



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 60
April 2008

From the Editor

2008 is off to a running start...and the 60th issue is chock full of great articles!

Janet Hand, Heather Mitchell and Diane Tweeddale have sussed out what appears to be a new birding hotspot for Melbourne - Mill Creek Lakes – and have shared their findings with us. You may know that the long-awaited update to the 1994 *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds* by Christidis & Boles came out earlier this year; our very own Bill Ramsay has tackled the task of working out what the changes mean to us. The

Education Committee has been going full-tilt, and there are some great activities on the books for the next few months – check them out! As always, there are fantastic speakers lined up for the Branch Meetings, and great outings on offer, so be sure to join in the fun!

As always, member contributions are invited and **May 1** is the deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the June issue of *The Melbirdian*. Happy Birding!

Chris Wichems, Editor

Melbourne Water Wetland Bird Survey Update

The heavy rains in December and January caused temporary but extensive flooding in the four wetlands being monitored by MELBOCA. The flooding resulted in rubbish being deposited in and on the banks of the wetlands, and in some cases, reed-beds were flattened...could this be why no frog calls were recorded in January? Conditions improved in February; water levels stabilised and frogs were heard calling.

The Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills have been a bit like 'Grey Nomads', popping into a wetland now and then to tease the survey team. No sightings of Blue-billed Duck, Pink-eared Duck or Hardhead were recorded in January or February. Perhaps they have headed north

for breeding where water conditions are more favourable. And will our summer visitors - Latham's Snipe, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Australian Reed-Warbler - be with us for much longer? We shall find out in March. Of note, Musk Lorikeet and Silveryeye were two new species recorded during January and February, taking the total species seen at the four sites being monitored by MELBOCA since June 2007 to 85. Please see the attached report for more details.

MELBOCA are surveying 4 of the 10 Melbourne Water sites, and PENBOC and BAYBOC are surveying the remainder. Collectively, the 10 sites have ticks against 107 bird species, three frog species and one mammal (Rabbit).

Graeme Hosken

MELBOCA Branch Meetings

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

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

Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 22 April 2008 8.00 pm

Ray Thomas 'The Honeyeater Project 13 Years On – What Have We Achieved, and What Have We Learned?'

With fewer than 1500 Regent Honeyeaters left in the wild, Ray Thomas, coordinator of the Regent Honeyeater Project, and his team of volunteers have played an important role in the recovery program for this species. Come and hear about the hand-on conservation work Ray has spearheaded in the Benalla region – and what you can do to help out.

Tuesday 27 May 2008 8.00 pm

Chris Doughty 'The BOCA Tour to Myanmar in February 2007'

Formerly known as Burma, Myanmar is the most ornithologically diverse country in SE Asia. This previously inaccessible country has recently opened its doors to travellers, and birders have since been able to visit this birding frontier. Join Chris on a unique armchair tour of Myanmar – it promises to be a fascinating evening!

Inside This Issue:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Birding Hotspots Near You: Mill Park Lakes | 2 |
| Education Update | 2 |
| Christidis & Boles 2008: What's New? | 3 |
| Interesting Sightings | 4 - 5 |
| Past Meeting Reports | 6 - 7 |
| Outing Reports | 8 - 9 |
| Autumn Coach Tours | 9 |
| Dates to Remember | 10 |
| Volunteers Needed! | 10 |
| Contact MELBOCA | 10 |

Birding Hotspots Near You: Mill Park Lakes Wetland

Nestled among a new housing development in South Morang is Mill Park Lakes Wetland, an under-advertised birding experience (Melway 183 B8). Thoughtful planning has resulted in a system of created lakes with assorted microhabitats, including developing shrubs, reed beds, muddy flats, rocky shorelines and grasslands. Even though the paths around the lakes are used by cyclists, fishermen, dog walkers and pram walkers, the birding is good. Birds abound and not only the 'bread-gobblers', i.e., Pacific Black Duck and feral domestic ducks. On our recent visit, three observers notched up 47 species in two and a half hours.

Coming from Plenty Road, the site is accessible either from Gordon Road and Jardier Trace or from McDonalds Road, Civic Drive and Findon Road. There is a car park in front of the shops at The Promenade, but the area is mainly residential and there are no public toilets. However, the Promenade Café serves good coffee, and the friendly staff allows the use of a customers' toilet.

