



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 66
April 2009

Low Water Levels Reveal New Habitats

After the high water levels seen during the Melbourne Water Wetland Surveys in December 2008, levels diminished dramatically towards the end of February to the extent that only small ponds remained at two of the six wetlands. Large mud flats were also exposed, especially at River Gum Creek Wetland, creating a habitat not previously seen. The lack of water has definitely influenced the birds seen at the six wetlands being monitored by MELBOCA during the recent survey period.

Black-winged Stilt favoured the low water levels, with 29 individuals recorded at River Gum Creek in February. In addition, 37 Australian Pelican enjoyed fishing in the shallow water at the same site. The small Waterford Wetlands site provided two highlights for the recent survey period: an Australian Shelduck and a Blue-billed Duck, the latter actually having some deep water to dive in. The Hallam Valley Road site is still providing the 'team' with new species. During January and February, six new species were recorded at this site, including Spotted Pardalote, which is a new species for all six MELBOCA sites.

At River Gum Creek, a Brown Songlark in February has taken the tally for the six sites to 122. Of the 122 species recorded at River Gum Creek over the past 21 months, 28 have been seen at all six sites. In February, the team at Frog Hollow was pleasantly surprised by Yellow-billed Spoonbill, the first of this species for the site.

By the way, the Feral Geese at River Gum Creek and South of Golf Links Road sites are still there. Seems that they were let off for Christmas!

Graeme Hosken



*Yellow-billed
Spoonbill
photographed
at the Western
Treatment Plant
by Damian
Kelly*

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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 Speakers

Tuesday 28 April 2009 8.00 pm

Will Steele 'Biodiversity Conservation at the Western Treatment Plant, a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance'

Will Steele is a Senior Wildlife and Wetland Scientist who is responsible for the management of biodiversity conservation activities for Melbourne Water.

Come and hear all about the Western Treatment Plant – otherwise known as Melbourne's Twitcher's Paradise - from the man in charge!

Tuesday 26 May 2009 8.00 pm

Jane Crouch 'Climate Project - Australia'

The Academy Award-winning film *An Inconvenient Truth* made climate change a household phrase. Are you keen to learn more about climate change – and what we can do to help?

As a member of the Climate Project, Jane has been personally trained by Al Gore to provide education on climate change. Come and hear more about this exciting topic – particularly about issues that are important to us in Australia.

The Yarram Bunkstyle Camp Experience

Have you ever thought about going on a Bunkstyle Camp, but weren't sure exactly what they are all about? Heather Mitchener will answer all of your questions as she shares her experience at the Spring Bunkstyle camp that was held this past September in Yarram, Victoria.

Carol Page welcomed 14 birdos and two day visitors to camp when we met for Happy Hour. The motel grounds were spacious, with many birds calling. The dawn chorus was lovely, breaking the silence of the night. It started with Australian Magpies warbling and mixed flocks of corellas and cockatoos screeching overhead.

Friday: We drove in convoy to Bulga National Park to meet our leader for the day, Leon Trembath. The weather was kind to us, so we spent a very pleasant day following the Ash Track down to the suspension bridge and returning via Fern Gully and Wills Tracks. We enjoyed spectacular views of lush fern gullies and the forest floor, Mountain Ash and ancient beech trees with many birds calling and one view of a male Superb Lyrebird displaying. The highlight here was Rose Robin.

After lunch, we walked the Lyrebird Ridge Track but birds were scarce. Leon then took us on to Tarra Valley and the Cyathea Falls. We crossed trickling mountain streams where elusive Platypus live and passed under ancient Myrtle Beech that protects a delicate understorey of tree ferns, lichens and moss. Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Superb Fairy-wren, Brown Thornbill, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Rose, Pink and Eastern Yellow Robins were among the birds seen, with Superb Lyrebirds and Eastern Whipbirds heard.

Saturday: After an overnight storm, we assembled on a cool, windy and showery morning. Our guide was Rohan Bugg and his two young sons, Matthew and Daniel. First stop was Won Wron Flora and Fauna Reserve. The waterhole had some water but the area was quite dry. There were many orchids, including small Mosquito and caladenias. We had good views of Australian Hobby, Scarlet Robin, White-throated Treecreeper, Brown Thornbill, White-eared Honeyeater and Grey Fantail. We moved on to White Woman's Waterhole in the Won Wron State Forest. The flatter area was covered with Manna Gum, Grey Gum, Swamp Paperbark and sedges while higher, sandier areas had Yellow Stringybark, wattles, Black She-oak and bracken fern. A Shining Bronze-Cuckoo posed beautifully whilst White-naped Honeyeater, Australian King-Parrot, Crimson Rosella and plentiful Grey Fantails were also present.

