

BirdLife Melbourne Newsletter

Volume 3 Number 2 June 2014

Heard about the Challenge Count?

On the first Sunday in December every year, 400 plus birdwatchers go tearing around the countryside counting birds. This madness is called the *Challenge Bird Count*.

It started in 1967 when Roy Wheeler, President of the Bird Observers Club, organised a challenge between Melbourne and the USA teams taking part in the Audubon Society Christmas Count. He divided the Melbourne/Geelong region into eight areas, each with a team of four to six observers. Each team had to record as many species as possible during a 24 hour period and the results were added together.

The original idea was to get the eight groups to cover as many species as possible. Team A covered the forests above Healesville down to Gembrook, and were required to get Pink Robin, Wonga Pigeon, Lewin's Honeyeater and Cicadabird etc. Team E covered the Werribee area and had to get most of the waders whilst Team B went down to Phillip Island and got Short-tailed Shearwaters and other seabirds.

In the June 1969 *Bird Observer*, Roy Wheeler gave the results. He wrote:

'The first count on 10th December 1967 was an attempt to beat the then American record of 204 species seen in one day. The BOC recorded 209. The members of the San Diego, California team during their Christmas Birdcount on December 21, 1968 regained the lead with 217 species beating the BOC 1968 total of 213 species. In December 1969 the Melbourne and Geelong teams regained the lead from the USA with 222 species.'

By 1973 things were changing. The USA connection had gone and they tried a three-way challenge with Sydney and Brisbane but this didn't last long, probably because those two cities had far bigger lists and December was not ideal for them. So, by 1982 it was simply a challenge between the eight teams around Melbourne. Geoff Deason compiled the results for many years and, in 1982 a total of 230 species were recorded. Team E, led by Fred Smith assisted by John Barkla and Bob Swindley, recorded the total of 157 species.

In 1985 I took over the running of the Challenge Bird Count and broadened the participation by inviting all BOCA Branches to take part. Shepparton, Corowa, Ballarat, Nhill

and East Gippsland joined in the first year.

In 2012 we had 35 teams from all states and territories except Western Australia, and the Northern Territory, with a total of 404 people taking part. Cairns/Mossman recorded 203 species with Tweed Heads getting 197. Team sizes varied from 32 in the Tweed Heads team to three people in a number of teams.

Graeme and Judy Hosken have compiled the results for many years and I thank them for all the work they have done. Adriana Bianchi has now taken over this role and I really appreciate her involvement. Results of previous years' Challenge Bird Counts are posted on the [BirdLife Australia website](http://birdlife.org.au).



Laughing Kookaburra © Bryon Samuels 2012 birdlife.org.au

John Barkla, on his fortieth consecutive Count, led an 11-strong team on the 2013 Challenge Bird Count, covering an area within a 25km radius from Werribee.

As in prior years, the Count commenced from midnight on Saturday in the You Yangs and concluded a little after 7pm on Sunday. In the many years John has participated in the Count, he has found that during the most recent decades, the species counts have been consistently higher than in previous decades. In the 10 years from 1991 to 2000, the average number of species counted was 154. From 2001 to 2010, the average increased to 169 and for the first three years of this decade, the average has been 185. This has been attributable in part to better coverage and more counters.

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Activities Calendar

ACTIVITIES FOR BIRDLIFE MELBOURNE JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2014

This calendar includes field activities for BirdLife Melbourne including the monthly 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, Tim Bawden at tbawden@live.com.au or on 0488 017 781.

