

# BirdLife Melbourne Newsletter

Volume 4 Number 3 September 2015

## More than just a pretty face

### Barn Owl pellets: Non-invasive tracking for small marsupial animals

by Emily Scicluna

I have recently become aware of the phenomenal potential raptor pellets have toward the surveying of small mammal populations. Pellets are naturally regurgitated by raptors as a means of getting rid of indigestible material, and when these are collected they provide a neat package of identifiable material for researchers, allowing for the easy identification of mammalian prey. There are often intact skulls, vertebral columns, teeth and insect exoskeletons held within these pellets.

I recently assisted Dr Patricia Woolley, a current Emeritus Scholar at Latrobe University, who is interested in analysing the contents of owl pellets as a means of detecting the presence of mammals (dasyurid marsupials) in remote areas. The pellets were collected by fellow researchers who knew the roosting site of a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), and collected them as an 'opportunistic collection' to assist her research. Unfortunately, the remains of mammalian prey in the pellets we worked with disappointed Dr Woolley, as they were purely the remains of *Mus musculus* (House Mouse) rather than the *Dasyercus* remains she was hoping for. *Dasyercus* are carnivorous marsupials that are locally extinct in many areas, however Dr Woolley is hoping to one day find evidence to suggest they are making a comeback in the Nullarbor region.

Despite these results disappointing Dr Woolley, they were of great interest to me because I had not yet been exposed to this survey method, and the value this non-invasive tracking technique has to offer the field. The technique is invasive to neither bird nor mammal, and involves a very simple process. Pellets, which are oval shaped regurgitations, are soaked in warm water with detergent, which assists separation of the debris held together. This



Petri dishes containing bones from each pellet



is then poured into a tray, and flushed with water to gently remove hair and other debris that floats to the top of the tray. This is all then poured through an array of different sized sieves to collect anything useful that may accidentally have been removed from the sample.

The large quantity of mammalian hair in these pellets was not useful for DNA analysis because they were not fresh pellets. The pellets had been sitting out in the weather for an unknown period of time which may have caused DNA molecules to break down, and are also combined with owl

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# Activities Calendar

## Activities for BirdLife Melbourne September to December 2015

This calendar includes field activities for BirdLife Melbourne including the meetings held at Balwyn and Carlton. Should you have any ideas for an activity, or would like to volunteer as a leader, please contact the BirdLife Melbourne Activities Co-ordinator, Philip Peel at [kbutlerppeeel@bigpond.com](mailto:kbutlerppeeel@bigpond.com) or on 0499 169 500.