The surfaced trail by The Promenade follows the lake perimeter. On a January visit, we followed the sunny trail along the open lakeside and past reed beds, leading us to a planted shrubs area. Waterbirds were the main attraction. A shallow lake yielded an Australian Spotted Crake foraging on the muddy bank beside a Royal Spoonbill, a couple of Black-winged Stilt and a pair of Black-fronted Dotterel. Hardhead, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal and Australasian Shoveler were also present and a pair of Black Swan escorted five cygnets over to the

Eurasian Coots who were angling for a bread handout. Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant and Great Cormorant were using the area and the Purple Swamphen had clearly come to stay. Welcome Swallows and some Fairy Martins flew overhead for insects while Australian Reed-Warbler called and flew among reed beds (a seasonal species, but indicative of the density of the reeds). As yet the area has not a lot of cover for small birds and House Sparrow, Superb Fairy-wren, European Goldfinch and European Goldfinch were the commonest species identified. White-fronted Chat and White-plumed Honeyeater were present near the edges of the lakes. The lakes vary in depth and so does the amount of rock or mud at the edges. Perches are available and cover varies but there is no tall vegetation around the trail yet. Nearby are some remnant mature eucalypts where Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Red Wattlebird were seen. It will be interesting to follow the survival of these old trees in the changed hydrologic regime.

The area is a tribute to the planners and to those maintaining it for the City of Whittlesea. Mill Park Lakes is also a wonderful demonstration of the ability of birds to find and use a managed habitat in a residential setting. Our thanks go to Tim Connell, the City of Whittlesea Environmental Works Officer, for his report of the male Blue-billed Duck at the site on "Birding-aus" that alerted us to another fantastic birding hot spot close to Melbourne.

Janet Hand
Heather Mitchell
Diane Tweeddale

Education Committee: Join in the Fun!

The MELBOCA Education Committee has been busy...

In February, Janet Hand had two speaking engagements with two different groups that wanted to learn about birds, and in March, Barbara Longmuir shared her bird knowledge with a lovely Ladies Group in Malvern. On Saturday 1st March, our very own Graeme Hosken represented BOCA on the 3AW gardening program 'Jane and Darren's Big Backyard'.

...and we have several events on the books for the next several months!

April and May will see Barbara and Graeme give talks to the City of Monash Aged Day Care Groups; in April, an After School Care Group in Box Hill is keen to have the "The Bird Lady" (that's Barbara!) back for a return visit; and Barbara will be conducting a 'Breakfast with the Birds' at Blackburn Lake on Saturday 12th April, from 7.30 to 10.00 am that includes a walk and morning tea.

Blackburn Lake Sanctuary is an important bird habitat and you may have heard about the birds of Blackburn Lake in the recent media coverage about the Powerful Owl Family that made use of nest boxes provided by Dr Jim Greenwood.

Last October, BOCA put Parrots on Parade for Bird Week; educational activities that occurred in conjunction with Bird Week included a Sunday afternoon 'Stickybeak' activity at the Blackburn Lake Sanctuary Visitor Centre. (For those of you who may not know, Stickybeaks is the Junior Branch of BOCA – for members up to 14 years of age.) Children were invited to participate in several hands-on activities to learn all about parrots and they were also delighted to meet our special guest, Mate, Chris and Des Wichems' pet Galah.

Following the success of this session, BOCA has been invited to present more 'Stickybeak' activities in 2008. We will begin with *Investigating Owls* on Sunday 18th May and *Migrating Birds* on Sunday 13th July. Both sessions will occur between 2.00 and 4.00 PM so that families visiting the sanctuary will be able to participate.

Janet Hand
Annette Cook

If you would like to assist MELBOCA to plan or deliver these and other community education activities please contact either Janet Hand (info@melboca.org.au) or Annette Cook at BOCA National Office (Tel: 9877 5342 or education@birdobservers.org.au).

Christidis and Boles 2008: What's New?

The long awaited *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds*, by Les Christidis and Walter E Boles, 2008, is a major revision to their 1994 version, and has given birdwatchers much to think about. The book (available from BOCA's Blue Wren Gift Shop at a Member's Price of \$54.37 and for reference in the BOCA Library) is very detailed and includes extensive reasons and references as to why the various changes have been made.

The importance of this publication is that in all probability it will become the benchmark for the taxonomy of Australian birds for the coming years. Even if you don't have the endurance to read it in its entirety, it is well worth perusing to gain some understanding of the rationale behind the changes that have been made.

Simplistically, and in plain language, the main changes can be summarized as follows:

- The geographical coverage has been extended to include Australian Antarctic Territory.
- The number of species (excluding extinct birds and the Supplementary List) has increased from 791 in the 1994 version to 852 in the 2008 version. The number has increased primarily due to:
 - The inclusion of many new records of vagrants accepted by the Birds Australia Rarities Committee (BARC).
 - A net gain of splitting over the lumping of species.
 - Promotion of some species from the 1994 Supplementary List.
 - Recognition that more introduced species now have sustainable populations.
- A net gain of splits over lumps will see most serious tickers receive some armchair ticks.
 - The eleven 'effective' splits for Australian birders are:
Vanuatu Petrel from White-necked Petrel; Linchi Swiftlet from Glossy Swiftlet; Variable Goshawk from Brown Goshawk; Kalkadoon Grasswren from Dusky Grasswren; Short-tailed Grasswren from Striated Grasswren; Western Wattlebird from Little Wattlebird; Kimberley Honeyeater from White-lined Honeyeater; Arafura Fantail from Rufous Fantail; Pacific Robin from Scarlet Robin; Buff-sided Robin from White-browed Robin and Green-headed Yellow Wagtail from Yellow Wagtail (now known as Eastern Yellow Wagtail).
 - The four lumps are:
Snares Penguin with Fiordland Penguin; Gould's Bronze-Cuckoo with Little Bronze-Cuckoo; Lesser Sooty Owl with Sooty Owl and Black-backed Wagtail with White Wagtail.
 - Several of the splits and lumps anticipated in BOCA's *Little Blue Birdlist* Edition 3 did not eventuate.
- Eighteen species found in Australia and its territories have been split from similar overseas species, with potentially more armchair ticks for international birders. All have been given new English Names (except Grey Fantail) to differentiate them from the similar overseas species. The new names are:
 - Australian Swiftlet, Australasian Darter, Australian Little Bittern, Eastern Great Egret, Eastern Osprey, Pale-vented Bush-hen, Australian Painted Snipe, Brown Skua, Tasman Parakeet, Eastern Koel, Christmas Island Hawk-Owl, Eastern Barn Owl, Eastern Grass Owl, Australian Logrunner, Australasian Figbird, Grey Fantail, Australian Reed-Warbler and Australasian Pipit.
- Extensive revisions have been made to the sequences of genera and species within genera, with the consequential reshuffling of the bird list used at 'Bird Call'. Just as some of us were starting to come to grips with the 1994 order, the learning process will have to start again.
- Numerous reclassifications of species have occurred resulting in extensive changes to Scientific Names. DNA studies, well beyond the understanding of many birders (including me) have led to many of these changes.
- Many readers will be aware that there has been an ongoing debate on the merits of the two common concepts for taxonomy when applied to albatrosses. For a full explanation of the two concepts the reader is referred to page 6 of Christidis and Boles 2008. Very simplistically, the traditional Biological Species Concept (BSC), adopted in the 1994 version, recognises that species can have subspecies, while the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC) considers all subspecies as species. Using the PSC, the number of albatross species for Australia would increase from 10 to possibly 21. Christidis and Boles 2008 has retained the BSC.
- Some relatively minor changes in English Names have been adopted, one being as subtle as the insertion of a hyphen between Night and Heron.
- The chats are now embedded with the honeyeaters.
- Tasman Booby, listed as extinct in the 1994 version is no longer listed. Recent studies have concluded that this species was a subspecies of Masked Booby.

The bulk of the work for Christidis and Boles 2008 was completed by the end of 2006. New species are forever arriving in Australia and its territories, coupled with advances in research, make it impossible for such a book to remain up to date for long. In just over a year, Eurasian Curlew, Slaty-backed Gull and Fairy Pitta are three species (all subject to BARC review) not included in the Main Species Lists, which have been listed as Unusual Sightings in Bird Notes Series.

Bill Ramsay

Interesting Sightings

Entered 02 March 2008

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

Currently, we are collecting reports of Currawong, Corella, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Crested Pigeon, Song Thrush, Brown Thornbill 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 22 January and 26 February 2008), via email or as WEB reports to the BOCA National Office.

| Currawong Sightings | | | |
|-------------------------|---------|---------------------|---------------|
| Pied Currawong | | | |
| Most days Jan-Feb '08 | 1 or 2 | Bennett Ave | Mt Waverley |
| 13 Jan '08 | 3 | Blacks Walk Reserve | Blackburn |
| 17 Jan '08 | Several | Police Academy | Glen Waverley |
| 22 Feb '08 | 7-9 | Tarroona Ave | Mt Waverley |
| Grey Currawong | | | |
| Most days since Sep '07 | 1 or 2 | Bannons Lane | Yarrambat |

| Corella Sightings | | | |
|----------------------------|--------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Long-billed Corella | | | |
| 12-14 Feb '08 | 16 | Plume Ct | Glen Waverley |
| Little Corella | | | |
| Daily Dec '07-Feb '08 | 60+ | Montmorency Second. College | Montmorency |
| 08 Dec '07-04 Jan '08 | Flocks | Melton Township | Melton Township |
| 02 Jan '08 | 40-50 | Frog Hollow Reserve | Camberwell |
| 02 Jan '08 | 5 | Main Rd | Eltham |
| 09 Jan '08 | 8 | Chirnside Park Golf Course | Chirnside Park |
| 22 Jan '08 | 3 | Chirnside Park Golf Course | Chirnside Park |
| 28 Jan '08 | 25 | Bennett Ave | Mt Waverley |
| 09 Feb '08 | 8 | Clyde St | Thornbury |
| 10 Feb '08 | 3 | Clyde St | Thornbury |
| 14 Feb '08 | 100+ | Susan St | Eltham |
| 21 Feb '08 | 40 | Gilpin Park | West Brunswick |
| Corella species | | | |
| Most days | 10-20 | Ascot St | Doncaster East |

| Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo Sightings | | | |
|--|---|----------------|-----------|
| 03 Feb '08 | 2 | Blackburn Lake | Blackburn |

| Crested Pigeon Sightings | | | |
|--------------------------|------|--------------------|----------------|
| 10 Dec '07 | 2 | Warland Rd | Moorabbin |
| 20 Dec '07 | 2 | Warland Rd | Moorabbin |
| Daily Jan-Feb '08 | 6-10 | Doris St | Murrumbeena |
| Daily Jan-Feb '08 | 2-6 | Kew Golf Course | Kew |
| 19 Jan '08 | 2 | Deep Creek Reserve | Doncaster East |
| 20 Jan '08 | 2 | Braeside Park | Braeside |
| 12 Feb '08 | 35 | Footscray Park | Footscray |
| 14 Feb '08 | 7 | Wingrove Park | Eltham |
| 17 Feb '08 | 1 | Springfield Park | Box Hill |
| 17 Feb '08 | 4 | Banyule Flats | Viewbank |
| 25 Feb '08 | 2 | Vasey Ave | Mt Waverley |

| Song Thrush Sightings | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--------------|-----------|
| 12 Dec '07 | 1 | Hillcrest Dr | Hillside |
| 27 Dec '07 | 1 | Moorhead Dr | Mill Park |
| 31 Jan '08 | 1 | Moorhead Dr | Mill Park |
| 04 Feb '08 | 3 | Moorhead Dr | Mill Park |

| Brown Thornbill Sightings | | | |
|---------------------------|-----|-------------|----------------|
| Most days '07 | --- | Bennett Ave | Mount Waverley |
| 24 Feb '08 | 2 | Ascot St | Doncaster East |
| 25 Feb '08 | 2 | Franklin Ct | Glen Waverley |

Interesting Sightings Cont'd

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

Is your suburb listed?

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

* Suburbs added, January-February 2008.

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

Other Sightings

| | | | | |
|---------------|----------------------------|----|--|---------------|
| 01 Nov '07 | White-winged Triller | 1 | Point Nepean National Park | Point Nepean |
| ?? Dec '07 | Black-eared Cuckoo | -- | Springvale Rd Wetland | Braeside |
| ?? Jan '08 | Gang-gang Cockatoo | 4 | Highview Rd | Ferny Creek |
| 02-07 Jan '08 | Tawny Frogmouth | 1 | Brighton St | Richmond |
| 10 Jan '08 | Australian Hobby | 1 | Brighton St The bird was chasing sparrows | Richmond |
| 17 Jan '08 | Eagle (species) | 1 | Ansett Estate | Mt Eliza |
| 19 Jan '08 | Spotless Crake | 1 | Domain Wetlands | Templestowe |
| 12 Feb '08 | Eastern Koel | 1 | --- | North Balwyn |
| 15 Feb '08 | Eastern Rosella (juvenile) | 1 | Plume Ct | Glen Waverley |
| 16 Feb '08 | Little Eagle | 1 | Taroona Ave | Mt Waverley |

Additional Notes

- Pied Currawong reared young in spring '07 at Olive Ave, Mt Waverley and at Bay Rd, Torquay.
- A Masked Lovebird was seen fighting with Rainbow Lorikeets at Wardle Ct in Blackburn South between the 26th and 31st of January, 2008.
- Musk Lorikeets were observed feeding in a Norfolk Island Hibiscus and in a Firewheel Tree at Moorabbin.
- Mike Wicks reports that he has lived in the same house at Warland Road, Moorabbin since 1986 and his first sighting of a Little Wattlebird was in August and then September and October of 1986. The next sighting was in May 1987 and sightings have continued monthly through February 2008 with the exception of February 1988, June 1988 and August 1989, during which time Mike was on holidays. The number of birds seen was between 1 and 4 on recorded months.

*Please note that all of the above records cover the area within 60 km of the Melbourne GPO.
Refer to Melway Street Directory, Pages 1 and 2.*

Graeme Hosken, Recorder

Past Meeting Reports

22 January 2008

After welcoming all to the first meeting of 2008, including new member Ian Livingstone, Graeme Hosken introduced the Bird of the Evening segment. Speaking on the Eastern Spinebill, David Plant illustrated his talk with some superb photographs of this little bird that regularly visits his garden. The Eastern Spinebill ranges from Cooktown in Northern Queensland down to South Australia and Tasmania, and the Latin name for this species, *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*, describes the slender, thorn-like bill. The song is most distinctive, with a loud "piping" call, and the species makes a beautiful hanging nest of soft materials. The genders can be difficult to differentiate as these delightful birds are so fleet of wing.

Unfortunately, the guest speaker, Dr Grainne Maguire, was unable to attend tonight's meeting at the last moment and this necessitated some sterling improvisational work by Graeme in organizing the main event! Howard Plowright, Janet Hand and Duncan Turnbull stepped into the breach to provide us with a varied program and should be thanked for their commitment to the cause.

Howard entertained the group with a selection of his many excellent sound recordings, visualised with sonagraphs generated on the computer. He played 5 different recordings of ravens, and asked the audience to identify them – which demonstrated that this is not as easy as one might think! He then shared an amazing recording taken in Sherbrooke Forest of a locally famous Superb Lyrebird named The Pretender, whose mimicry of other bird species was fascinating – especially so when the harmonics could be visualised. When his imitations and his targeted originals were sonographed and compared side by side, so to speak, the sonograms revealed very noticeable differences between the imitation and the real thing. The Pretender's mimicry of the Laughing Kookaburra call was excellent, but his copy of the Eastern Whipbird really needed some work! The next part of Howard's presentation was devoted to the recordings of the Helmeted Honeyeater, taken in the Bunyip State Forest. Howard played the very soft contact call of the adult on returning to the nest prior to feeding the chicks and the begging calls from the chicks and pointed out the difference between the "chip begging", "submission" and "attacking" calls.

With input from David Ap Thomas, Janet Hand reported on the Christmas Camp that was held at Dartmouth in the Western District of Victoria from the 23rd of December to the 7th of January on the banks of the Glenelg River. A total of 39 people attended and 142 species of birds were recorded, of which 72 were seen in the camp environs. Some of the birds sighted included Azure Kingfisher, Olive Whistler, Gang-gang Cockatoo, a white morph of the Grey Goshawk, and a flock of 40 Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos. At nearby Mills Swamp, Brolga and Southern Emu-wren were observed and the cattle yards yielded Brown

Songlarks, Eurasian Skylarks, Blue-winged Parrots and Rufous Bristlebirds. Although New Years Eve was extremely hot, the usual camp jollity survived with a BOCA anthem and community singing – but I gather no one stayed up to ring in the New Year. Duncan Turnbull took a side trip down to Nelson on the Glenelg estuary, from which both the inland waters and ocean sand bar could be seen. He observed Little Terns (a pair of which may have been nesting), Hooded Plovers and Black-fronted Dotterel, with Red-capped Plovers, Pied Oystercatchers, Great Crested Grebe and Australian Pelicans on the mud flats. The sink hole at Picaninny Ponds yielded few birds.

MELBOCA has been contacted by Birds Australia with a request for volunteers to take part in their shorebird count. Further details may be obtained from Birds Australia.

Barbara Longmuir informed the group that the Melbourne Zoo is collecting wine and champagne corks for recycling to raise funds for different Zoo projects and initiatives. Incredibly, cork recycling has raised some \$277,000.00 for different Zoo projects and initiatives to date. If you are interested, please bring any wine and champagne corks (including plastic corks) to the monthly MELBOCA meetings and Barbara will see that they get to the Melbourne Zoo for recycling. Barbara also asked if anyone has bird lists for Como House, either recent or past.

Duncan Turnbull was thanked for his very professional production of nametags for members, including the wooden box for storage. The evening then concluded with an invitation for a cuppa.

Linda Stock

26 February 2008

Janet Hand opened the meeting and welcomed visitors and new members. Damian Kelly and Bill Ramsay led the Bird of the Evening Segment, taking us on a tour of the MELBOCA website. Damian designed the MELBOCA website (www.melboca.org.au) and Bill coordinates the content that appears on the website. Going through the main menus, Damian and Bill showed us how we could use the website to: find information about local birding locations; see what upcoming outings are on offer; find out what birds were seen on recent outings; access MELBOCA branch news, learn about the conservation activities MELBOCA is involved in – and how you can participate; find out about MELBOCA Education Activities, and much more. There are also some fabulous identification guides on the website, and the entire website is peppered with brilliant photographs of birds, taken by MELBOCA members. Bill and Damian also highlighted the Members' Contribution area, and they welcome any feedback. All up, Bill and Damian have done an incredible job; the MELBOCA website contains a wealth of great information that is available at the click of a mouse – so be sure to check it out.

Past Meeting Reports Cont'd

The guest speaker this evening was Chris Tzaros, Conservation Manager of Birds Australia, who spoke on the '**Orange-bellied Parrot Survey Update**'. Chris, an entertaining and accomplished speaker, illustrated his talk with an impressive PowerPoint display.

The Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) is one of the world's most endangered species and it is believed only 140 wild birds remain. As the smallest of the six grass bird species belonging to the *Neophema* genus, the OBP migrates annually between Tasmania and the Victorian and South Australian coasts. Breeding on the coastal plains of south-west Tasmania during summer, the OBP heads north in March, up the west coast of Tasmania, across the Bass Strait to the mainland where they disperse along the coastline as far as Corner Inlet in the east to the Coorong in the west. They remain on the mainland for the winter and return to south-west Tasmania in September-October.