Next stop was Jack Smith Lake, but the area we accessed was dry. Five magnificent Wedge-tailed Eagles, two Swamp Harriers and a Nankeen Kestrel put on quite a display. White fronted Chats were seen and great views of a Striated Fieldwren were seen through John's scope. Rain squalls came and went and there was a strong, chilly wind blowing. At McLoughlins Beach, there were Hoary-

headed Grebe, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants near the footbridge. This is part of the Corner Inlet and Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park and consists of shallow marine waters, intertidal mudflats and a series of over 40 sand islands. We were thrilled by a flock of 35 Royal Spoonbills that were feeding on the edge of the mangroves. They then rose up to wheel above us before returning to the same spot. The sky was dark which enhanced their brilliant white plumage, streamlined bodies and elegance in flight.

We proceeded over the footbridge to 90 Mile Beach with a high tide and choppy sea. Several Pacific Gulls, a Caspian Tern, many Crested Terns and a new bird for some of us – Fluttering Shearwaters - were just offshore. A crowd of Australian Gannets swooped, soared and dived gracefully in the wind. We had another wonderful view of a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, feeding on worms, on the path back to the cars. A total of 26 new birds were ticked for the day.

Sunday: We met up with Rohan Bugg and the boys at Alberton West State Forest for another day of exploring. This was a Messmate and Blue Gum forest with wattle understorey and abutting open farmland. Australian Shelduck, Australian Wood Duck and a nesting Australasian Grebe were on one of the dams. Grey Butcherbird, Eastern Rosella, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, wattletails, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and a few Varied Sittellas were also present. Half our time was spent admiring and identifying Wax-lip, Pink Finger and Donkey Orchids, amongst others. We moved a few kilometres along the highway to a side road and into sandy soil country with Coastal Manna Gums and grasstrees. White-eared Honeyeater, Collared Sparrowhawk and a Wedge-tailed Eagle put in an appearance. We enjoyed magnificent close up views of a male Spotted Pardalote and his nest hole in the side of a dirt pile, with three Striated Pardalotes also in the same area. Numerous mosquitoes, almost as big as the pardalotes, made their presence felt.

Port Welshpool rotunda and gardens provided a pleasant lunch spot. In sunny but breezy conditions, we walked the foreshore and were again thrilled to see some 60+ Royal Spoonbills sleeping in the sun, sheltered from the wind by mangroves. Crested Tern, Pied Oystercatcher, a handsome Eastern Great Egret, Pacific Gull, Australian Shelduck and Australian Wood Duck rested on a nearby sandspit, while Black, Little Black and Pied Cormorants perched at the marina. Black Swans fed inshore, while out near the marker buoys a pod of dolphins cavorted.

The Welshpool Cemetery Reserve was a lovely, sheltered spot with many large, old banksias, Wedding Bush and Swamp Paperbarks. Most gums had big clumps of mistletoe in full bloom and we had good sightings of male Mistletoebirds. A White-bellied Sea-Eagle and another Wedgie soared in the same thermal for a long time. Yellow-faced and Crescent Honeyeaters were seen

Interesting Sightings

Entered 03 Mar 2009

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.

MELBOCA is collecting reports of White-plumed Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill and Noisy Miner sightings within 60 km Melbourne, plus other Field Reports. MELBOCA is very interested in the apparent disappearance of the White-plumed Honeyeater from the Melbourne suburbs. Is this the case in your area – and, if so, are Noisy Miners present?

If you would like to provide a sighting or breeding report on any of these species, please forward the information to MELBOCA, c/o BOCA, PO Box 185, Nunawading VIC 3131 or email info@melboca.org.au. Be sure to include name, address, date of record, location of sighting (i.e., street, suburb, post code, Melway reference) and the number of birds sighted.

The following reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meetings (held at Balwyn on 27 January 2009 and 24 February 2009), via email or as WEB reports to the BOCA National Office.

White-plumed Honeyeater Sightings			
Jan – Feb '09	< 10	Most sites, Melbourne Water Survey	Dandenong Catchment
Daily	4-6	Laverton Street (<i>no Noisy Miners present</i>)	Williamstown
22 Jan '09	50	Royal Park	Parkville
25 Jan '09	2-5	Yarra Glen Billabong	Yarra Glen
14 Feb '09	1-5		Patterson Lakes
14 Feb '09	1-4	Haughton Road	Oakleigh South
19 Feb '09	6	Lillydale Lake (<i>no Noisy Miners present</i>)	Lilydale

Eastern Spinebill Sightings			
Daily	?		Montrose
07 Feb '09	?	Adele Avenue	Ferntree Gully
10 Feb '09	2	Tyrrell Avenue	Blackburn
13 Feb '09	2	Village Walk	Mooroolbark
15 Feb '09	2 (juv)	Hume Street	Upwey
20 Feb '09	1	Ascot Street	Doncaster East
23 Feb – 01 Mar '09	1	Sandgate Avenue	Glen Waverley
24 Feb '09	1	Sandgate Avenue	Glen Waverley
24 Feb '09	1	Macleod Parade	Macleod

Noisy Miner Sightings			
Jan – Feb '09	5-10	Two sites, Melbourne Water Survey	Dandenong Catchment
12 Feb '09	< 35	Cobden Street (<i>have displaced White-plumed Honeyeater</i>)	Kew
Most days	< 7	Chirnside Park Golf Course (<i>have displaced White-plumed Honeyeater, New Holland Honeyeater and Eastern Spinebill</i>)	Chirnside Park
Most days	Several	The Boulevard	Warrandyte

Little Wattlebird Sightings

I wish to thank all the members who have submitted Little Wattlebird sightings within 60km of the Melbourne GPO since February 2007. On the completion of the Survey in February 2009, records received have indicated the species is wide spread over the Melbourne area with sightings in 107 suburbs. It is proposed the data received will be entered onto a map and produced as an attachment in a future Melbirdian.