Sunday 1 June 2014	Yellingbo Birdwalk	Yellingbo Reserve. Melway 305 G11. 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. Due to Parks Victoria operational requirements the gate will be closed at 10.30am and not opened until after Bird Call at approximately 3pm. Toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080 or onlyme53@bigpond.com
Saturday 7 June 2014	Boneseeding & Birding	You Yangs Regional Park. Meet at 10am in the car park just past the Park Office, approx 300 m from the Branch Rd 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. Contact Merrilyn, 9889 4924 or merrilyn@wirejunkie.com
Thursday 12 June 2014	Carlton Monthly Meeting	8pm at BirdLife Australia National Office, 60 Leicester St, Carlton. Plenty of free street parking nearby. Guest speaker: Tim Dolby. Subject: A new book – <i>Finding Australian Birds</i> . Tea and coffee served after the meeting with time to chat with other attendees. Contact Claire, melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Wednesday 18 June 2014	Weekdays Outing	Wilson Botanic Park, Berwick 10am – 3pm. Leader: John Bosworth. Melway 111 B7. Enter from Princes Hwy. Meet in car park. Toilets available. Will be combined with South of Golf Links Road, Narre Warren, Melway 110 H12 (no toilets) after lunch. Contact Diane, 9836 8692 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Saturday 21 June 2014	Photography Group Outing	For details contact Peter 9435 4249 or teacherpeterb@gmail.com
Sunday 22 June 2014	ETP Survey	Note: Surveys are suspended until further notice. Check the BirdLife Melbourne website for current information. 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. Contact Mike, 9787 7136 or pterodroma@bigpond.com
Tuesday 24 June 2014	Balwyn Monthly Meeting	Note: revised venue. 8pm at Balwyn Community Centre, 412 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (300m east of Talbot Avenue). Melway 46 E8. Good on site parking at rear of venue. Guest Speaker: Sonja Ross. Subject: Hot, cold and somewhere in between – some wildlife of the Americas. Member's topic: Bill Ramsay – BirdLife Australia's Working List of Australian Birds. Stay for supper and a chat after the meeting. Contact Bill, 9803 1493 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Saturday 28 June 2014	Beginners Outing	Woodlands Historic Park. Meet at 10am in the car park off Somerton Road. Melway 178 B6. Contact Hazel, 9876 3712 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Sunday 6 July 2014	Yellingbo Birdwalk	Yellingbo Reserve. Melway 305 G11. 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. Due to Parks Victoria operational requirements the gate will be closed at 10.30am and not opened until after Bird Call at approximately 3pm. Toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080 or onlyme53@bigpond.com
Thursday 10 July 2014	Carlton Monthly Meeting	8pm at BirdLife Australia National Office, 60 Leicester St, Carlton. Plenty of free street parking nearby. Guest speaker: Eliza Larson, PhD student. Subject: Nest site selection, heat stress and breeding success in cavity-nesting parrots (relating to climate change). Tea and coffee served after the meeting with time to chat with other attendees. Contact Claire, melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Wednesday 14 July 2014	Weekdays Outing	Lillydale Lake, Lillydale. 10am – 3pm. Leader Geoff Russell. Melway 38 G7. Enter from Swansea Road and park in the left/first car park. Toilets available. Contact Diane, 9836 8692 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Tuesday 22 July 2014	Balwyn monthly meeting	8pm at Balwyn Community Centre, 412 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (300m east of Talbot Avenue). Melway 46 E8. Good on site parking at rear of venue. Guest Speakers: Jill and Ian Wilson. Subject: New Zealand Subantarctic Islands – Galapagos of the Southern Ocean. Member's Topic: Richard Alcorn – Erema eBird. Stay for supper and a chat after the meeting. Contact Bill, 9803 1493 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Saturday 26 July 2014	Beginners Outing	Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne. Meet at 10am in the Stringybark car park. Melway 133 K12. Contact Hazel, 9876 3712 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Sunday 27 July 2014	ETP Survey	Note: Surveys are suspended until further notice. Check the BirdLife Melbourne website for current information. 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. Contact Mike, 9787 7136 or pterodroma@bigpond.com