Wednesday 2 September 2015	Weekdays Outing	100 Acres Reserve, Park Orchards. 10am-3pm. Leader: Gina Hopkins. Melway 35 E9. Enter from Knees Road and meet in the car park. No toilets. <b>Contact Diane, 9836 8692</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a> .
5 September 2015		<b>Note revised date for the Birding &amp; Boneseeding activity which has been transferred to 3 October.</b> For details <b>contact Merrilyn, 9889 4924</b> or <a href="mailto:merrilyn@wirejunkie.com">merrilyn@wirejunkie.com</a> .
Sunday 6 September 2015	Yellingbo Birdwalk	<b>Note later start time, April to September.</b> Yellingbo Reserve. Melway 305 G11. Take Warburton Hwy to Woori Yallock, turn right to Yellingbo. At Yellingbo, turn right towards Seville, then left into Macclesfield Rd. After 2.5km turn right at large pine trees. Gate opens 10am, walk starts 10.30am. <b>Due to Parks Victoria operational requirements the gate will be closed at 10.30am and not opened until after Bird Call at approximately 3pm.</b> Toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. <b>Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080</b> or <a href="mailto:onlyme53@bigpond.com">onlyme53@bigpond.com</a>
Thursday 10 September 2015	<b>No Carlton Monthly Meeting</b>	At this stage, there will be no Carlton Monthly Meeting in September. Meetings will only be held every second month for a trial period. The BirdLife Melbourne Committee will review the program and Members will be informed of the outcome.
Sat & Sun 19 & 20 September 2015	Photography Group Weekend Outing	Chiltern area. For details <b>contact Peter, 9435 4249</b> or <a href="mailto:teacherpeterb@gmail.com">teacherpeterb@gmail.com</a>
Tuesday 22 September 2015	Weekdays Outing	Gobur Flora Reserve, via Yarck. 10am-3pm. Leader: Bob Tate. Melway X910 S7 or VicRoads 62 B3. Meet outside Yarck store, Maroondah Highway (B300). Toilets in Yarck. Convoy driving to different locations. <b>Contact Diane, 9836 8692</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a> .
Tuesday 22 September 2015	Balwyn Monthly Meeting	8pm at Balwyn Community Centre, 412 Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn. Melway 46 F8. Good on-site parking at rear of venue. Guest Speakers: Val & Peter Fowler. Subject: Peru with the backpacking birdwatchers. Member's Topic: Kerryn Herman - Biodiversity monitoring in Melbourne's east. Stay for supper and a chat after the meeting. <b>Contact Bill, 9803 1493</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Saturday 26 September 2015	Annual Members BBQ	Come along for a morning of birding in the beautiful You Yangs Regional Park, and then join us for a barbeque lunch and the opportunity to catch up with fellow members. Meet at 9am in the first car park just past the entrance (at the visitors centre). Email Millie Scicluna at <a href="mailto:elscicluna@gmail.com">elscicluna@gmail.com</a> to RSVP and advise of any dietary requirements so catering can be organised.
Saturday 26 September 2015	Beginners' Outing	Hawkestone Park, South Morang. Meet at 10am in the car park at Red Gums Picnic Area off Gordons Road. Melway 183 H7. <b>Contact Hazel, 9876 3712</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Sunday 27 September 2015	ETP Survey	Eastern Treatment Plant, Bangholme. Meet at 9am for a survey that will continue until the evening. The survey is carried out by 4WD. Numbers are restricted and booking is essential. Survey date may change at short notice due to operational constraints. Leader is Mike Carter. <b>Contact Mike, 9787 7136.</b>
Saturday 3 October 2015	Boneseeding & Birding	<b>Note revised date: September activity has been transferred to October.</b> You Yangs Regional Park. Meet at 10am in the car park just past the Park Office, approximately 300m from the Branch Road entrance to the park. Melway Key Map Page 11 C12. Until late afternoon, the day is spent birding and removing the invasive weed Boneseed. Bring all you need for a normal days birding plus gardening gloves and a trowel for Boneseed removal. <b>Contact Merrilyn, 9889 4924</b> or <a href="mailto:merrilyn@wirejunkie.com">merrilyn@wirejunkie.com</a>
Sunday 4 October 2015	Yellingbo Birdwalk	<b>Note early start time, October to March.</b> Yellingbo Reserve. Melway 305 G11. Take Warburton Hwy to Woori Yallock, turn right to Yellingbo. At Yellingbo, turn right towards Seville, then left into Macclesfield Rd. After 2.5km turn right at large pine trees. Gate opens 9am, walk starts 9.30am. <b>Due to Parks Victoria operational requirements the gate will be closed at 9.30am and not opened until after Bird Call at approximately 2pm.</b> Toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. <b>Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080</b> or <a href="mailto:onlyme53@bigpond.com">onlyme53@bigpond.com</a>
Tuesday 6 October 2015	Weekdays Outing	Birdsland Reserve, Belgrave Heights. 10am-3pm. Leaders: Jill and Ian Wilson. Melway 84 B2. Enter from McNicol Road (Melway 75 C12). Park near toilets and shelter. <b>Contact Diane, 9836 8692</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Thursday 8 October 2015	Carlton Monthly Meeting	8pm at BirdLife Australia National Office, 60 Leicester St, Carlton. Plenty of free street parking nearby. Guest Speaker & Subject: TBA. Tea and coffee served after the meeting with time to chat with other attendees. <b>Contact Claire, melbourne@birdlife.org</b>
Saturday 17 October 2015	Photography Group Outing	Plenty Gorge/Yan Yean Reservoir. Leader: Peter Bennet. For details, <b>contact Peter, 9435 4249</b> or <a href="mailto:teacherpeterb@gmail.com">teacherpeterb@gmail.com</a>