Interesting Sightings Cont'd

Other Sightings				
17 Dec '08	Australian Spotted Crane	1	Ruffey Park Lake	Doncaster
31 Dec '08	Horsfield's-bronze Cuckoo	1	Lilydale Lake <i>(being fed by two Superb Fairy-wrens)</i>	Lilydale
11 Jan '09	Australasian Pelican	1	Huntingdale Road Wetlands	Mt Waverley
19 Jan '09	Pink-eared Duck	2	Karkarook Park	Heatherton
20 Jan '09	Latham's Snipe	1	Ruffey Park Lake	Doncaster
22 Jan '09	Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	Florence Terrace	Beaconsfield
25 Jan '09	Black-eared Cuckoo	1	Billabong at Yarra Glen	Yarra Glen
06 Feb '09	Pallid Cuckoo	1	Laverton Street	Williamstown
16 Feb '09	Weebill	1	Park Crescent	Caulfield North
19 Feb '09	Brown Songlark	1	River Gum Creek Wetland	Hampton Park
21 Feb '09	Gang-gang Cockatoo	1	Bennett Avenue	Mt Waverley
?? Feb '09	Musk Lorikeet		Wattle Park	Burwood
01 Mar '09	Tawny Frogmouth	2	Sandgate Avenue	Glen Waverley
01 Mar '09	Pied Currawong	12-20	Sandgate Avenue	Glen Waverley
01 Mar '09	Grey Currawong	1	Sandgate Avenue	Glen Waverley

Additional Notes

- White-plumed Honeyeaters were seen in the Moonee Ponds / Keilor / Sydenham area frequently until the last 12 months.
- White-plumed Honeyeaters were seen in Clematis in 1987 / 1988, but not since that time – and there are no Noisy Miners there, either.
- There is a pair of Eastern Spinebill that has taken 'permanent residence' in a street in Clematis (near Emerald) since 1985. They breed regularly, often producing two young.
- Noisy Miners have returned to the Pembroke Retarding Basin, Mooroolbark, after a three year absence.
- Noisy Miners have been present at Tyrrell Avenue in Blackburn for several years. The White-plumed Honeyeaters disappeared when the Noisy Miners arrived.
- The Friends of Royal Park conduct several bird surveys throughout the year and I have recently received their Late Summer Survey. Twelve people attended the survey held on 22 February 2009 and 37 species were recorded, the highlights being: Australasian Grebe (25), Clamorous Reed-Warbler (14), Grey Shrike-thrush (1), Musk Lorikeet (13) and White-plumed Honeyeater (50). For additional information, please see their website: www.friendsofroyalpark-parkville.org

What Do You Think?

- John Dennison reports at least six Common Bronzewing at Lilydale Lake on 18 February 2009. This species is not often recorded there, maybe once or twice a year. John also reports that there seem to be more Kookaburras at the same location. Have they fled the fires?
- How fast does a Rock Dove fly? Linda Stock was travelling along the Eastern Freeway at 100kph and a Rock Dove kept company with her car for at least 5 km. Have you experienced a similar activity with other bird species?
- Are the bushfires causing a movement of birds into the Melbourne Metro area? Several verbal reports have been received of large flocks (up to 80 individuals) of Little Raven at Box Hill and Balwyn North. Gang-gang Cockatoo numbers have increased along the Yarra in Greensborough while Galah and Long-billed Corella have come into a garden in Doncaster East to drink at a bird-bath. Your observations are of interest.

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

Past Meeting Reports

27 January 2009

Bill Ramsay welcomed everyone back after the festive holiday period. The Bird of the Evening was presented by Diane Tweeddale, who spoke on 'Birding at O'Reilly's.' She described the rainforest birds encountered at the feeding stations and along the track of the resort. The Boonong and Border tracks beside the resort are graded and surfaced and provided excellent birding. Yellow-throated Scrubwrens and Satin Bowerbirds foraged and nested beside the track while other species seen included Eastern Yellow Robin, Brown Gerygone, Australian Brush-Turkeys and Eastern Whipbirds. The Timbertop walk (suspension bridge) is located near the junction of the tracks and raises people into the canopy to see the Catbird, Pink Robin and White-headed Pigeon. Python Rock track gave views of Australian Logrunners, male Paradise Riflebird, Albert's Lyrebird and the 'prize' sighting of a Noisy Pitta. She was a happy birdwatcher and highly recommended the location.