Sunday 3 August 2014	Yellingbo Birdwalk	Yellingbo Reserve. Melway 305 G11. 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. Due to Parks Victoria operational requirements the gate will be closed at 10.30am and not opened until after Bird Call at approximately 3pm. Toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080 or onlyme53@bigpond.com
Wednesday 12 August 2014	Weekdays Outing	Sherbrooke Forest, Sherbrooke 10am – 3pm. Leader Rhonda Miller. Melway 75 G2. Enter picnic ground from corner of Sherbrooke Road and Sherbrooke Lodge Road. Toilets available. Contact Diane, 9836 8692 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Thursday 14 August 2014	Carlton Monthly Meeting	8pm at BirdLife Australia National Office, 60 Leicester St, Carlton. Plenty of free street parking nearby. Guest speaker: Amelia Formby, Masters student. Subject: The function of bill colouration in Black Swans. Tea and coffee served after the meeting with time to chat with other attendees. Contact Claire, melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Saturday 23 August 2014	Beginners Outing	Lillydale Lake. Meet at 10am in the first car park on the left off Swansea Road. Melway 38 G7. Contact Hazel, 9876 3712 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Sunday 24 August 2014	ETP Survey	Note: Surveys are suspended until further notice. Check the BirdLife Melbourne website for current information. 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. Contact Mike, 9787 7136 or pterodroma@bigpond.com
Tuesday 26 August 2014	Balwyn Monthly Meeting	8pm at Balwyn Community Centre, 412 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (300m east of Talbot Avenue). Melway 46 E8. Good on site parking at rear of venue. Guest Speaker: Mike Honeyman. Subject: Hooded Plovers. Member's topic: Michael Seyfort – Avian Anomalies. Stay for supper and a chat after the meeting. Contact Bill, 9803 1493 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Wednesday 3 September 2014	Weekdays Outing	Yan Yean area 10am – 3pm. Leader: John Prytherch. Melway 391 D1. From Plenty Road turn into Arthurs Creek Road, then left into Recreation Road. Entrance on first right. Turn next left and park in first car park. Toilets available. Contact Diane, 9836 8692 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Saturday 6 September 2014	Boneseeding & Birding	You Yangs Regional Park. Meet at 10am in the car park just past the Park Office, approx 300 m from the Branch Rd 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. Contact Merrilyn, 9889 4924 or merrilyn@wirejunkie.com
Sunday 7 September 2014	Yellingbo Birdwalk	Yellingbo Reserve. Melway 305 G11. 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. Due to Parks Victoria operational requirements the gate will be closed at 10.30am and not opened until after Bird Call at approximately 3pm. Toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080 or onlyme53@bigpond.com
Thursday 11 September 2014	Carlton Monthly Meeting	8pm at BirdLife Australia National Office, 60 Leicester St, Carlton. Plenty of free street parking nearby. Guest speaker: Michelle Hall, Research Fellow. Subject: Personality in Superb Fairy-wrens. Tea and coffee served after the meeting with time to chat with other attendees. Contact Claire, melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Wednesday 22 September 2014	Weekdays Outing	Long Forest Reserve/Lake Merrimu 10am-3pm. Leader: Graeme Hosken. Melway 329 C11. Reserve entrance from Canopus Cct. From Old Western Highway take Long Forest Road or from Western Freeway take Hopetoun Park Road (see Melway 335 C10). Park on road. Toilets at Merrimu Reservoir car park, Melway 328 J6. Toilets available. Contact Diane, 9836 8692 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Tuesday 23 September 2014	Balwyn Monthly Meeting	8pm at Balwyn Community Centre, 412 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (300m east of Talbot Avenue). Melway 46 E8. Good on site parking at rear of venue. Guest Speaker: Chris Doughty. Subject: A birding tour to Boigu Island in the Torres Strait. . Members topic: Graham Harkom – Skomer Island, Wales. Stay for supper and a chat after the meeting. Contact Bill, 9803 1493 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Saturday 27 September 2014	Beginners Outing	Coolart Wetlands. Meet at 10am in the car park. Melway 193 H9. Contact Hazel, 9876 3712 or melbourne@birdlife.org.au
Sunday 28 September 2014	ETP Survey	Note: Surveys are suspended until further notice. Check the BirdLife Melbourne website for current information. 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. Contact Mike, 9787 7136 or pterodroma@bigpond.com

Bird Song Identification Project

Do you have an ear for bird songs and calls? If so, we need your help! We are looking for participants for a research project at Museum Victoria evaluating the utility of automated field recordings for bird surveys.

