



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 74
Summer 2010

Warrandyte to Westgate: A Summary of Yarra Walks

February, and the year started well with 27 birders enjoying a delightfully warm sunny walk through Chelsworth Park and Wilson Reserve. Forty-six species were seen with a pair of Tawny Frogmouth topping the list for many observers. An excellent view of two Brush-tailed Possum added to the interest.

The list was smaller in March at Willsmere Billabong in Kew when only 28 species were observed. The outing was of interest to many who learned that, between the billabong and Royal Guide Dogs in Kew, the river was in fact re-routed and straightened to accommodate a straight stretch of the Eastern Freeway. On this walk, sadly, we saw no small birds at all — no thornbills, wrens, robins or fantails.

In April, the walk from Fairfield boathouse, across the pipe bridge and uphill towards Yarra Boulevard gave us great views over Yarra Park. In the distance, city skyscrapers proved very photogenic. We proceeded upstream towards Chandler Highway bridge and returned downstream alongside the river. Thirty-one species were seen, the highlight being a female Rose Robin, duly photographed by Judith. Of interest was the fact that, four years previously in the same spot, we had also seen a Rose Robin, an immature male. Who would have thought to see a Rose Robin so close to the city!

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Immature Golden Whistler at Studley Park Boathouse. Photo, Rodger Scott

MELBOCA Branch Meetings: Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 23 November 2010 8:00pm

Bruce and Sue Tardif: "What Role Can Friends Groups Play in the Conservation of Threatened Species"

Bruce and Sue have shared a role as co-ordinators of the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater for several years. We look forward to hearing more of the work undertaken to help this iconic species.

Tuesday 22 February 2011 8.00pm

Chris Lester: "Don't just go to Lima Zoo"

We look forward to Chris's humour as much as his photographs as he takes us with him on his tour of Peru.

MELBOCA branch meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except December) in the Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Ave, Balwyn, not far from the library (Melway 46 E8). The meeting begins at 8:00pm and features a guest speaker and a Member's Topic segment. Entry is by a donation of \$4. Out-of-town members and visitors are always welcome!

Tuesday 25 January 2011 8.00pm

Chris Doughty: "BOCA tour of Egypt"

Chris is promising us wonderful photos from the tour he led to Egypt.

If you couldn't join him in Egypt, join him in armchair-comfort in Balwyn.

Tuesday 22 March 2011 8.00pm

Ken Osetroff "Nature of Japan in all seasons"

Ken regularly leads tours to Japan and he will show us the wide variety of natural surroundings as well as wonderful locations for bird watching there.

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Outing Report: Wednesday Wanderings (cont'd)

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On a calm, sunny morning in May at the Bellbird Picnic area, we walked upstream. The bird list was quite short — only 23 species, with sadly no small bushbirds being seen at all. The walk was made interesting by many thousands of chattering, squabbling, active Grey-headed Flying Fox camped on both sides of the river. Many birders living in nearby suburbs commented that they often observe the flying foxes overhead as they head out each night foraging in gardens, orchards and reserves in the Yarra valley.

The June walk on a cold, overcast morning commenced at the A.E. Corben Oval in Yarra Bend Park. Thirty-three species were enjoyed during this longish walk downstream towards Dights Falls. Again, Tawny Frogmouth topped the list



Wednesday Wanderers on their September walk. Photo, Geoff Browne

of interesting sightings. Five White Geese or "dinner ducks" were noted close to the boathouse. Sadly, once more, no small birds were seen on this walk — no thornbills, wrens, robins or scrubwrens. We did see two Brush-tailed Possum, one alive but very sleepy and one quite dead under a tree. Did it succumb to the previous very cold night?

Thirty species were observed during the July walk from the Studley Park Boathouse around Galatea Point. Conditions were overcast and cool for this winter walk downstream alongside the Yarra. Rodger captured a nice photo of an immature Golden Whistler during the morning. We remarked on the fact that Currawong — sometimes Pied, sometimes Grey — had been seen on most previous walks during 2010. Was this the reason for the dearth of small bushbirds, or was the drought over the previous 10 years to blame? Perhaps the prolonged dry spell causing the demise of shrubs and plants has resulted in fewer insects, flies etc, the mainstay of wrens, thornbills, fantails? It had been a very long time since we'd seen an Eastern Yellow Robin alongside the Yarra.

The August walk was held on a bitterly cold, windy morning. Icy remains of the previous night's hailstorm were evident in drifts alongside the path. Nevertheless, 14 hardy souls braved the elements for the walk from Dights Falls, upstream along the east bank of the Merri Creek, to Heidelberg Road and back alongside the west bank. Again, a Tawny Frogmouth headed the list of only 26 species. On this walk we were pleased to find a few Superb Fairy-wren, some Welcome Swallow and a few Magpie-lark but saddened at the number of introduced species — blackbirds, starlings and Common Myna.

On 22 September, the Wednesday Wanderers commenced in the Sir Arthur Rylah Reserve, off Walmer Street, Kew. We met a small group enthusiastically working to restore the riverside bushland near the footbridge. Jocelyn explained that the Friends of Walmer Street Bushland Inc. meets each Wednesday morning, working from 10 to 12; we were shown what they have accomplished thus far. We then continued upstream along a rather narrow, rough track until we came eventually to the Collins pedestrian bridge and F.A. Andrews Reserve. Sadly there was no glimpse of the Azure Kingfisher seen four years previously.

On Wednesday 24 November, we will meet at 9:45am at Como Landing (Mel 2M, C3) for a 10:00am ferry crossing to Herring Island to undertake a bird survey for Parks Victoria. Return ferry 2:00pm. Please carry lunch

There will be **no** Wednesday Wanderings in December and January, but I look forward to seeing you all again at 10:00am on 23 February 2011. We meet at Gate D of the Botanic Gardens, South Yarra (Mel 2L C2) for a walk through the gardens followed by a longish walk downstream alongside the Yarra and into the city. Please carry lunch for a picnic on one of the lawns.

The Wednesday Wanderings — Warrandyte to Westgate, consisting of 34 morning walks — commenced in June 2004. The aim was to explore the many parks, reserves and private Parks Victoria properties which lie alongside the Yarra, working steadily downstream from Jumping Creek in Warrandyte, to the mouth of the Yarra downstream from the city. The walks have been carefully documented and a comprehensive list of birds observed in the Yarra Valley during the seven years is kept by MELBOCA.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the last seven years spent observing the birds of the Yarra Valley and meeting so many lovely MELBOCA members who have contributed so much to each outing. However, I am no longer able to undertake the drive up from Rosebud West each month so, sadly, May 2011 will see the end of this second series of Wednesday Wanderings.

MELBOCA will be pleased to hear from anyone who is willing to undertake coordinating a possible third series. All the groundwork has been done; all the information is on file. Enquiries should be directed to MELBOCA President Graeme Hosken or to me Celia M. Browne email: info@melboca.org.au

Celia M. Browne

Past Meeting Reports

July 27 2010

John Young opened the meeting, welcoming everyone, especially new members. **Janet Hand** took the mike for the member's topic and spoke on her birding experiences near the Murray.

At Wentworth, where Sturt's tree from 1830 is still standing, she stayed at Willow Bend Caravan Park. The explorer Sturt diplomatically re-named the Murray from its original "Hume River". Sturt's expedition reached the Murray mouth where a Silver Gull indicated the sea. Janet only recorded 15 birds in 10 days in drought conditions at Tiboburra, though Sturt recorded good water. Janet found the banks of the river better for birding with several species nesting in varying degrees of safety. Janet recommended consideration of Wentworth as a substitute for a Mildura stopover when travelling north.

John announced the coming outings while the computer was readied for the main talk. **Professor Rachel Webster**, head of the astrophysics group at the school of Physics, University of Melbourne, spoke on *Climate Change: Recent Developments in the Science and Technology*. Over the past decade, she has become steadily more concerned as data accumulated.

Melbourne University offers a multidisciplinary subject on climate change, covering current data and developing technologies. It had 400 undergraduate students in 2010.