Wednesday 21 October 2015	Weekdays Outing	Mt St Leonard. 10am-3pm. Joint outing with BirdLife Yarra Valley. Melway Key Map Page 10, Grid Q3. From Healesville take Myers Creek Road/St Leonards Road. Turn into Monda Track after approximately 11km. <b>BEWARE OF LOG TRUCKS.</b> Park near bend after approximately 4km. Nearest toilets at Healesville (Melway 270 C12 or 278 E1). <b>Contact Diane, 9836 8692</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Saturday 24 October 2015	Beginners' Outing	Newport Lakes and Jawbone Reserve. Meet at 10am in the car park off Mason Street. Melway 53 G3. <b>Contact Hazel, 9876 3712</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Sunday 25 October 2015	ETP Survey	Eastern Treatment Plant, Bangholme. Meet at 9am for a survey that will continue until the evening. The survey is carried out by 4WD. Numbers are restricted and booking is essential. Survey date may change at short notice due to operational constraints. Leader is Mike Carter. <b>Contact Mike, 9787 7136.</b>
Tuesday 27 October 2015	Balwyn Monthly Meeting	8pm at Balwyn Community Centre, 412 Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn. Melway 46 F8. Good on-site parking at rear of venue. Guest Speaker & Subject: TBA. Member's Topic: Speaker: Karen Lee. Subject: The other St Kilda. Stay for supper and a chat after the meeting. <b>Contact Bill, 9803 1493</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Sunday 1 November 2015	Yellingbo Birdwalk	<b>Note early start time, October to March.</b> Yellingbo Reserve. Melway 305 G11. Take Warburton Hwy to Woori Yallock, turn right to Yellingbo. At Yellingbo, turn right towards Seville, then left into Macclesfield Rd. After 2.5km turn right at large pine trees. Gate opens 9am, walk starts 9.30am. <b>Due to Parks Victoria operational requirements the gate will be closed at 9.30am and not opened until after Bird Call at approximately 2pm.</b> Toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. <b>Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080</b> or <a href="mailto:onlyme53@bigpond.com">onlyme53@bigpond.com</a>
Wednesday 4 November 2015	Weekdays Outing	Banyule Flats, Viewbank. 10am-3pm. Leader: Lyn Easton. Melway 32 F2. Enter reserve from Somerset Drive. Car park at end of drive. No toilets. <b>Contact Diane, 9836 8692</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a> .
Thursday 12 November 2015	<b>No Carlton Monthly Meeting</b>	At this stage, there will be no Carlton Monthly Meeting in November. Meetings will only be held every second month for a trial period. The BirdLife Melbourne Committee will review the program and Members will be informed of the outcome.
Tuesday 17 November 2015	Weekdays Outing	Baillieston. 10am-3pm. Leader: Graeme Hosken. Melway X910 N3 or VicRoads 46 D6. Meet at Nagambie near toilet block in town centre. Convoy driving from there. <b>Contact Diane, 9836 8692</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a> .
Saturday 21 November 2015	Photography Group Outing	Westernport sites. Leader: John Van Doorn. For details, <b>contact Peter, 9435 4249</b> or <a href="mailto:teacherpeterb@gmail.com">teacherpeterb@gmail.com</a>
Sunday 22 November 2015	ETP Survey	Eastern Treatment Plant, Bangholme. Meet at 9am for a survey that will continue until the evening. The survey is carried out by 4WD. Numbers are restricted and booking is essential. Survey date may change at short notice due to operational constraints. Leader is Mike Carter. <b>Contact Mike, 9787 7136.</b>
Tuesday 24 November 2015	Balwyn Monthly Meeting	8pm at Balwyn Community Centre, 412 Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn. Melway 46 F8. Good on-site parking at rear of venue. Guest Speaker: Brett Lane. Subject: Australian shorebirds - a sampler. Members Topic: Speaker & Subject TBA. Stay for supper and a chat after the meeting. <b>Contact Bill, 9803 1493</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Thursday 26 November 2015	Photography Group Activity	Dinner and slide night. For details, <b>contact Peter, 9435 4249</b> or <a href="mailto:teacherpeterb@gmail.com">teacherpeterb@gmail.com</a>
Saturday 28 November 2015	Beginners' Outing	You Yangs Regional Park. Meet at 10am in the first car park on the left, just past the information centre. Melway Key Map Page 11 C12. <b>Contact Hazel, 9876 3712</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a>
Wednesday 2 December 2015	Weekdays Outing	Karkarook Park, Heatherton. 10am-3pm. Leader: Diane Tweeddale. Melway 78 D7. From Warrigal Road, turn into Fairchild Street and then into park. Meet in car park near information centre and toilets. <b>Contact Diane, 9836 8692</b> or <a href="mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au">melbourne@birdlife.org.au</a> .
Saturday 5 December 2015	Boneseeding & Birding	You Yangs Regional Park. Meet at 10am in the car park just past the Park Office, approximately 300m from the Branch Road entrance to the park. Melway Key Map Page 11 C12. Until late afternoon, the day is spent birding and removing the invasive weed Boneseed. Bring all you need for a normal days birding plus gardening gloves and a trowel for Boneseed removal. <b>Contact Merrilyn, 9889 4924</b> or <a href="mailto:merrilyn@wirejunkie.com">merrilyn@wirejunkie.com</a>
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DNA making for a difficult identification process. The bones serve as a much easier method for identification, and after being separated and grouped into skulls, jaws and pairs of pelvic bones, are then identified to species.