On the mainland, OBPs are typically found in coastal saltmarshes within three kilometres of the coast, often on small islands or narrow spits. They roost in tall dense shrubs such as the Moonah, Golden Wattle, and Coast Beard Heath, and may "loaf" in African Boxthorn, which provides a measure of protection to them.

Because the OBP can be easily confused with the Blue-winged Parrot, Chris walked us through the key identification features of the OBP. Of note, some Blue-winged Parrots develop an orange colouration on the belly so this should not be used as a definitive diagnostic marking! When identifying a *Neophema* parrot, it is important to closely observe: the colour of the upperparts, face and frontal band; whether the bird has a frontal band, and if so note the colour, width and pattern; the extent of blue on the shoulder patch; the colour of the primary feathers; and the alarm call. Briefly, the OBP has a rich grass green plumage on the upperparts, a bright greenish-yellow face, a blue frontal band over the beak, only the edge of the wing primaries are blue. In flight it is obvious that the Blue-winged Parrot has much more blue on its wing and Chris had some wonderful photos showing a mixed flock for comparison. The OBP alarm call is quite distinctive, being a harsh "ch" "ch" "ch" with a rasping, buzzing quality as opposed to the higher pitched "twittery" call of the Blue-winged Parrot. Chris had some copies of the brochure titled *Identifying the Orange-bellied Parrot* for distribution (available on the web at www.birdsaustralia.com.au/our-projects/identifying-obps.html) that outlined the key distinguishing characteristics of the OBP, all of which was summarized in his presentation.

Surveys for OBPs and population monitoring have been conducted on the mainland each winter since 1980. Traditional survey sites include the Bellarine Peninsula, the Western Treatment Plant, French Island, Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Yambuk Lake. In recent years, patterns of habitat usage and dispersion appear to have changed, to the point where we are not certain as to

where most of the birds occur whilst they are on the mainland. Compared to survey results from the 1980s, when an average of 43% (86 birds) of the known total population was accounted for, surveys since 2000 have recorded an average of just 10% (20 birds) of the population, despite increased volunteer numbers and greater survey site coverage. Therefore, goals for the OBP project in future include more intensive and focused mainland surveys.

Upcoming surveys in 2008 are planned for the 3rd and 4th of May, the 26th and 27th of July and the 13th and 14th of September. Chris would be very interested to take the name of anyone interested in partaking in a survey – his contact details are listed below.

If you think you may have seen an OBP, please **immediately** contact either Chris (Tel: 0409 235 263 or c.tzaros@birdsaustralia.com.au) or Glen Ehmke (Tel: 0447 286 488). It is also extremely important to check for leg bands on any OBPs. Over half of the wild OBP population is banded with a colour band on each of its legs. Please observe the bands as closely as possible, recording both the colour of each band and the letter which will appear on either the left or right band. Some very useful information can be gleaned from sightings of banded birds. (Of note, Blue-winged Parrots are *not* banded which makes the banded one more likely to be an OBP!)

Len Robinson gave the vote of thanks for an outstanding presentation and reminded us that he saw his first OBP some 60 years ago when they were quite common in the Werribee area. We thanked Chris for an extremely detailed, informative and interesting presentation.

Duncan Turnbull has offered to produce extra name tags upon request and payment of \$2.00 per tag as a fund raiser for MELBOCA. David Plant appealed for more speakers to take part in the Bird of the Evening segment - which does not necessarily have to be about a bird. Lateral thinking required here, and suggested subjects included a favourite birding spot or place of interest. Contact David if you are one of the willing.

Graeme Hoskens mentioned that Channel 10 (Melbourne TV) is making a series called 'Kenny's World' that is a spin-off of the popular movie, 'Kenny'. Apparently, the story is that Kenny has discovered birdlife in the treatment plants into which he deposits sewage, and part of the TV series has been filmed at the Western Treatment Plant. BOCA members – including our very own Xenia Dennett and Graeme Hosken – have participated in the filming as 'extras' – so keep an eye out for them when the series airs (dates uncertain at the time of press, but further information will be provided as it comes to hand).

Linda Stock

Outing Reports

February 27

Wednesday Wanderings

Jumping Creek Reserve, Warrandyte State Park

What makes for a successful bird outing? Is it the quality and quantity of birds observed? Or is it the number of birders who arrive at the meeting place, eager to explore a reserve and enjoy the birds and scenery along the Yarra's edge? In the case of the first Wednesday Wandering at Jumping Creek Reserve in February, it was both.

During the walk from the car park to Blue Tongue Bend and return **45** bird species were identified, highlights being the Australian Owlet-nightjar peeping coyly from the entrance to a 'spout' spotted by Janet Hand. A Powerful Owl perched low over the path (missed by the leader and half a dozen other birders intent on watching where they put their feet) was spotted by a keen-eyed birder following. The owl was admired by all, photographed by many, and was a new bird for Chris from Nunawading. The total of 45 species beat by 7 the number observed in June 2004 when we did the same walk during Series 1.

The group numbered an amazing **56**. We were pleased to welcome again familiar faces from the past – among them were 'Uncle' Reg who gamely managed the entire undulating walk on a warm day; Cecily who shared her knowledge of insects and plants as well as birds; and Margaret, all the way from Highett, with her daughter, Jacqui.

The upcoming Wednesday Wanderings are scheduled for Wednesday 23 April (Pound Bend, Warrandyte State Park) and Wednesday 28 May (Normans Reserve, North Warrandyte); please see the outing details on page 10. No need to book – and we hope to see you there!

Celia M. Browne

5 February 2008

Bellarine Peninsula

Ten dedicated enthusiasts gathered at Belmont under the leadership of Fred Smith on a fine, mild day. Rains during the past couple of months had left water in the wetlands beside the golf course and the birding here was better than last year. Latham's Snipe flew to the muddy edges while European Greenfinch and numerous Australian Reed-Warblers moved between reed beds. There were good views of a couple of Australian Spotted Crake flicking their tails as they quietly foraged along the mud. Golden-headed Cisticolas buzzed and occasionally flew high, still calling. Red-browed Finch and Superb Fairy-wren were active among the bushes. Enjoying the antics of Black-winged Stilt and Purple Swamphen, we somewhat reluctantly left the wetland for the Balyang Sanctuary. The sanctuary has been extended recently and birds are using the created habitat. Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant were common, as were Silver Gull, Pacific Black Duck,



Powerful Owl seen during Wednesday Wanderings on 27 February. Photo by Marlene Lyell

Chestnut Teal and Grey Teal. Australian Pelican were also using the ponds beside the Barwon River. A Nankeen Night-Heron flew behind trees and disappeared. However, it later perched in good view and obligingly turned around revealing its breeding plumes. Along the river bank there were numerous Australasian Darter nests with nearly-grown young visible on branches. Birds species flying overhead included Wedge-tailed Eagle, Little Egret and Song Thrush. Again, we were enjoying the sights but had to depart for the next stop - Hospital Swamp. The water here was also higher than in 2007. Black Swan had well-grown young and numerous Australian Shelduck swam at a distance. Welcome Swallow and Tree Martin flew overhead, and Swamp Harrier patrolled the edges of the lake. Red-rumped Parrot, Striated Fieldwren and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater were present beside the road while reed warblers and wrens used the cover at lake's edge.

The next stop was Tait's Point, where we lunched while a Caspian Tern repeatedly flew past. Great Cormorant and Black Swan flew below while Yellow-rumped Thornbill and Willie Wagtail foraged in the paddock beside us. As at Hospital Swamp Lake, Common Greenshank foraged on the far bank, necessitating scopes for good views. Lunch consumed, we proceeded to Black Rocks. Here, Singing Honeyeater perched on the bushes and when we reached the beach there were several hundred Silver Gulls and only single individuals of Great Cormorant, Crested Tern, Australian White Ibis and White-faced Heron. Driving east a short distance, we were rewarded with two adult Hooded Plover. Disappointingly, we saw no young and it was feared that a predator had been active. Just before we returned to our cars, a large flock of Common Starling was observed with a Peregrine Falcon chasing it. The next stop was Barwon Heads where the highlight was an Eastern Curlew on a sand bar near Australian Pelican, Pacific Gull and Royal Spoonbill. Again, Common Greenshank was across the estuary. Our last stop was Lake Lorne at Drysdale where Freckled Duck, Blue-billed Duck and Australian Shoveler were observed and Black-fronted Dotterel also joined the list. None of the numerous birds seemed at all

Outing Reports Cont'd

put out by the arrival of the tourist train at the station beside the lake. By now it was late, and we called a bird count of 84 species accompanied by an enthusiastic vote of thanks to Fred for his inspiring leadership.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

March 3

Reef Island / Coronet Bay

The drive down the South Gippsland Freeway was made interesting by the groups of motorcyclists returning from the races held at Phillip Island the previous day. Bill Ramsay was our leader and the weather was dry, sunny and calm. Ultimately, we were 26 in number as we walked the shoreline of Coronet Bay. Masked Lapwing called in noisy agitation at the start of the walk. Black Swan with well-grown young swam near while Australian White Ibis and Straw-necked Ibis flew overhead. A mysterious brown bird flew among the salt bush amid lots of speculation. The final decision was a Eurasian Skylark, based upon its flight, colouring and call. The Striated Fieldwren was regrettably only seen by a few.

The spit was close but scopes were still needed. There were so many scopes that discussion ensued on the correct term for a collection of scopes. Whatever the word, we were very grateful for the generosity of the scope owners to us binocular-only watchers. An Eastern Curlew kept its head tucked away from us but finally moved and allowed definite identification while a Common Greenshank remained so far away that only scopes gave a clear view. A quartet of Double-banded Plover was a highlight at this stage as some of us had not seen this species before. They were obligingly close with Red-necked Stint located nearby to give size contrast. The spit was well populated with Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Silver Gull, Pacific Gull, Crested Tern, White-faced Heron and Australian Pied Oystercatcher. As we crossed to and from the island, there were Sharp-tailed Sandpipers foraging in one particular patch of mud. Ruddy Turnstone skulked among the rocks or flew along the beach. Curlew Sandpiper foraged close to us, allowing us to study their colouring and the shape of their down-turned bill. Two Caspian Tern stood to our right, one adult and one immature. The latter was begging loudly, without any response except an opened bill from the adult. Taking our cue from this gesture, we settled to lunch among the shrubs and the high tide mark.

Once lunch was eaten, scouts went out and the word came back: 'Grey-tailed Tattler among the rocks'. Scopes yielded a good view, but the bird could be located with the naked eye and was close enough for viewing with binoculars. Once everyone had viewed the bird, the majority of the group made their way carefully around the rocky coast of the island, hoping for plover. Success resulted - but even the minority who stayed behind were

not disappointed as a mixed flock of turnstones and Pacific Golden Plover were flushed back them and the birds stopped in clear view. At the end of the walk, the bird list totalled 42 species and at least 8 people had ticked a 'lifer'. We thanked Bill for his leadership which had given us such a pleasurable and productive day.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings



Red-necked Stint seen on Reef Island outing.
Photo by Damian Kelly.

Autumn Coach Tours – Book Now!

Join us on a coach tour this autumn!

Werribee Plains Area

Saturday 19 April 2008

Leader: David Torr
Cost: \$45.00 BOCA members
\$50.00 non-members

Attendance on a Coach Tour is by prepaid reservation only. Please either:

- Post fare to BOCA at the following address:
BOCA National Office
PO Box 185
Nunawading VIC 3131
- Ring Jenny on 03 9877 5342 for credit card bookings

Late cancellations can be phoned into the BOCA office, but for a refund please confirm in writing. A cancellation fee will be charged.

Please dress appropriately for the weather and wear sensible footwear. Don't forget your binoculars, hat, drinks and lunch. Extra baggage can be left safely on the bus when out walking. Tours leave from outside Hamer Hall, St Kilda Road, Melbourne (Melway 2F G7) at 8.00 am sharp, returning at approximately 6.30 pm.

Contact MELBOCA

Mailing address:

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.melboca.org.au

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 23 April 2008 - Pound Bend, Warrandyte State Park. (Melway 23 A11) 9.45 am. Park near toilets. A mainly flat, circular walk of approx 3 km. White-winged Choughs & Koalas often seen here. Join us for BYO lunch after the walk.

Wednesday 28th May 2008 - Norman's Reserve, Bradleys Lane, North Warrandyte. Mel 23 B12. 9.45 am. Please park neatly, small area. This will be a mostly flat walk downstream and return, approx 3 km total. Sturdy shoes / boots advisable. King Parrots a possibility. BYO chairs & lunch.

Beginners Outings

Saturday 19 April – Braeside Park, Braeside. (Melway 93 F2) 1.30pm. Meet in carpark off Governor Rd.

Saturday 17 May – Jumping Creek Reserve, Warrandyte State Park. (Melway 24 A11). 1.30pm. Meet in main carpark.

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

Weekdays Outing

Mon 7 April – Warrangine Creek, Bittern. (Melway 164 G2) 10 am.

Wed 7 May – Heritage Wetlands, Wonga Park. (Melway 24 K10) 10am.

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

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

Sunday 4 May. Gates open at 10 am. Walk begins at 10.30am

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

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

Volunteers Needed!

- The BOCA Library needs volunteers to preside over the library one day a month (Mon – Fri) between the hours of 10.00am and 3.00pm. Light duties, pleasant surroundings, no experience necessary. Contact Trish in the National Office (Tel: 9877 5342).
- The BOCA Blue Wren Shop needs volunteers, particularly on Saturday morning. Light duties, pleasant surroundings, we will show you what to do. Contact Trish in the National Office (Tel: 9877 5342).

Help Needed!

The Wildlife Ecology and Urban Ecology Group at Monash University is conducting behavioural research into the adaptive significance of communal roosting in the **Common Myna**. Results from the study may help in the management of the species. We would be very grateful to learn, from MELBOCA members the location of active communal roosts anywhere in suburban Melbourne.

Contact: Juni Hoel (Tel: 0419 371 382 or Email: Juni.Hoel@sci.monash.edu.au



MELBOCA is the Melbourne Branch of Bird Observation & Conservation Australia