Our Guest Speaker was Dr Chris Wichems who spoke on 'Operation Migration: Whoopers on the Move.' Chris is originally from the US and she has a rather keen interest in birds.

Chris had the wonderful opportunity to go 'behind the scenes' at Operation Migration, and she counts it as one of her top birding experiences. Operation Migration is a non-profit organisation that is playing a critical role in the conservation of the Whooping Crane. 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. There are fifteen species of crane world-wide and the Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) is the rarest of them all. In the early 1940's only 15 birds remained. They nested in northern Canada and migrated 2500 miles to the coast of Texas. Several attempts were made to reintroduce Whooping Cranes at different locations; however, none were successful at creating a sustainable population.

Operation Migration started in 1994. Founders Joe Duff and Bill Lishman developed an innovative way to reintroduce migrating bird species: they used ultralight aircraft to lead birds on their first migration. After conducting scientific studies on Canada Geese, Trumpeter Swans, and Sandhill Cranes, they caught the eye of the International Whooping Crane Recovery Team.

The urge to migrate is instinctual in Whooping Cranes. The knowledge of where to go and how, is not. The migration maps used by cranes are ones that have been handed down over the generations. When this chain is broken and the migration route is lost, future generations of cranes must learn it again from another source.

Since 2001, Operation Migration pilots have been that source, acting as surrogate parents and teaching an ancient migration route to new generations of Whooping

Cranes. As of 2008, this crew has made eight successful migrations. Partnering with eight other organizations, Operation Migration became a founding member of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, a group dedicated to the recovery of the Whooping Crane. Each of the groups that make the partnership has a different role to play in the recovery process.

Chris then took us 'behind the scenes' and showed us how the process works – from egg through to the first migration. Her presentation was supplemented with some fantastic photos courtesy of Operation Migration. The eggs are hatched at Patuxent in Maryland. Before hatching, the eggs are exposed to the sound of the ultralight engine. Once they hatch, they never see humans – humans wear white Crane outfits that are kitted out with a Whooping Crane puppet that is used to feed the chick. At just a few days old, the cranes are introduced to the ultralight and begin training to follow it. This is accomplished using the "circle pen," developed by Operation Migration, which allows the chicks to be in proximity to an operating ultralight without any danger.

At approximately 50 days of age, the chicks are moved to the 'flight school' at the Necedah National Wildlife Centre in Wisconsin. Training occurs each day, weather permitting, preparing the Whooping cranes for the ultralight-led migration. The cranes are conditioned to follow the ultralight up and down a landing strip. Soon the cranes begin to spread their wings and realize their ability to fly, which moves on to aerial training. As they mature, the birds start to fly longer distances behind the ultralight, increasing their stamina for sustained flight. Throughout the summer, the birds are trained an average of 56 days.

Migration begins when all the birds can fly together, typically in early October. The migration process is amazing. The journey covers 7 states and 1250 miles, taking as long as 97 days (as they may only travel for 2 hours each day). They erect electric fenced pens to keep the birds safe on their stopovers. The migration involves four ultra-light aircraft, a Cessna and a twelve member ground crew following with tents, caravans, etc.

The class of 2008 consisted of fourteen young Whooping Cranes. They had just landed safely in Florida on 24 January, their migration taking a total of 88 days!

After only eight years, there are now over 70 Whooping cranes migrating between Wisconsin and Florida - this high survival rate represents nearly five times the number that existed in the 1940's. With continued success, another 5 years will be needed to make this population self-sustaining. For more information, visit www.operationmigration.org.

John Barkla gave the vote of thanks, noting that it is fantastic to hear 'good' conservation stories. Graeme Hosken highlighted the interesting sightings and we finished off the evening with supper and a cuppa.

Janet Hand

Past Meeting Reports, cont'd

24 February 2009

Janet Hand opened the meeting and welcomed new members. Tania Ireton, ornithologist (with an amazing 708 Australian species on her life list) and guide for Birds Australia, BAYBOCA and visitors, spoke on 'Desert Birding: the Strzelecki Track and Other Places, 8-26 August 2006.'

This tour was organised by Australian Ornithological Services and was well-timed, as there had been significant rains early in the year and there were plenty of flowers and breeding birds. The tour took them through the southern and western divisions of New South Wales, SW Queensland, the desert country of South Australia, the Flinders Ranges and the mallee country of South Australia and Victoria. Travel was in a comfortable 20-seater bus. A 4WD followed the bus, allowing equipment to be stowed away from the participants. Tania was wielding a new camera and its results were impressive, to say the least.

Starting at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne, they travelled north to Deniliquin, where Tania photographed Plains Wanderer. The island sanctuary at Deniliquin had lots of blossom and Musk Lorikeet, Long-billed Corella and Yellow (Crimson) Rosella were taking advantage of the flowering. In the Hillston area, the flowers were profuse but trees were still struggling in the drought. The ti-tree in the Nonginni Nature Reserve yielded Barn Owl, Whistling Kite, Grey-fronted Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin and Splendid Fairy-wren, among others.

Continuing north to Bourke, they passed through some of the most picturesque woodland in inland Australia. Stunning trees with names like Wilga, Beefwood, Leopardwood, Ironwood and Whitewood occur in this area. In the Bourke area, there were Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and Apostlebird with a good photo of a dragon thrown in.

Frank O'Connor introduced the idea of 'state ticks' by the 5th day when Australian Bustard was noted. Also present were an approachable Collared Sparrowhawk, Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush (shy but singing among the branches), White-browed Treecreeper, Variegated Fairy-wren, a White-necked Heron in a tree and the only pair of Major Mitchell's Cockatoo seen on the trip. By an oil field at the Cooper Creek was Grey Grasswren while Fairy Martin bred below the stock ramps. A flock of Galah was worth a second look as there was a Grey Falcon perched in the same dead tree. The camera proved its worth by recording a good image at a distance of 300m. Black Kite was also seen in the area.

The gibber area was covered with vegetation, though kangaroos had moved on, but there were lots of Bourke's Parrot beside the road and at the occasional waterhole. Inland Dotterel, with young, were sighted, as were many Budgerigar, while night birds included Southern Boobook, a Barn Owl and Australian Owlet-nightjar. A pair of Brolga and a pair of Flock Bronzewing were sighted; then *flocks* of the latter were encountered. Orange and Crimson Chat and two species of Button-quail joined the list. Distant views of an Eyrean Grasswren were obtained in the swale and dune country. In areas with more standing water were Black Falcon, Royal Spoonbill and Red-browed Pardalote. Other

raptors seen included Brown Falcon, Black Kite, Whistling Kite, and Black-breasted Buzzard. A Letter-winged Kite was roosting in the thickest part of the Coolabahs, notable for its bulging bright red eyes.

Lyndhurst was an area which had missed the rains and though very dry and hot, it yielded Rufous Fieldwren, Thick-billed Grasswren and Chestnut-breasted Whiteface. At the Parachilna Hotel, the rooms were comfortably underground and the delicious menu was designed around game dishes. Chiming Wedgebill was seen in the area.

Travelling through the Flinders Ranges by Brancina Gorge gave sightings of Yellow-footed Rock Wallaby, Emu (with young) and Elegant Parrot. Through Wilpena Pound to Willow Springs Station where the trippers found Striated Grasswren on the rocky outcrops among the sharp, unfriendly Spinifex. Next, Mulga Parrot and smoke bush, Black-eared Cuckoo and Regent Parrot, then across the Murray near Morgan and there was Red-lored Whistler and Yellow-plumed and White-eared Honeyeaters. Through Billyat N.P. and the Pink Lakes near Ouyen, with little water and a lot of mud, Striated Grasswren, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Mallee Emu-wren joined the list. Then, on the last day, heading back to Melbourne, there was the Powerful Owl in a pine plantation with a Galah in its talons.

In 19 days the group had ticked 250 species and Tania ticked 13 new ones. Bill Ramsay thanked Tania for a talk which had clearly inspired many to travel in the area, whether again or for the first time. Bill recalled going over some of the ground but seeing fewer birds as there had not been rain.

Janet announced the deaths in the bush fires. At Kinglake, Dr Richard Zann, his wife Eileen and daughter Eva perished. Dr Zann was a world authority on Zebra Finches and bird song. MELBOCA member Karma Hastwell is also believed to have perished with the Zanns, but her name had not yet been released. Leigh Ahern and his wife Charmain perished at Steels Creek. Leigh, together with BOCA, initiated the very successful Land for Wildlife scheme. Jenny and John Barrett also died at Steels Creek. Jenny was a research officer with the Victorian National Parks Association and collaborated with Don Saunders on many environmental submissions. The death of Martin Schultz at Callignee in Gippsland was reported. MELBOCA's thoughts went to their families and friends and anyone else affected by the bushfires.

Because of the fires, the February Bunk-style camp at Rawson has been rescheduled to May and notices will appear in the *Bird Observer*. Graeme Hosken assured us that the Helmeted Honeyeater colonies had survived the bushfires. White-throated Needletail, however, seemed to be in very low numbers and their roost areas may have been destroyed. Large numbers of Little Ravens, Long-billed Corellas and Gang-gang Cockatoos have been reported in Melbourne since the fires.

John Johnson won the "lucky number" draw for the bottle of wine, and the proceeds of the raffle were directed to Wildlife Victoria. The evening ended with a cuppa and a chat.

Diane Tweeddale

Outing Reports

Weekday Outings

16 February 2009

Bellarine Peninsula

Seven enthusiasts met at the Barwon Valley Golf Club. The day was fine, the breeze light and the predicted heat did not arrive. Fred Smith led us, first to the wetlands where the drought has recently exposed mud. Latham's Snipe, Little Grassbird and Buff-banded Rail were the highlights with Chestnut Teal, Silver Gull, Masked Lapwing and the ubiquitous Spotted Dove making their first appearance for the day. Then we moved on to Balyang Reserve. No Nankeen Night Heron, but more Black-fronted Dotterel and our first Australian Pelican. An Australian Reed-Warbler briefly appeared at the edge of the reeds and an Australian Spotted Crake came boldly out onto the mud after the aggressive Eurasian Coot, who had been harassing the Crake swam away. An Australasian Grebe fed a chick on the lake. Australasian Darter nested along the Barwon River, with well-grown juveniles visibly perched. The poplars were popular; their overhanging branches supported Little Pied Cormorant beside the local Australasian Darter population. We watched a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo perch on a low branch and bend down to drink from the river. At least it had access to water. Rainbow Lorikeet called among the possum-guarded eucalypts, showing much interest in a hollow where feral honeybees had built a comb.

Hospital Lake had also dried out with very little birdlife observed. However, Black Swan and Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo flew overhead. We moved on to Tait Point and lunched under the shade, while scopes detected very far Musk Duck among the swans. A single Caspian Tern flew past. With the angle of the light, the identification of Little Pied, Great and Pied Cormorants was difficult. Six Whistling Kite quartered the opposite hill, occasionally causing a flock of Australian Magpie to fly. After lunch, we headed down to Black Rock where Spiny-cheeked and Singing Honeyeater were seen. The beach seemed, initially, to have nothing but Silver Gull and a few Australian White Ibis. Dedicated and patient watching yielded Red-capped and Hooded Plover, Red-necked Stint, Australasian Gannet, Crested Tern and Pacific Gull. A Striated Fieldwren farewelled us as we left. The tide was coming in at the Barwon River estuary but the sand flats had gulls, ibis and a White-faced Heron taking a close interest in two people who were digging for sand worms. Eastern Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper also foraged on the sand and a small flock of Yellow-rumped Thornbill were the only thornbills seen on the day.

Now we looked at Lake Lorne at Drysdale, which was lower than any of us had seen it. A Little Eagle soared overhead and many Masked Lapwing rose stridently. Australian Wood Duck were first seen here but the Freckled Duck were no longer present. They were observed at our last stop, McLeods Waterholes Reserve. Here, the deeper water supported a large bird population

and we also added Royal Spoonbill, Laughing Kookaburra and Brown Goshawk. A fitting finale to the walk occurred when a Little Eagle caused the eruption, over our heads, of a massed flight made up of a large flock of Galah, small flocks of Musk Lorikeet and Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, and a couple of Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Australian Magpie. The final bird list contained 87 species and we thanked Fred for such a successful day.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

4 March 2009

**Springvale Wetlands,
Aspendale Gardens**

Unfortunately, our advertised leader, Geoff Deason, was unable to attend due to illness. His place was filled by a committee, comprising Arthur Carew, David Ap-Thomas, Leonie Robbins and Diane Tweeddale.

After weeks of very hot weather, 31 people assembled in cold, windy and cloudy conditions with showers threatening. Australian Magpie, Little Raven, Magpie-lark and the ubiquitous Spotted Dove greeted us. Australian Pelican soaring above improved our mood and a lone Australian Shelduck shared a mud flat with at least 10 Black-fronted Dotterel. Purple Swamphen have clearly continued to breed successfully through the drought, as have Masked Lapwing; however, Eurasian Coot and Dusky Moorhen were present in comparatively low numbers. Eastern Great Egret flew across the ponds and stalked the shallows with one member commenting on the two-tone leg colour (their upper parts yellow and lower parts black and muddy). The strong wind kept Golden-headed Cisticola from perching on the grass heads and only brief views were obtained as they rose and dived. Despite the close housing development with its large houses and narrow gardens, highlights included a pair of Magpie Geese plus four Royal Spoonbill. Superb Fairy-wren called and were occasionally seen; then a group of us glimpsed a Spotless Crake as it passed between the clumps of reeds. Nearby, an Australian Reed-Warbler flitted between waterside vegetation while two Australian Wood Duck shepherded their two ducklings from the bank to the safety of the pond. Some in the group had seen Latham's Snipe earlier in the walk, but nearly everyone had glimpsed a flying individual by the end of the walk. We returned to our cars and drove to the north side of Braeside Park for lunch and a morning bird call, which listed 40 species. Linda, the American visitor, was extremely pleased with at least 2 more 'ticks' on her Australian bird list

After a relaxed lunch in the visitor centre and out of the wind, our remaining group of 21 walked southeast, being checked out by the numerous Noisy Miner. A member commented that the suburban miners seemed fatter, larger and noisier than those in the country. Any comments? An immature Grey Butcherbird foraged around the bark and

Outing Reports, cont'd

base of a eucalypt, and we remarked on its brown colouring. There was little water around so we hoped that the Eastern Long-necked Turtle at the base of the same tree found its way to some. We were pleased that Crested Pigeon seemed to supplant the introduced Spotted and Rock Doves. An Australasian Darter flying over needed some time for identification and a Brown Goshawk occasioned close scrutiny before its identity was agreed upon. A Common Ringtail Possum was curled up in the roof of an information shelter with another possum evading observation by disappearing into a tree hole. The only

other animals sighted were a couple of Rabbits. We recorded 22 species in the dry open forest. Few creek beds or ponds retained water and the low numbers of birds and animals reflected this. Total species count for the day was 53. Many thanks to those who found themselves leading the walk!