Ongoing surveys of pellets from different species of owls and other raptors in different regions, could prove to be interesting research for university practical classes. Comparisons of urban and regional habitat could provide information regarding trends and changes over time, regarding predator and prey relationships featuring our native wildlife (as well as introduced species).



If any readers are aware of owl (or other raptor) nests or roosts in locations across the state, have GPS coordinates or clear directions for us to locate them, and would be interested in contributing this information, feel free to email me at [elsciicluna@gmail.com](mailto:elsciicluna@gmail.com). We would be happy to let you know results, which over time have great potential for illustrating interesting predator/prey relationships in our local communities.

Emily is currently a student at Latrobe University and a member of the BirdLife Melbourne Committee

## Are you familiar with MS Excel and Access and want to help out?

We are looking for a volunteer to replace Graeme Hosken to coordinate and provide the quarterly report on the Dandenong Valley Catchment Surveys (four wetland sites). Graeme has been doing this task for the past eight years and we are now looking for someone to take over. This job requires:

- a basic knowledge of MS Excel and Access
- approximately three hours each quarter to put the quarterly report together, and
- three hours a month to input the survey results into a database.

If you are interested in helping out, please email [melbourne@birdlife.org.au](mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au). Assistance will be given during the handover of this project.

## BirdLife Melbourne Committee

**President:** Tim Bawden (Tel: 0488 017 781)

**Vice President:** Bevan Hood

**Secretary:** Alan Crawford

**Treasurer:** Greg Hempenstall

**Committee Members:** Adriana Bianchi, Ron Garrett, Mark Hall, Owen Lishmund, Philip Peel, Millie Scicluna, Scot Sharman, Joab Wilson

**Activities Coordinator:** Philip Peel

**Conservation Liaison Officers:** Joab Wilson and Claire Lowe

**Newsletter and Blog Editor:** Adriana Bianchi

All the above can be contacted by email at [melbourne@birdlife.org.au](mailto:melbourne@birdlife.org.au)

This newsletter is published quarterly, in March, June, September and December by BirdLife Melbourne – the Melbourne branch of BirdLife Australia. Contributions for the next issue are due 20 October 2015 and can be emailed to [bianchiadriana8@gmail.com](mailto:bianchiadriana8@gmail.com). Any ideas for future newsletter stories or contributions are welcome.

## The problem with cats

Feral cats are a major contributor to the decline of many threatened species. A recent metastudy by Edith Cowan University examining the scats and stomach contents of feral cats around Australia found that their diet consisted of about 400 Australian species including 28 listed species. Reptiles were the most commonly eaten (157 species), followed by birds (123), marsupials (58), rodents (27) and frogs (21). The declared 'war on feral cats' at the Threatened Species Summit in July is formal recognition of the damage feral cats are doing to our native wildlife.

But what of domestic cats? A study by the University of Exeter in England has found that cat owners do not believe their pet cats are a threat to wildlife. While the study's cat owners were generally able to predict whether their pets would bring home prey, they were not able to accurately predict how much. Over the four months of the study, the 43 cats delivered a total of 325 animals (60% rodent, 27% birds, 6.2% unidentified). However, when the cats' owners were asked if they were willing to contain their cats to protect wildlife, the answer was no.

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