Venus, Earth and Mars were all, at different times, covered with CO₂, but complex life evolved only on Earth and modified our atmosphere. Living cells split CO₂ to oxygen and cellular carbon. Some carbon was sequestered as limestone and coal. The greenhouse effect, where gases including water, CO₂ and methane absorb heat, raises Earth's temperature 20-25° and supports life. Burning fossil fuels uses O₂ and generates CO₂ which raises the temperature. Other variations in temperature are due to orbital variations, solar output and volcanoes but anthropogenic CO₂ increase might create a "tipping point" which may have given Venus its dense, hot, acidic atmosphere via a runaway greenhouse effect.

Temperature variation has profoundly affected human history. Archaeological studies show our species was able to leave Africa via land bridges to Saudi Arabia 60,000-70,000 years ago during low temperatures and low sea level, when water was held in ice cover. The last warm 10,000 years, the Holocene, covers all human history. The colonisation of Australia can be regarded as a result of the "Little Ice Age" in Europe. Crops failed, people starved and convicted thieves were transported across the globe.

Climate models failed to predict the extent of Arctic sea ice melting. Sea ice will not raise sea level but the ice sheets of Antarctica and Greenland, if completely melted, would raise the sea level 70-80m. They seem stable, as yet. Australia, already a hot, dry continent, is likely to become drier, seriously affecting all major population centres.

Currently, Perth experiences one third normal rainfall, with low dam inflows, and is pumping non-renewable artesian water. CSIRO collects atmosphere samples at Cape Grim, Tasmania. Carbon dioxide is rising and oxygen is declining (slightly) as we burn more fossil fuels. Rising temperatures will affect alpine, coastal, rainforest and marginal agricultural ecological systems. Crops, diseases, insects and birds will then respond. Orchid specialists observe that rising temperatures already seem to be affecting orchid-pollinating insects. The increase in acidity of oceans with carbon dioxide increase may affect all carbonate-forming organisms, e.g. corals and shells.

Per capita, Australia is one of the worst polluters in the world as we rely on brown coal to produce much of our electricity. This could be reversed if we shut down Hazelwood and converted to other methods of power generation. Concentrating solar power is an expensive but advanced technology which is continuing to develop. It could be used to generate Japan's power needs from a small area of inland Australia, shipping the energy as hydrogen and oxygen formed by splitting water. Undergraduates have costed this at 3% GDP with zero emissions. Storage methods using steam or molten salt to power turbines are already in use and are starting to answer the argument that solar is only effective when the sun shines.

Geothermal energy is used in Europe, where, after the initial expense of installing a heat pump, cooling or heating is free. Electricity generation is possible with deeper drilling. At Birdsville, radioactive rocks are relatively close to the surface and at least one-third of required electricity (10MW) is generated geothermally. However, Victoria requires 10GW, which would mean experimentally drilling 4km to 200° rocks. Pumped fluids need insulation and brown coal appears ideal. The estimated cost is at least \$10 million, but the advantages are minimum visibility, a much faster response to a changing load requirement, at least 5000 years' supply and zero carbon emissions. The current system must wastefully overproduce to cope with peak requirements. Geothermal technology can be local, e.g. Portland and Bendigo could have generators.

Wind generation supplies measurable energy, especially in Denmark. However, while turbine cost is decreasing and production is increasing, storage remains a problem. Australia has sunlight and geothermal resources. A commitment to change is needed.

Rachel answered many questions, demonstrating the interest her topic raised. **Colin Barraclough** then thanked her.

Barbara Longmuir advertised items from the gift shop including books and guides. **Graeme Hosken** took interesting sightings and reported on outing sightings and the wetland surveys. John Young then closed the meeting and we chatted over a cuppa and biscuit.

Diane Tweeddale

Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

24 August 2010

Sonja Ross welcomed everyone and introduced the guest speaker, **Dr Paul Sinclair**. Paul is the Australian Conservation Foundation's Healthy Ecosystems Program Manager, co-ordinating work on rivers, oceans, forests and natural resources management issues. His talk was titled *Remaking connections between people and nature*.

Connections between man and nature have been broken and need mending. Raised on the Murray, Paul and his family love the area. He often works in South Australia in the fields of sustainable use and of restoration of rivers, and he spends time with a professional Coorong fisherman, Henry Jones, whose family has been there for five generations. Reports about the health of the Coorong are very disturbing — waterbird numbers down and the environment seriously degraded.

After a visit to the Coorong, Paul likes to read his children a story from childhood — “*One Fine Day*” — on remaking broken connections. In the story, a fox upends a pail of milk and has his tail cut off by the farmer's wife as punishment. Should he refill the pail, she will return his tail. But the cow wants something in return — pasture. And the field wants water. And so it goes on. The fox has set in motion a series of unintended consequences that he can't reverse. He is caught in a downward spiral with no hopeful outcome. Eventually he encounters a miller who has the generosity of spirit to give the fox something for nothing, and that activates a chain of reconnections and his tail is eventually re-attached. All the connections are remade by the generous act of one person. At the end of the story, Paul always thinks ... we can do this.

We are breaking connections with the life-support systems that provide us with water, regulate the temperature, atmosphere and health of the soil. We are not allowing regeneration. With the Murray system, we have broken all the connections, with unexpected consequences for all.

In 1946, the Murray River commission started damming and storing water. Victoria started irrigating patchwork farms allocated to returned servicemen. The Hume Reservoir and weirs were constructed. The river was regulated so that water could be provided in the quantity and quality required. But there was no flood plain. Rivers need floods to put nutrients back into the soil — deep highs and deep lows. A river without this will die. Black Box trees, whose bark was used by the local Aborigines, need to drink every ten to twelve years. Lose these trees and you lose natural and cultural heritage. Many of the flood plains and wetlands are already dying. Latest research shows 90% of the floodplain wetlands have disappeared — some waterbird populations have been reduced by 80% and the health of 86% of the Murray valleys rated poor or very poor.

G.P.Marsh, author of *Man and Nature*, wrote: “Sight is a faculty, seeing is an art.” That is our challenge: to see the world in connection with nature. One of Paul's mentors was Dudley Foweraker, who worked in a clothing shop in Renmark. Dud drew different maps showing former loca-

tions of countless plants, reptiles and birds in what are now huge salt plains. He also knew all the Black Box trees in the area, mentioning a huge Black Box in a local car park. Paul couldn't recall it. But there it was — an enormous Black Box, isolated from the river system. Dud had noticed it and seen its value. When people looked at a tree, he felt that they only saw the value of the timber, not the value of the tree to the soil, wildlife, community and environment. His awareness of nature, articulated as well as any scientist, is a reminder that “seeing is an art”.

The Murray River Commission stated in 1946: “The real wealth of any country can be measured by its agricultural production”. Agricultural production is critical for our survival, but the only thing of value in our landscape? No. We need to think about important things that don't have a dollar value. On present estimates, land degradation is costing Australia \$4.5 billion a year.

Signs are that people are changing the way they value the environment. The Gunbower Forest has received environmental water. Good intentions must be acted on, but the past is always with us. Carbon pollution threatens to be our most lasting legacy. Climate change will harm delivery of water. These are the following predictions on long-term floods in the Barmah Forest

47 in 100 years under natural conditions
26 in 100 years in current conditions
7 in 100 years under climate change.

Hope for the rivers lies with the people. Environmental groups mistakenly believe everyone must change completely. Weirs and dams, which started the degradation, were an attempt to create a better world. Everyone aspires to prosper in the world. Here the past is the hope for the future. Mechanical persistence and resources need to be applied differently. In 1947, George Farwell said: “Man cannot overturn the balance of nature without paying the costs of large-scale readjustments. If he tackles it with the same energy as went into irrigation, the equilibrium can be restored.” Can the Federal Government do this in the new Murray-Darling Basin plan? We need to take action now.

The ACF launched a campaign called *Just Add Water*, \$15 buys 140,000 litres of water. People were encouraged to donate so that the ACF could buy water for the Hattah Kulkyn National Park, and deliver a message to government that water should be delivered to all wetlands. \$16 million was raised, but the value was far beyond that. Everyone should be encouraged to pressure politicians.

Coorong fisherman Henry Jones had his own act of generosity, cooking delicious Coorong mullet for obdurate irrigators at a Murray conference, keeping open connections and communications.

Janet Hand thanked Paul for his excellent talk. She had been to Hattah-Kulkyn National Park and had witnessed the water in the wetlands herself

John Barkla followed with a talk on the BOCA/BA merger in place of a Member's Topic.

Sunny Fernie

Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

28 September 2010

The MC for the evening was **Janet Hand**. Janet invited **Bill Ramsay** to give the Member's Choice segment, and, being such an avid traveller and keen recorder, Bill is rarely short of a topic. This night, he spoke on *RSPB Minsmere*, which is the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reserve at Minsmere on the coast of Suffolk, UK, an approximately 2.5 hour drive from London. Minsmere is a flagship reserve beloved by bird watchers, though it is only one of over 100 RSPB reserves in Britain. The flat land holds reed beds, shingle beach bordering the North Sea, open water 'scrapes' and woodland. The public can meander along extensive paths and enjoy the comfort of two-story hides. Bill pointed out that the reserve is a staging point for migrating birds, so sightings vary with the seasons and there is always an element of surprise. Bill showed excellent photographs of birds and habitat, including ducks, gulls, waders, lapwing, snipe, bittern, raptors and warblers, closing very appropriately with a pub.

Janet then invited **Dr Grainne Maguire** to give her talk, *The Challenge of Protecting Beach-nesting Birds*. Grainne is manager of the Beach-nesting Birds Project being conducted by Birds Australia. The bird species selected for this study was the Hooded Plover, since this bird remains on the ocean beach year-round, breeds on the beach, and is easily recognised by a white collar which is present even in juveniles. After breeding, adult birds remain in breeding pairs, while juveniles can disperse up to 300km. Their invertebrate diet consists of sand-hoppers, worms and snails. They select a stretch of beach with bare sand in order to see approaching danger, and with sand dunes behind for cover. Midden sites are favoured and rocks are good for hiding. The nest is a shallow scrape in the sand above high water mark, and, as such, is incredibly vulnerable to danger from high winds, king tides, predators and human carelessness. Hooded Plover eggs are speckled white and difficult to spot, though watching the birds from a distance can reveal the nest. Predators include ravens, magpies, kestrels and gulls, foxes, dogs, rats and cats, and, as if that is not enough, the breeding cycle can be interrupted by horses, vehicles and particularly humans. Dog owners love to let their dogs run free on beaches, and Hooded Plover are so wary of loose dogs that they will run to the water line for safety, and may leave the nest for long periods, thus breaking the incubation regimen. The same happens if people picnic on the beach too close to a nest. Chicks cannot fly for 5 weeks, but feed themselves as soon as they emerge from the shell. So they need to forage safely, preferably amongst seaweed. Despite their excellent camouflage only one in six survive to fledging.

Hooded Plover occupy the southern coastline from NSW to WA, including the shores of Tasmania. Numbers are down to 50 birds in NSW, 400-500 birds in Vic, 600-800 birds in SA, and 1000-1500 birds in Tas. Counting suggests 4000-5000 birds in WA, but this may be a distinct subspecies. The eastern population is in trouble.

The aim of Grainne's project is to promote the co-existence of recreationists and beach-dwelling birds. Top-

ics for study include: pest plants and animals, erosion, pollution, development and population growth, beach access, recreation use and climate change. With Hooded Plover as their flagship species, they also anticipate benefits for other beach-dwelling birds in trouble, such as Beach Stone-curlew, Pied and Sooty Oystercatcher and Red-capped Plover. They are working with the public, volunteers and land managers.

Biennial counts for Hooded Plover have been conducted since 1980, and these have shown that the coasts of far western Victoria, Mornington Peninsular, and the Bass Coast are breeding hot spots. The figures also reveal poor breeding success. If a breeding pair loses their nest, eggs or chicks, they will breed again nearby, up to 7 times in a season. Unfortunately, they never flee to a safer stretch of beach, once they have established their territory. It is therefore crucial to have a team of active monitors to watch nests. Grainne's team has 150 trained monitors, together, they raise public awareness, visit schools, and report to local councils. Already, results have shown that management of nest sites improves fledging success. Temporary measures include fencing, signs and shelters for chicks. Fencing need only be star pickets and plastic tape; this is enough to deter most of the public. Noticeboards provide information about Hooded Plover, the presence of a nest or nests on the beach, hence fencing, and progress reports on the chicks, giving the public a sense of ownership and engendering responsible behaviour. To provide a safe haven for chicks, simple wooden peaked shelters have been placed near nests; and Grainne's photographs showed that both adults and young have taken to them for shade and safety.

The project team has developed a practical guide for park and council rangers on the management of beach-nesting birds. This includes information on the breeding period for Hooded Plover, which can be the whole of the summer period from August to March; and also the need to encourage beach users to watch out for signs indicating the presence of nesting birds. Dog owners must keep their dogs on a leash, and, ideally, should walk at the waters edge, well clear of the upper beach and in clear view of nesting birds.

Grainne finished with an acknowledgement of her volunteers who give valuable help in several ways — watching a breeding pair, chatting to beach users, and attending the biennial count.

Ruth Ackie gave Grainne our thanks for an interesting presentation, with superb complementary photographs. A very worthwhile project.

Janet resumed with many announcements. A sombre note was struck with the news that someone has been tampering with water gates at the Western Treatment Plant, Werribee, in order, possibly, to promote more habitat ideal for birds. This kind of behaviour may be detrimental to all who enjoy going there and is very irresponsible.

The Birding Shop on Riversdale Road is closing its doors, and

Outing Report: Long Forest Reserve and Merrimu Reservoir

27 September 2010

Seventeen intrepid souls gathered under lowering grey skies at the entrance to the Long Point Track. **Graeme Hosken** led us as Yellow Thornbill flitted among the mallee and Crimson Rosella flew overhead. The sandy, stony area was full of low wattles in magnificent flower after the rains and, initially, birds were heard rather than seen. The mournful calls of White-winged Chough culminated in a sighting of three birds flying over a mound of lichen-covered rock but the Fan-tailed Cuckoo continued to be elusive. Recent echidna scratches at numbers of ant nests were the only evidence of their presence. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo screeched overhead while Eastern Yellow Robin called downhill and then showed itself on a tree trunk.

Well spotted was a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo calling from a dead branch. Down into the calmer creek gully after the windy height yielded Superb Fairy-wren sightings for some of us. It was wonderful to see and hear water flowing in the creek and to hear frogs calling again. The creek was flowing over the gully track so a steep scramble up had us once more on a windy ridge where hats were firmly secured. It was worth it when many sighted a bird which was agreed, after debate, to be a male Pink Robin. There were also good brief views of an immature Golden

Whistler while stragglers saw Yellow-tufted and White-naped Honeyeater. Heading towards Steep Track, stragglers found a female Mistletoebird even though there were no mistletoe fruit visible. Steep Track lived up to its name but the siren call of "lunch" had us enthused as we walked, though pausing to admire a flowering fringe lily by the track.

Before lunch we searched for a Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest but only found a broken tree as rain intensified. Then to the reservoir picnic area for a well rugged up lunch while many Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flew past. Welcome Swallow, House Sparrow and Australian Magpie also dominated but six Australian Pelican and three Black Swan were also seen. A couple of Masked Lapwing flew past a Magpie-lark and two distant Wedge-tailed Eagle on the ground seemed to be feeding. Difficult to locate were the White-fronted Chat as the rain returned and drove us back into shelter. Here we decided to do the bird call and found we had 44 species when a Galah flew in to make it 45. We thanked Graeme for his preparation and leadership which had introduced this southern mallee area to many of us and given us such an interesting day's birding.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Outing Report: Anglesea Area

19-20 October 2010

The past weekend had been wet but 12 of us met in the car park under blue skies. **Leonie Robbins** led us and the afternoon bird count started immediately with Pacific and Silver Gull, Caspian and Crested Tern and Great Cormorant on the Anglesea River. Welcome Swallow flew past and Little Raven and Red Wattlebird made their first appearances. House Sparrow probably depended on the local bakery for much of their food. A Singing Honeyeater made a brief appearance, as did a Nankeen Kestrel. We then walked toward the river mouth, adding Masked Lapwing, Pacific Black Duck and Little Black Cormorant. A puzzle at the river mouth was the numerous dead fish lying in the channels with only two Silver Gulls investigating them. Were they by-catch or rejects? Convoy driving took us to the flora reserve beyond the end of Noble Street where the birds were few but the wildflowers many. Orchids were photographed and a flower guide was helpful. Love creeper and peas, ti tree and rice flowers, goodenias and stackhousia were all present. Driving on, down Distillery Creek Road, we stopped for the flowering grasses. The flower-covered spikes were visited by several aggressive Red Wattlebird.

Down near the dam, a bird-rich patch had Australian Wood Duck and Grey and Chestnut Teal (the latter with young) on the water but most action was in the bush. A pair of Sacred Kingfisher called while Dusky Woodswallow and Brown Thornbill flew near. A highlight was a Blue-winged Parrot perched. A "lifer" for some, but we hoped

for better viewing conditions. New Holland Honeyeaters were numerous and Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo and Grey Shrike-thrush were vocal. Superb Fairy-wren were more heard than seen as they stayed out of the sight of predatory Pied Currawong. A Wedge-tailed Eagle overhead caused alarm calls but an Eastern Yellow Robin, carrying nesting material, was probably too small to be worried by such a large raptor. A highlight for many were Varied Sittella, orange-winged as they flew.

At the picnic area, the nature walk added the calls of Rufous Whistler, Olive-backed Oriole and Satin Flycatcher, and glimpses of White-naped and Yellow-faced Honeyeater. At the end of the afternoon, at Coogarah Park, pobblebonk frogs called and Spotted Dove made an unwelcome appearance. A week earlier, a nesting Black-fronted Dotterel had been observed but when we checked that area the recent heavy rains had raised the water level above the nest area. It seemed the bird had probably had a nesting failure. At our picnic tea we watched both a Spotted and a Striated Pardalote forage in a nearby tree and added Forest Raven to the day's list of 71 species.

Next morning, we assembled as heard but unseen Silver-eyes flew high overhead. Near Coalmine Road viewing area, in front of the cars, was a Blue-winged Parrot in clear view on the sunny ground. Beautiful views for all, especially for those who'd hoped for a better sighting than yesterday. We were admiring flowers again when at least

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Education Report: From Eltham to Leeton

September was a busy month for Education at MELBOCA. We started with an Information Display at the Australian Plant Expo at Eltham on September 11 and 12. This event was organised by the Yarra Yarra Group of the Australian Plant Society. Jean Cuthbert assisted my husband, Ron, and I to set up on the Friday afternoon. Thanks Jean and Ron. BOCA supplied brochures, magazines and posters to give away and we had bird colouring sheets for the children who attended. One large display board was promoting BOCA and the other one promoting Bird Week. The new venue was a winner with over 1100 people passing through the doors. We were kept busy all weekend.

This year, instead of playing bird call CDs, we had a PowerPoint called 'Birds of Eltham' running all weekend on my laptop. It showed each bird's name with its photograph while playing the relevant calls. I must thank Maarten Grabandt for his expertise in putting together this presentation for us to use. My thanks to Trina and John Young, Sylvia McCallum (BOCA Office), Maarten Grabandt, Daphne Hards and Duncan Turnbull who joined me on a roster of 'Information Sharers' over the weekend.

Later that week, BOCA headed to Leeton for the Australian Bird Fair and BOCA Forum. Friday is always Schools Day, with local schools coming in for a Round Robin of educational activities based on birds and the environment. BOCA ran three sessions about Owls to fit in with the Birds of Prey theme this year. Annette Cook (BOCA Education co-ordinator) gave our groups a PowerPoint presentation before the children were divided into two groups. One made owl kites while the other dissected owl pellets

to see what was in their 'fur balls'. The groups swapped over half way through the session so everyone could experience the two activities. Annette was assisted by Jenny Lau (BOCA Conservation), Jenny's son Tim, Arthur Carew and myself. The same people assisted Don Saunders (BOCA Conservation) in the BOCA tent on the Saturday and Sunday morning at the Bird Fair. We took it in turns to attend some of the very interesting lectures that ran at the Bird Fair. Thanks Tim and Arthur for your assistance.

Bill Ramsay attended the BOCA Forum that followed the Bird Fair as MELBOCA's delegate and I attended as an observer. We both enjoyed the experience especially when our teams came first and second in the Bird Quiz night run by Tania Ireton (BAYBOCA).

On Monday 27 September, I gave a presentation called 'Attracting Birds to Your Garden' at the Kew Garden Club. This was the third Garden Club this year and I have another booked for 2011.

On Sunday 10 October, Jenny Frohlich led a small group from the Humanist Society of Victoria on a 90 minute walk around Blackburn Lake and showed them the various species that can be seen there. Thirty species were seen including a Little Black Cormorant (not common at this location) and a Nankeen Night-Heron. Thank you Jenny for leading the walk and Barbara Longmuir, who was on hand, in case a larger group attended.

*Janet Hand
MELBOCA Education Officer*

Outing Report: One-Eye Forest via Heathcote

19 July 2010

Even before we started walking, the forest showed its merit when the call of "Little Eagle" had us looking up from the car park. Sure enough, list one. Fourteen of us had gathered in Heathcote, sampling the delights of the bakery and checking out the birds on the recreation oval before following our leader, **Marlene Lyell**, in convoy to the forest.

Fuscous Honeyeater were numerous while Red Wattlebird and Noisy Friarbird were ... noisy. Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Musk Lorikeet also kept us busy trying to obtain a clear view as they dashed amongst the foliage. Striated Pardalote and White-naped Honeyeater were occasionally seen, but a Black-chinned Honeyeater was difficult.

Starting our walk and revelling in the cold, calm sunshine, movement in the upper foliage was noted. It took time but finally we'd all seen a couple of Swift Parrot. Other sightings included Eastern and Crimson Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, while a Wedge-tailed Eagle soared past overhead, seemingly ignored by

a flock of Dusky Woodswallow chasing insects beneath a cloud. A stand of "chinaman's bush" — low growth beneath the power line easement — yielded Flame Robin and Superb Fairy-wren but Speckled Warbler were too elusive. Few sightings were at ground level and some of us were beginning to suffer from "bird watcher's neck" as we peered upward. Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo were both heard but unseen while Purple-crowned Lorikeet were "lifers" for some of us. It was a measure of the area's richness that the return to the cars for lunch was one of the slowest, as even hungry bird-watchers slowed and raised their bins with repeated enthusiasm. A highlight here included an elusive Crested Shrike-tit. After lunch, below even more Dusky Woodswallow soaring after insects, with Pied Currawong and several Noisy Friarbird calling, we walked along the former rail line where Brown Treecreeper foraged. Back to the cars to the calls of Little Corella and we added up a bird list of 51 species altogether. Thank you Marlene for a well-planned and successful walk.

*Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

Interesting Sightings

Field Note Reports – Entered 10 October 2010

The following MELBOCA Field Note Reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meeting held at Balwyn in July, August and September, 2010, and email and web reports to MELBOCA. The report includes **White-plumed Honeyeater**, **Eastern Spinebill**, **Bell** and **Noisy Miner** sightings within 40km of 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? We would also like to know if **Eastern Spinebill** visit your garden.

Bell Miner Sightings

The Department of Sustainability and Environment has received reports that **Bell Miner** numbers are reducing or have vacated areas they have occupied for many years. To assist DSE, MELBOCA is asking members to provide the following information:

1. Details of existing colonies (eg Date, Suburb, Melway reference and, if possible, how long the colony has occupied the area);
2. Details of colonies that have disappeared from their normal location. Details as above, Date, Suburb, etc.

Existing Bell Miner Colonies

All year	Merri Ck (CERES)	Brunswick East
All year	Gov't House, St Kilda Rd	Melbourne
Last few years	Old Joe's Creek Reserve	Boronia
All year	100 Acres	Park Orchards

Vacated Bell Miner Colonies

Warrandyte	Stony Creek	Not seen since 2008
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Information may be directed to MELBOCA by email: info@melboca.org.au.

Tawny Frogmouth Study

A request has been received from Marian Weaving, a student doing a PhD at Deakin University, who is investigating the ecology and behaviour of the Tawny Frogmouth. Specifically, how the Tawny Frogmouth is impacted and affected by varying levels of urbanisation.

The research includes species distribution, genetic fitness, reproductive behaviour, home range and calling behaviour. The study is contained within the eastern suburbs in a general square from Doncaster (NW), Kangaroo Ground (NE), Wantirna (SE) and Mt Waverley (SW).

If any MELBOCA members know of Tawny Frogmouth who live in the area stated, could they please contact Marian

White-plumed Honeyeater		
22 Jun 2010	Docklands	3008
24 Jul 2010	Royal Park	3052
?	Banyule Flats	3084
13 Aug 2010	Heatherton	3202
22 Aug 2010 (3)	Coburg North	3058
27 Sep 2010	Camberwell	3124
18 Sep 2010 (1)	Prahran R/Stn	3181
Most Days (4-6)	Elsternwick Park	3186
Eastern Spinebill		
?? Feb 2010	Croydon	3136
?? Mar 2010	Knoxfield	3189
?? Apr 2010	Ivanhoe	3079
?	Mont Albert	3127
27 Apr 2010	Blackburn	3130
?? May 2010	Eltham	3095
?	Doncaster	3108
?	Preston	3027
?? May 2010	Boronia	3155
23 May 2010	Blackburn	3120
24 May 2010	Surrey Hills	3127
?? Jun 2010	Blackburn	3130
?	Park Orchards	3114
?	Heathmont	3135
22 Jun 2010	Glen Waverley	3150
?? Jul 2010	Park Orchards	3114
27 Jul 2010	Canterbury	3126
28 Aug 2010 (1)	Oakleigh	3166
Noisy Miner		
Most days	St Helena	3089
?	Boronia	3108
?	Doncaster	3108
?	Thornbury	3071
?	Royal Park	3052
?	Templestowe	3106
?	Elsternwick Park	3186
13 Aug 2010	Heatherton	3202
20 Sep 2010 (1)	Peel St, Windsor	3181

either by email: mweaving@deakin.edu.au or by telephone : 0438 315 333.

If contacting by email, please include your phone number.

Thankyou for your assistance.

Graeme Hosken
President MELBOCA

Other Sightings

Date	Sighting	Street/Location	Suburb
17 Apr 2010	Grey Fantail (2)	Shane Cres	Croydon
20 Apr 2010	Flame Robin (1)	South Golf Links Rd	Narre Warren
?? Apr 2010	Grey Fantail (2)	Allister Ave	Knoxfield
01 Jun 2010	Scarlet Honeyeater (1)	Darebin Creek	Heidelberg West
09 Jun 2010	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (17)	Como Ave	Rye
11 Jun 2010	Gang Gang Cockatoo (6)	Bennett Ave	Mt Waverley
20 Jun 2010	Swift Parrot (2)	TH King Oval	Glen Iris
21 Jun 2010	Olive-backed Oriole (1)	Melbourne Zoo	Parkville
10 Jul 2010	European Goldfinch (6)	Rowland St	Mont Albert
12 July 2010	Yellow-tailed black-Cockatoo (30)	Laverton St	Williamstown
14 Jul 2010	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (9)		Hoppers Crossing
17 Jul 2010	Nankeen Kestrel (1)	Garden Rd	Clayton
19 Jul 2010	Gang-gang Cockatoo (3)	Valley Reserve	Mt Waverley
23 Jul 2010	Scarlet Honeyeater (2)	Blackburn Lake	Blackburn
24 Jul 2010	Brown Goshawk (1)	Cooloongatta Rd	Camberwell
24 Jul 2010	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (40)		Somerville
26 Jul 2010	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (12)	Newport Lakes	Newport
09 Aug 2010	Wedge-tailed Eagle (1)	Cnr Blackburn/ Andersons Ck Rds	Doncaster East
12 Aug 2010	Crimson Rosella (3)	Rear of BOCA NO	Nunawading
13 Aug 2010	Australian Reed Warbler (1)	Troups Creek	Hampton Park
	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (90+)	The Briars	Mt Martha
16 Aug 2010	Little Corella (9 – feeding in a Desert Oak)	Charles St	Hawthorn
	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (40+)		Footscray
19-20 Aug 2010	Crimson Rosella (20)	Dellas Ave	Templestowe
22 Aug 2010	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet (1)	Dellas Ave	Templestowe
01 Sep 2010	European Song Thrush (1)	Cranwell Ct	Mulgrave
02 Sep 2010	Brush Bronzewing (1)	100 Acres	Park Orchards
02 Sep 2010	Australian White Ibis (32)	Highfield Ave	Blackburn South
16 Sep 2010	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (4)	Thompson Ct	Mill Park
	Nankeen Night Heron (1 — free flying)	Melbourne Zoo	Parkville
18 Sep 2010	White-naped Honeyeater (1 — this bird died from the result of crashing into a window of a house adjoining the creek. Unusual to record this species in this location? Any comments?)	Back Creek	Burwood
27 Sep 2010	Scarlet Honeyeater (2)	Gresswell Lake	Bundoora

Notes Received

Babbler Survey – Benalla

A babbler survey was conducted north of Benalla on 14 July by Ray Thomas and his team. Ninety-six Grey-crowned Babblers were identified. A vast improvement on the 50 sighted in 2003. Plantings over the years have provided an additional habitat for this threatened species. Ray is elated at the result, not to mention seeing other species that have benefited from the revegetation program.

Banded Stilt – Australian Wader Study Group

Ken Gosbell of the Australian Wader Study Group reported in July of an exciting Banded Stilt breeding event at

Lake Torrens, South Australia. If you require further information, Ken's report may be found on the AWSG website at <http://www.awsg.org.au/news.php>. With the amount of water now in inland lakes, further exciting breeding results are yet to be discovered. What species will be next?

Friends of Royal Park

The Spring Bird Survey was conducted on 26 September 2010. Total number of species recorded was 29. Highlights included Australasian Grebe (6), Black-shouldered Kite (1), Little Grassbird (1) and White-plumed Honeyeater (12).

Interesting Sightings continues on page 11

Birding of the most modest kind

Most of my bird observing now seems to take place while walking my dog, or in the confines of my inner-city Richmond garden.

In one week in our garden, I observed a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo yelling noisily in the native frangipani, Rainbow Lorikeet in the Norfolk Island Pine and an Eastern Rosella also enjoying the native frangipani. The Norfolk Island Pine has also provided a wonderful stage for the Grey Butcherbird to show off his beautiful, fluting melody and is home to a varying number of ravens.

The usual residents are blackbirds, White-plumed Honeyeater taking insects from the pool surface, Spotted Dove – whose gentle insistent cooing reminds me of my childhood in Sydney, Little Wattlebird and the much larger Red Wattlebird often together in the *Eucalyptus caesia* or enjoying the salvias, House Sparrow and, of course, those unpleasant and unwanted visitors, Common Myna and Common Starling. There is the occasional Australian Magpie, Magpie-lark and even the odd Pied Currawong. Passing through on their travels, we also hear, and then see, small flocks of Silvereye and Brown Thornbill.

During our 17 years in Richmond we have had a few unusual visitors: a Crested Shrike-tit, a Nankeen Night-Heron and a Little Pied Cormorant that spent part of an afternoon on the trellis above the garage. Not long ago, a White-faced Heron landed briefly on the roof of the house next door while we were having lunch. We have watched, entranced, from our balcony as Peregrine Falcon parents teach their young offspring to fly from the 'battlements' of the warehouse two doors away. This week, a solitary Eastern Spinebill has been enjoying a large, long fuschia, pink salvia and the pretty japonica 'Apple Blossom'. We regularly hear and see a Tawny Frogmouth on our balcony or on the nearby wires. Throat pellets at the base of the jacaranda let us know when one has visited, even if we don't see it.

Varying-sized flocks of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo fly overhead. We know because their mewling calls arouse the interest of the four-footed guardian of the household. Cormorants, darters, Silver Gull, lorikeets, large flocks of ravens and magpies and the occasional Masked Lapwing are the usual flyover suspects, but we have also seen woodswallows and corellas.

A Saturday walk over the Yarra River, via the Collins Bridge from the Abbotsford side, usually provides Red-

rumped Parrot, Rainbow Lorikeet, Eastern Rosella and occasionally Musk Lorikeet, but one early morning, another dog walker and I observed at length a female Superb Parrot near the nesting boxes in the magnificent *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* that line the river bank. I have walked the same route many times but I have never seen it again. I suppose it was an escapee. Kookaburras love this stretch of river as do Australian Wood Duck (often watching from the safety of a dead tree), Dusky Moorhen and the odd Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, as well as several honeyeaters.

One morning, after a walk through the Barkly Gardens, we continued to McConchie Reserve and observed a Little Egret in full breeding plumage perched on the old walkway, plumes dancing in the gentle breeze. Australian Reed Warbler flitted from reed-bed to reed-bed, chiacking and pausing just long enough for us to enjoy their pale reflections. Pacific Black Duck and a Dusky Moorhen nosed along the edges of the reed-beds and on to the far side of the little waterway. Welcome Swallows twittered quietly. I have watched a family of Purple Swamphen here, the brown youngsters with their pencil thin legs taking instruction in foraging from their elegant, royally clad parents. This has been a site to observe at close quarters Nankeen Night-Heron, egrets, cormorants and darters as well as swans, coots and the odd preening Silver Gull. The White-plumed Honeyeater love the small *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* planted on the water's edge until they are chased off by wattlebirds or Noisy Miners. I recall Barry Dowling describing the lonely call of a grassbird at this location but I do not believe I would recognize it.

Another post-market Saturday walk along the Yarra starts from the Hawthorn Bridge area. There, we regularly see Tawny Frogmouth: once, a family of five. Not so often seen now are the Sacred Kingfisher, but regular sightings include Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, cormorants — sometimes a raft of 20 or so flying low over the river, the occasional darter, coots, Dusky Moorhen calling noisily, and Silver Gull. Currawongs call from the tall trees, magpies warble, Magpie-lark build their nests on branches overhanging the water, as do Willy Wagtail. There are foraging blackbirds (for years there was one with a partially white wing), Common Myna, Red Wattlebird, Spotted Dove, sometimes Crested Pigeon, Bell Miner, Welcome Swallow, Noisy Miner, Rainbow Lorikeet, Eastern Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot and the occasional

Article continues over page

Distraction for a birdwatcher

Last Monday, I went to a screening of the Australian tear-jerker *Matching Jack*. Some scenes are set on the Williamstown foreshore and I was pleasantly distracted when one of the banded Black Swans paddled into view in a couple of scenes. It wore a white neck band but no lettering was detectable, so I can't help the swan researcher. Sometimes you get more out of a movie than you expected.

Diane Tweeddale

Article continued from page 10

Galah. Further along the track, before Victoria Street, there are Brown Thornbill, White-browed Scrubwren, Eastern Spinebill and Spotted Pardalote to be found. Once, a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo rested on a wire fence, quite unperturbed by me or the dog.

Our weekday morning walks alternate between Barkly Gardens and Yarra Park, aka the MCG car park. At Yarra Park, I once found what I thought was a dead immature Red Wattlebird at the base of tree. After I sent it to BOCA for potential use as a skin, it was correctly identified by Howard Plowright, who left a wonderful message on my machine. "Robin," he said in his modulated, precise voice, "your immature wattlebird is a Stubble Quail in fine breeding plumage." I do not know what it was doing dead at the base of a eucalyptus outside the MCG.

Of those walks through Gosch's Paddock to the Botanical Gardens, our favourite birds are the cheeky Grey Fantail, which often accompany us, and the tiny Superb Fairy-wren which we never tire of appreciating. On our return from the Gardens along the river one day, the dog stopped at the base of a slender eucalypt sapling and I looked up to see a Barn Owl. I had a good look before it was swooped by an indignant Australian Magpie and I was able to observe it in flight for some time. This was in broad daylight with traffic nearby.

These are modest and incidental sightings but the pleasure is anything but modest and often I remind myself that I am so close to a large, modern metropolis, walking the dog (a bird dog in fact!) and virtually never with binoculars ... how lucky am I?

Robin Nettleton

Birding with Murphy

You are out birding and someone says : "What's that bird over there?" You ask: "Where?" Reply: "In the tree, on the branch with the leaves." After many more questions, you finally establish the correct area only to be told that it flew off and was only a ...!

Be careful of asking opinions about the identity of a bird, afterwards, you will probably be more confused than enlightened.

Someone says: "Wait, listen to that call." Of course, as everyone stops to listen, the bird refuses to call again.

If a bird is sitting on the fence, there will be a 'purist' who will say that it doesn't count as it isn't in the reserve.

Never take your binoculars off during lunch. You will probably miss the bird of the day.

On any given day, have at least three options of clothing for weather events.

For photographers, there is no such thing as the perfect shot. You accidentally deleted it when trying to show someone.

Interesting Sightings (Cont'd)

Backyard Birds!

Since January 2010, I have received only 16 'backyard' reports from MELBOCA members. I am sure there are many members who have kept lists of what they have seen at, or over, their property. With plans to publish a full list in a future addition of *The Melbirdian*, your assistance is requested.

I have modified a pro forma used for the recording of species seen on MELBOCA Outings for entering your sighting records, now titled 'Backyard Birds'.

The following information is requested:

Name, Site Name, From Date, Abundance, Status, Breeding, Habitat

If you don't want to include info on the latter four items, a cross will do beside the species seen.

Forms may be obtained by one of the following methods:

- 1 Forward your request by email to info@melboca.org.au and I shall return the required documents by return email
- 2 Contact me on 9802 5250 and I shall post the documents to you.
- 3 The Backyard Birds pro forma may be found on the MELBOCA Website www.melboca.org.au.

Good luck!

Dandenong Catchment Survey Summary

July to September

The six survey teams endured a mainly cold and wet three months. Water levels were high with some sites above capacity, which caused a noticeable decline in duck species and individuals. It's possible that the inland rains, having filled many catchment areas and created abundant breeding sites, is responsible for this low count.

High-water levels didn't deter the return of the summer migrants, with Latham's Snipe recorded at Waterford Wetlands in late August and at River Gum, Hallam Valley Rd and Waterford Wetlands in September. The early return of Australian Reed Warbler was recorded in July at Hallam Valley Rd, in August at South Golf Links Rd, and in September at Frog Hollow, Kilberry and River Gum. Bronze-Cuckoos were also on the move, returning in September. Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo were at Hallam Valley Rd and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo at South Golf Links Rd.

The following new species were added to MELBOCA sites.

On survey days:

- Australasian Bittern, Hallam Valley Rd, July
- Singing Honeyeater, Kilberry, July
- Crested Shrike-tit, South Golf Links Rd. September
- Eastern Yellow Robin, Hallam Valley Rd, September

On non-survey days:

- Australian King Parrot at River Gum in September

Individual sites on survey days:

- Common Bronzewing at Hallam Valley Rd in August
- Brown Goshawk at South Golf Links Rd in July
- Caspian Tern at Hallam Valley Rd in September
- Yellow-t'led Black-Cockatoo, South Golf Links Rd, September
- Brown Songlark at Waterford Wetlands in September

The total species count for all MELBOCA sites is 143.

A full listing for the MELBOCA sites from July to September may be found on the MELBOCA website.

In the last Melbirdian, I indicated a new (7th) site, Rigby's, would become available for surveying by a MELBOCA team in either August or September. Unfortunately, the wet conditions in the past months delayed planting at the wetland and, in early October, Melbourne Water advised that some construction is still under way at the site. The first survey of this large site will now be in January 2011.

As mentioned previously, Rigby's, situated between Fern-tree Gully and Wellington Rd, Dandenong Creek and Eastlink, is the largest wetland that Melbourne Water has constructed in the Melbourne metro area. What will be the first new species to add to the existing MELBOCA Survey List?

What does a survey team do at each wetland?

A Team Leader has one to three assistants and the leader is normally the scribe.

A pro forma includes various actions to be completed on the day, including the site name, date, start and end times, cloud cover, temperature, wind and water level. If the weather changes during the survey, which sometimes happens, a 'notes' section is provided. The 'notes' is also the spot where dogs are recorded, that is, are they 'off' or 'on' the lead. Some sites require dogs to be on the lead at all times.

The next area is where the pen/pencil gets busy, recording species, habitat, observations, activity and comments.

Species: birds, frogs (all team members are becoming experts in frog calls), mammals and fish.

Habitat: ten categories, including G-Grass, MF-Mud Flat and OH-Overhead. One of the most common habitats is OW-Open Water.

Observations: number seen, eg. 2.6.3.1.4x. The 'x' denotes 'off site'.

Activity: five categories, including D-Displaying, F-Foraging, etc.

Comments: note area for unusual activity, eg breeding, feeding young, etc.

Depending on the size of the wetland, data may be recorded on one to five pages and the time taken to complete a survey from less than an hour to three hours.

Not all is finished on the survey day. The results obtained are transferred to a Microsoft Access database which is normally completed by the Team Leader. Once completed, the monthly survey data is forwarded to BOCA's Conservation Officer, Jenny Lau, for the production in the *Annual Report on the Wetlands*, which is then forwarded to Melbourne Water who provided the grant for this project.

Graeme Hosken

Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

Continued from page 5.

is generously giving BOCA their remaining stock. After stock-taking, the goods have arrived at national office, and we look forward to some different items in time for Christmas.

By the time you read this, a bus tour to Wonthaggi will have taken place. If you are interested in bus tours, please make yourself known to **John Young**.

Graeme Hosken gave reports on previous and upcoming branch outings, and also a report on the Melbourne Water Survey Sites. For Interesting Sightings, a marvellous record of 100 Gouldian Finch at Edith Falls in the Northern Territory was given. On this positive note, the meeting progressed to the supper table.

Daphne Hards

Beginners Outings

Yellow Gum Park

28 August 2010

A pair of Brown Goshawks and a flock of Little Corellas captured the attention of the early arrivals waiting in the car park. The Beginners were joined for this outing by several Friends of the Gorge (i.e. Plenty Gorge), making a total of 27 on the walk. After viewing the lake from the upper lookout, we noted that some of the Yellow Gums (from which the park takes its name) were in blossom, as were many wattles and the native clematis, raising our hopes of seeing a good range of birds. Red Wattlebird were dominant on the high ridges with several other honeyeater species seen in the lower regions. Good sightings of Red-browed Finch, Eastern Spinebill and Spotted Pardalote were enjoyed near the Plenty River, which was almost in flood — a great sight after years of drought. A Fan-tailed Cuckoo, calling from over the river, was finally located, enabling everyone to get a good look at it. Eight parrot species were recorded in a total of 37 birds for the morning.

The Friends group stayed on to make nest boxes for the park whilst many of the Beginners drove to Hawkstowe Park for lunch and a second shorter walk. A Brown Falcon being harassed by a Magpie-lark was an interesting sighting, as was a flock of Dusky Woodswallows chasing around the tree tops. Hardheads, Grey Teal and Australasian Grebes were on the lake and several pairs of Red-rumped Parrots were seen by the old homestead, below which Yellow-rumped Thornbills fed on the grass. Four-

teen extra species were recorded for Hawkstowe, giving a total of 51 species for a most enjoyable day.

Karwarra Gardens and Kalorama Park

25 September 2010

Eleven members enjoyed a leisurely stroll around the newly refurbished Karwarra Gardens admiring the blossoming waratahs, wattles and other spring flowering native plants. New Holland Honeyeater and Red Wattlebird were much in evidence, giving other nectar feeders little chance of sharing the abundant food supply. Crimson and Eastern Rosellas flew between the tall eucalypts, whilst White-browed Scrubwren, Brown Thornbill and Superb Fairy-wren were seen foraging in the undergrowth.

The group then moved the short distance to Kalorama Park where they were impressed by the magnificent views of Silvan Reservoir and the distant hills. Grey Butcherbird were seen perching in a nearby tree and swooping down for prey in the long grass. A Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Eastern Whipbird could be heard in the distance. The members then walked into the rainforest along Jeeves Track where Golden Whistler, Grey Fantail and a Bassian Thrush were seen. The highlight of the day was when a very new beginner spotted a “grey bird with a pinky-red breast” in the tree canopy — a Rose Robin. All the group were able to locate the bird and his mate darting around, a rare treat for everyone.

A modest total of 27 species was recorded for the day on a most enjoyable excursion.

Report by outings leaders, Hazel and Alan Veevers

Media Release: Wildlife Health Surveillance Victoria

Wildlife Health Surveillance Victoria investigate reports of sick and dead wildlife from free-ranging populations in Victoria to understand baseline health, detect changes and identify risk factors. If you see wildlife from free-ranging populations with any of the following signs of disease, please contact us. We can ship carcasses to Werribee overnight for investigation.

Kangaroos and Wallabies.

- Eastern grey kangaroo sub adults. Weakness and death in high density populations due to an intestinal blood-sucking worm, *Globocephaloides trifidopicularis*.
- Uncoordinated, wobbly or apparently blind macropods can be due to Kangaroo blindness virus, phalaris staggers from pasture, toxoplasmosis from cat faeces etc.
- Eye & nasal discharge, sneezing & tail twitching. Herpes viruses have been identified.
- Bony lumps on legs.

Australian King Parrots

- Morbidity & mortality during winter. Possibly due to intestinal protozoa, *Spironucleosis spp.*

Crimson Rosellas

- Mortality and morbidity during winter.

Parrot & cockatoos

- Beak & feather disease.

Long-billed Corellas

- Morbidity & mortality was reported & *Chlamydophila spp* detected.
- Deaths: *Chlamydophila spp* have been detected.

Please contact Pam Whiteley 0400 119 301 pamw@unimelb.edu.au or Dr Beveridge 97312000 Faculty of Veterinary Science, The University of Melbourne, 250 Princes Hwy, Werribee, Vic 3030.

Outing Report: Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne

17 August 2010

The birding started in the car park with White-plumed Honeyeater and Grey Shrike-thrush foraging and a Nankeen Night-Heron roosting in a eucalypt. Fifteen members met in cold sunny conditions, grateful that the day promised to be fine. **Pat Bingham** led us along the Possum Gully Track while Superb Fairy-wren called in the undergrowth. Fan-tailed Cuckoo called in the distance but wasn't seen till later when both the male and female were clearly visible near our track. Hunters watched — Laughing Kookaburra, Brown Goshawk and Grey Butcherbird perched or flew while Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike called among the foliage. Honeyeaters were active even though there were more buds than flowers. As well as White-plumed there were New Holland, Yellow-faced (we felt a better common name would be "Yellow-striped"), White-eared and White-naped Honeyeater plus numerous Red Wattlebird. Some saw an Eastern Spinebill while nearly all heard Bell Miner.

Tracks were puddled with green mosses and many varieties of coloured fungi visible. Breeding may have begun as one White-browed Scrubwren was seen apparently removing a faecal sac and another seemed to be carrying food, while a Grey Shrike-thrush managed to call even as it carried off a large worm in its bill. We made our way up to the Trig Point Lookout, adding a Black-shouldered Kite and a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagle. Welcome Swallow swooped after insects in the breeze. Lunch was looking like a good idea so we returned to Stringybark Picnic area. The local Southern Brown Bandicoot emerged once we were seated and investigated us. Superior footwork

won it an unguarded banana skin which apparently yielded a satisfactory amount of fruit to act as dessert to a bug dug out of the soil. Superb Fairy-wren also foraged near our feet and a White-browed Scrubwren left its nest site in a hollow in a tree trunk to investigate us.

After lunch, we walked over to the lake via the wetlands walk. This added waterbirds to our growing list. Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Grebe, Purple Swamphen, Eurasian Coot and Dusky Moorhen were joined by a pair of Hardhead. It was reassuring to see a flow of water into the lake after so many years of low levels. There was no mud so crakes and rails were unlikely but frog calls were loud here and in many other moist areas. The feathers of a Dusky Moorhen near the bank gave evidence of predation, possibly by a fox as there were notices about fox baiting in many places and fox scat was seen. Foxes and bandicoots were not the only animals. Rabbit and wombat scats were present and we passed a couple of large active wombat burrows. Wallaby scat was on the tracks and at least two Black Wallaby were seen. A large Echidna was not troubled by our presence but a trio of Golden Whistler took their territory dispute elsewhere. Small birds included Spotted Pardalote, Brown Thornbill and Red-browed Finch but the only robins were Eastern Yellow Robin. At the end of the day we had 53 species at birdcall, including the obligatory last minute appearance, this time of a Pied Currawong. It was a very satisfying day and we thanked Pat for all her knowledge and preparation which made it so successful.

Diane Tweeddale

Outing Report: Warringine Creek, Bittern

1 September 2010

The showers were almost continuous but they only reduced our numbers to six, plus Gerard the Parks Victoria ranger.

Wet weather gear was the order of the day. The birds were not numerous at the walk's start, beside the busy road. This allowed us to concentrate on our footing as water was pooled on, and flowing across, the track.

Things improved on both counts once we entered the creek line area. Eastern Rosella, Brown Thornbill and Grey Shrike-thrush quickly joined the paddock birds (which had included Australian Magpie, Little Raven, Australian Wood Duck and Welcome Swallow). Frogs called from the standing water and a couple of rabbits ran away, but the day belonged to the birds.

Superb Fairy-wren and Spotted Pardalote were heard more than seen but Grey Fantail kept us company and Red Wattlebird were numerous. A couple of Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and several Galah were admired but a trio of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo was voted the best of the cockatoo sightings. Honeyeaters included New Hol-

land, Yellow-faced and White-eared plus Noisy and Bell Miner.

Grey Shrike-thrush foraged near the track and good, but brief, sightings were obtained of both adult female and immature Golden Whistler. Horsfield's and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo called but only the former was visible. Several Laughing Kookaburra and Grey Butcherbird and a single Grey Currawong hunted. A small wetland hosted a few Pacific Black Duck and a pair of White-faced Heron but nothing else. A small group of Varied Sitella was a high-light, foraging along the tree trunks and branches. This was a species not seen for many months.

Near the edge of the creek reserve, a Brown Goshawk was the only raptor of the walk. At the morning's end we had a bird list of 43 species even after omission of an unidentified teal. We also had the satisfaction of birding successfully in the rain after so many dry outings. We thanked Joan for her leadership and Gerard for his assistance and advice.

Diane Tweeddale

Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Dates to remember

Weekday Outings

(Contact Diane, 03 9836 8692)

Tue. 30 Nov. – Edithvale Wetlands

10:00am (Mel 93 D8). Meet outside hide in Edithvale Rd. Limited parking. Nearest toilets approx 400m past hide at sporting club. Gumboots advisable if recent rain.

Wed. 15 Dec. – Royal Park, Parkville

10:00am (Mel 29 C11). Enter Church St from Flemington Rd and follow Manningham St to Oak St or enter Oak St from the north via Park St. Park near toilet.

Mon. 14 Feb. – Bellarine Peninsula

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 452 A11). Leader Fred Smith. From La Trobe Tce/Settlement Rd take Barwon Heads Rd to Barwon Valley golf club. Park near toilets. Scopes useful. Convoy driving.

Birdwalk at Yellingbo Reserve (Contact Maryanne, 0402 283 080)

First Sunday of the month (5 December, 6 February 2011, 6 March)

Take Warburton Hwy to Woori Yallock and 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 at 10:00am. Walk starts at 10:30am. On-site toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. Mel 305 G11.

Wednesday Wanderings (Contact Celia, 03 5982 1314)

Wed. 24 Nov. – Bird Survey on Herring Island, South Yarra/Toorak

9:45am (Mel 2M C3). Meet at Como Landing at 9:45am for a 10:00am river crossing. Carry lunch. Toilets on island. Walk finishes approx. 2:00pm.

Wed. 23 Feb. – Botanic Gardens, South Yarra

10:00am. Note time change. (Mel 2L C2). Gate D. Toilets in gardens. Carry lunch for a picnic on one of the lawns

before walking along the Yarra into the City.

Wed. 23 Mar. – Birrarung Marr, Melbourne

10:00am (Mel 2F G5). Meet at Melbourne Visitor Centre, Federation Square for an upstream walk to Birrarung Marr, returning to City downstream along south bank. Carry lunch to eat in Alexandra Gardens.

Note: there will be no Wednesday Wanderings in December 2010 or January 2011

Beginners Outings (Contact Hazel, info@melboca.org.au)

Sat. 27 Nov. – You Yangs Regional Park

10:00am (Mel key map page 11 C12). Meet in the first car park on the left, just past the Information Centre. Please bring lunch as this a full day excursion.

Sat. 22 Jan. – Point Cook Coastal Park

10:00am (Mel 199 E3). Meet at the Beach Picnic Area, first car park on left.

Sat. 26 Feb. – Birdsland Reserve.

10:00am (Mel 84 B2). Meet in car park.

Sat. 26 Mar. – Pound Bend, Warrandyte.

10:00am (Mel 84 B2). Meet in car park. Park near toilets.

Sat. 23 Apr. – Cranbourne Botanical Gardens.

10:00am (Mel 133 K12). Meet at 10.00am in the Stringybark car park.

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

See the front page of this edition of *The Melbirdian* for more details, including upcoming guest speakers.

Member's Choice Segment – Call for Contributors

Every fourth Tuesday of every month, at the MELBOCA branch meeting, we dedicate five to ten minutes for a Member's Choice segment. This segment is an opportunity for members to share a topic of particular interest to them with all of us.

We are currently on the look out for contributors for this segment. It could be a bird species you have a special interest in. It could be a report on a recent tour, either in Australia or abroad. Perhaps there is an area that you've

been visiting for many years that you'd like to share. Or maybe you have a collection of birding photographs. A tale of birding obsession? A quest? Or just a question? Let us know!

Sunny Fernie is the coordinator, so if you think you have a topic that would make for a suitable Member's Choice segment, or just want to run some ideas past us, please get in touch with Sunny through MELBOCA on email info@melboca.org.au or by phone **03 9592 7728**.

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We're on the Web!

www.melboca.org.au



MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of Bird
Observation &
Conservation Australia

River Gum Creek Upgrade Completed

A \$5 million project designed to improve the health of River Gum Creek in Hampton Park has been completed.

A series of vegetated wetland pools have been created in the creek near Quail Court, Seebeck Drive and Kilberry Boulevard.

Manager of Waterways for the South East Region, David Norman, said the wetland pools would improve drainage in the River Gum Creek Reserve and enhance water quality in the creek by reducing stormwater pollution.

"Stormwater runoff from suburban streets is the main polluter of Melbourne's rivers, creeks and Port Phillip Bay because of what it picks up and carries into waterways," Mr Norman said.

"Stormwater runoff can carry pollutants ranging from nitrogen that causes algal blooms, to motor oil and animal droppings that can affect the health of fish and platypus.

"The wetland pools in River Gum Creek will naturally treat and reduce stormwater pollutants such as phosphorus and nitrogen. They are expected to remove about 1,300kg of

nitrogen a year from the creek."

Mr Norman said Melbourne Water had constructed 50 stormwater treatment wetlands over the past decade and recently achieved its goal of reducing the amount of nitrogen entering Port Phillip Bay by 100 tonnes a year.

"Everyone can do their bit to help prevent litter entering our waterways by not dropping rubbish, picking up after their dog, and fixing oil leaks in their car," he added.

About 165,000 native plants had been planted along this part of River Gum Creek and this would increase to more than 200,000 plants over the next three years.

The new plants include a large number of aquatic plants, grasses, shrubs and trees that would create a new habitat for fish, frogs and birds.

The rehabilitation project was carried out by the Waterways Alliance – a partnership between Melbourne Water, Ecodynamics, Fulton Hogan and SMEC.

A community planting day was held on Saturday 18 September to help celebrate the completion of the project.

Outing Report: Anglesea Area (cont'd)

Continued from page 6

fourteen Pied Currawong flew noisily. A quiet Grey Currawong dived down and caught a large lizard. It started to eat but carried its prey off when it realised we were watching. Male and female Scarlet Robin were delightfully close. Back near the cars, a lone Tree Martin was noted among the Welcome Swallow. We visited the head of the Coogarah Creek Lake for morning tea. Superb Fairy-wren came in close checking for scraps and Great Cormorant perched and dried their wings. Our departure was well timed as it coincided with the arrival of eight canoes of school children along the channel.

Point Addis was our next stop, but Bristlebirds were not co-operative. Some thought they heard calls, a couple thought they caught a glimpse, but there

was no acceptable observation. A couple of Australasian Gannet were sighted off the point and, in a nearby paddock, at least 100 Australian Magpie were on the ground. We admired the view from the point and then drove on to the Ironbark Basin picnic area. We cleaned our footwear against carrying the phytophthora fungus into the area and then followed the track. The understorey had been cleared beside the track but a highlight was a male Gang-gang Cockatoo on a dead branch. Lunch and bird call (64 species) were enlivened by Scarlet Robin, a White-throated Treecreeper and a Little Lorikeet. The list for both days totalled 80 species. Thanks to Leonie for showing us the potential of this fascinating area.

*Diane Tweeddale,
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

The *Melbirdian* is published four times a year. Member birding-related stories and articles (up to 800 words) are invited. The deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the Autumn Edition is 17 January 2011.