*Diane Tweeddale,
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

The Yarram Bunkstyle Camp Experience (*continued from page 2*)

while some beautiful Eastern Spinebills and Superb Fairy-wrens paused on sunny branches to show off their spring plumage. Grey Shrike-thrush, Golden Whistler, Red-browed Finch and New Holland Honeyeater were present. The lucky last to leave saw a Peregrine Falcon.

Monday 22: A free morning with optional sleep-in. Some went to Mays Bush State Forest – very dry and not much about except Crimson Rosella, wattlebirds and Grey Fantail. Jenny and I moved down the road and over a creek to a bushy patch in a damp gully out of the wind. The flowering trees and Clematis were full of birdsong. A Restless Flycatcher, Eastern Yellow and Rose Robins, Golden and Rufous Whistlers, Superb Fairy-wrens, White-throated Treecreepers and a White-faced Heron entertained us. A Short-beaked Echidna crossed the road only metres from us. Grey Fantails were a frustration, they were so numerous.

Everyone met for lunch at the home of Bill Black, set on the foreshore at Port Albert overlooking Nooramunga Marine Coastal Park. We donned our gumboots and went round the point to the mangrove flats where more Royal Spoonbills sheltered with Eastern Great and Little Egrets, Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pied Oystercatcher, Pacific Gull, Red-capped Plover and Masked Lapwing. Once again the scopes made all the difference to our enjoyment. Black Swans were feeding nearby while a Brown Falcon observed from a distance. The saltmarsh flats didn't yield the longed-for White-fronted Chats.

We moved on to the Old Port Trail through heathlands, banksia glades, melaleuca thickets and mangrove swamps. The original settlement of Port Albert was established here in 1841. By mid-afternoon a cold, blustery wind and dark sky made birding difficult, but we did see a huge old pine which was the roosting place for quite a number of Nankeen Night-Herons. Some flew off giving a great view of their wings. The proposed Gellions Run State Forest visit was abandoned due to wind and rain.

Tuesday 23: A cold windy day for us to go up to the Grand Ridge Road to meet Leon Trembath again and walk a

three kilometre section west of Tarra Bulga National Park. The road winds through Mountain Ash, Messmate and Blackwood forest. This section is due for logging in the near future. Few birds were seen. The highlight was a female Rose Robin that kept appearing near the cars to drink and bathe in some puddles and forage in the soft soil made by car tracks. Wedge-tailed Eagle, Brown Thornbill, Grey Fantail, Superb Fairy-wren and Superb Lyrebird put in brief appearances, while an Eastern Whipbird sang in the gully.

After lunch we proceeded to Buckleys Island Reserve. A gale was blowing, so exposed areas were unpleasant. We found Hardhead, Eurasian Coot, Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebes, Chestnut Teal and White-faced Heron on the water. A Swamp Harrier, Eastern Rosellas and a large flock of Australian White and Straw-necked Ibis which rose, swooped, banked and glided into new pastures on the other side of the water, were a bonus.

Some sensible members returned to Yarram for hot chocolate while others drove on to the Mullungdung Flora and Fauna Reserve – a large area of stringybark and Prickly Acacia. It was a wild goose chase with the prize being a pair of Scarlet Robin, seen by two of the most persistent, after a 15 minute game of hide and seek. The rest of us were reduced to photographing the huge mossies.

Bird call was held as usual and we attained a camp total of 118 birds. Carol thanked various members for help rendered before, during and after our time together. We are all indebted to Carol Page for yet another successful trip – the result of much forethought and groundwork. It was a privilege to be able to attend such a well-planned and executed camp. Many wonderful birds, sometimes under difficult conditions, good fellowship and not one incident for the 'Heaven Forbid' book.

Congratulations and a well done to Carol from us all.

*Heather Mitchener
East Doncaster, VIC*

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 22 April 2009 - Finns Reserve, Templestowe Lower. 9.45 am. (Melway 33 B4) Enter from Duncan Street. Toilets here. Crossing the river, we head downstream towards the confluence of the Yarra and Plenty Rivers where platypus can be seen. BYO chair and lunch to eat back at the cars after birdcall.

Wednesday 27 May 2009 - Birrarung Park, Templestowe. (Melway 32 H4) 9.45 am. Enter from Templestowe Road and drive to parking area closest to river where there are toilets with wheelchair access. This will be an easy, flat walk around the park followed by lunch back at the cars.

Weekdays Outings

Monday 20 April 2009 – NOTE: CHANGE IN VENUE because of the recent bushfires in the Healesville area
New Venue: Banyule Flats, Viewbank. (Melway 32 F2) 10am - 3pm. Bush and waterbirds. Enter park at Somerset Drive, carpark at end. No toilets. Leader: TBA.

Wednesday 13 May 2009 – Mill Park Lakes and Hawkestone. (Melway 183 A4) 10am - 3pm. From Plenty Rd take McDonalds Rd to Ferres Rd and turn right. Cross Findon Road at roundabout into The Lakes Boulevard. Park in carpark near shops on The Promenade. No public toilets. Convoy drive to Hawkestone Park (Mel 183 H7) for lunch and afternoon walk. Toilets at Hawkestone. All welcome, no need to book. Leader: Janet Hand.

Beginners Outings

Saturday 18 April - RJ Chambers Flora & Fauna Reserve, Pakenham Upper. (Melway 313 G8). 1.30pm. Meet in BBQ area in carpark off Bourkes Creek Road (near the intersection of Matters Rd).

Saturday 16 May – Brimbank Park, Keilor. (Melway 14 H9). 1.30pm. Meet outside Visitors Center off Keilor Park Drive.

Photoboca Group Outing

Saturday 25 April 2009 – Geelong Wetlands. For more information, please contact Bob Young at photoboca@optusnet.com.au.

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 5 April. Gates open at 10 am. Walk begins at 10.30am

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

Sunday 7 June. Gates open at 10 am. Walk begins at 10.30am

Upcoming Coach Tours

Saturday 4 April – The Briars, Mt Martha (bookings essential)

Saturday 2 May - Cranbourne Botanic Gardens, including the 'Australian Garden' and Blind Bight (bookings essential)

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

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.melboca.org.au



MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of
Bird Observation &
Conservation Australia

Important! Please Read!

April Weekday Outing – Change in Venue

The April 20 Weekday Outing was meant to be at Badger Weir in Healesville. However, because of the recent bushfires, all parks in the Healesville area have been closed until further notice. For this reason, the venue for the April 20 Weekday Outing has been changed.

The new venue for the April 20 Weekday Outing is Banyule Flats in Viewbank. Details of the new venue for this Weekday Outing can be found in the 'Dates to Remember' Section on Page 9.

Unfortunately, this change in venue was made after the Bird Observers' Calendar went to print; therefore, the information for the April 20 Weekday outing in the Bird Observers' Calendar is incorrect.

We apologize for any inconvenience.

If you have any queries, contact Diane Tweeddale.

Birding in the News...

Just How High Do Birds Fly??

Until recently, scientists had no idea just how high birds can fly.

However, according to an article published in the *Wilson Journal of Ornithology* (December 2008: Vol. 120, Issue 4, pg(s) 914-915), we now have a much better idea.

In August 2007, a Southwest Airlines passenger jet took off from El Paso, Texas and struck a bird during the flight. The jet was able to return safely to the airport, and airline personnel were able to collect enough feather remains so that scientists at the Smithsonian's Feather Identification Laboratory could identify the unlucky avian.

It turns out that the bird was a Marbled Godwit – a relative of the Bar-tailed Godwit, the latter being the species that is famous for its long-distance flights between Alaska and Australia / New Zealand. The Marbled Godwit also migrates – but much shorter distances (between the Northern United States and Mexico)...but that doesn't mean it flies lower!

So just how high was the Marbled Godwit flying? The flight crew recorded the plane's altitude at the time of collision as approximately 3,700 metres above ground level. That is the highest recorded for any bird!

Chris Wichems

The Melbirdian is published six times a year
Member birding-related stories and articles (up to 800 words) are invited
May 1 2009 is the deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the June issue
Put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard)
and send in your birding-related stories and articles!

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

Table 1. Bird species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

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

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
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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
Willie Wagtail	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	
Little Raven	X	X	X	X	X	X	Song Thrush						
Magpie-lark	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common Starling	X	X	X	X	X	X
Flame Robin							Common Myna	X	X	X	X	X	X
Horsfield's Bushlark							Red-browed Finch						X
Eurasian Skylark				X			House Sparrow	X	X	X	X	X	
Golden-headed Cisticola		X	N	X	X		Eurasian Tree Sparrow			X			
Australian Reed-Warbler	X	X	X	X	X		Australasian Pipit						X
Little Grassbird			X	X	X		European Goldfinch	X	X	X	X	X	
Brown Songlark			N				Common Greenfinch						X
Silveryeye				X									
Welcome Swallow	X	X	X	X	X		Feral Duck	X		X	X		
Fairy Martin					X		Feral Goose			X	X		
Tree Martin													
Total number of bird species seen at each site during the current survey months:								38	31	63	48	57	30
Total number of bird species seen at each site to date:								74	57	92	76	81	38
Total number of bird species seen at all MELBOCA sites to date: 122													

Table 2. Other species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

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

Key:

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

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

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