The online survey involves answering a few questions regarding your experience and will ask you to identify bird species from a series of audio field recordings. All experience levels are welcome to participate. Please email VicBirdIDSurvey@gmail.com for a link to the survey.

CHALLENGE COUNT CONT.

Highlights of the 2013 Count included:

- The first record of Pied Currawong but missing the Pacific Gull for the first time
- A selection of rarer waders (Ruff, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Pectoral Sandpiper) at the Western Treatment Plant
- Speckled Warblers at two sites in the You Yangs
- Several species seem to be increasing in number in the area including Brush Bronzewing, Cape Barren Geese, Black Kites, Crested Pigeons and Rainbow Lorriquets.

Some species could not be found, all of which used to be regularly recorded but have now disappeared or become very rare in the area. These include (last record count in brackets): Eastern Curlew (2003), Grey-tailed Tattler (1991), Lesser Sand Plover (1989), Greater Sand Plover (1986), Brown Treecreeper (1980) and Hooded Robin (1995).

John wrote:

'We saw more than 20% of Australia's bird species and approximately 42,000 individuals within 40 minutes drive of a city of 4+ million people in an area of only 25 kilometres radius: that in my view puts our area on a level comparable with anything else in the country and many other parts of the world.'

John's full report of the 2013 Count is on the BirdLife Melbourne blog.

Would you like to be part of the Count?

Anyone can enter a team which should preferably be at least three people. The area covered can be any size, not more than 25km radius, which can comfortably be covered by the team. This is not a twitchathon but is more a challenge to see how many species you can see in your patch.

The next Challenge Bird Count will be held on or around the weekend of 7/8 December. Please contact me at apthomas@alphalink.com.au if you would like to take part.

Have fun.
David Ap-Thomas

HAVE YOU VISITED THE BIRDLIFE MELBOURNE BLOG LATELY?

Contributors to our blog have been sending in regular reports, including all your old favourites which were, until recently published in this newsletter. Read about:

- Paul Sullivan's (Chief Executive Officer of BirdLife Australia) plans for the organisation in a [report of a presentation](#) he gave to members at the January Balwyn meeting. He spoke about his goals to refocus and improve business methods, build a strategy for the next five years, increase member participation, and improve dialogue with networks, branches and affiliates.
- Weekdays outings to the [Royal Botanic Gardens](#), Melbourne, the [Bellarine Peninsula](#) and [Royal Park](#)
- Beginners outings to [Banyule Flats](#) and [Longridge Park](#), Warrandyte
- Education activities for [February](#) and [March](#)
- The [March Birding and Boneseeding outing](#) in the You Yangs.

BirdLife Melbourne Committee

President: Sonja Ross (Tel: 9846 5380 or email: sonja.ross@yahoo.com.au)

Vice Presidents: Stuart Dashper/Tim Bawden

Secretary: Alan Crawford

Treasurer: Greg Hemenstall

Members: Adriana Bianchi, Bevan Hood, Susan Pepper, Scot Sharman.

All the above can also be contacted by email at melbourne@birdlife.org.au

This newsletter is published quarterly, in March, June, September and December by BirdLife Melbourne, the Melbourne Branch of BirdLife Australia. Adriana Bianchi is the current editor. Contributions for the next issue are due 20 July 2014 and can be emailed to bianchiadriana8@gmail.com

Are corellas a signal of worsening drought?

As the previous drought developed, large numbers of corellas were reported in the suburbs. Recently I have noted increased numbers in my local area (Melway 60C2), for example, on 8 and 9 March (30-40), 13 and 19 March (at least 50), 22 March (≈20), 23 March (large flock, partially seen). On 16, 18 and 19 April (≈200). This looks as if older birds are remembering foraging successfully and younger ones are following them as the country dies. All identified birds were Little Corella. Others have presumably observed this and drawn similar conclusions.

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Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats