



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 67
June 2009

What a Difference Rain Makes

Water levels at the six wetlands being surveyed by MELBOCA improved during March-April and were back to the December 2008 readings. The water seemed to be a joy to the frogs, with calls indicating three species present. However, waterfowl numbers were average, and four species were not present at all. Perhaps the rains inland may be the reason?

Nevertheless, new birds are still popping up. In March, a Bell Miner was spotted at Frog Hollow and in April an Intermediate Egret was seen at Waterford Wetlands and a Scarlet Robin at Hallam Valley Road. Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo was recorded at two sites. Like many other sightings of this species in the eastern suburbs over the past months, they are looking for food because their normal habitat was destroyed in the recent bushfires.

One 'low-light' was the sighting of a cat, perhaps feral, among rocks at Kilberry Boulevard Wetland in April.

At various times, other BOCA members visit one or more of the MELBOCA wetland sites and they record the bird species seen on 'non-survey' days. This has resulted in several species recorded that have not been noted at a site on an official survey day. A suggestion was made to include the 'non-survey' sightings on the two-month record, an approach which has been adopted. The designation used to denote these sightings is 'Ns'

(i.e., a 'non-survey' sighting). The new recording method began with the most recent (March-April 2009) report that is included with this issue. As of the end of April, the total number of bird species seen at all six MELBOCA sites is 127; this number includes the three new species seen on official survey days and two 'Ns' records.

Graeme Hosken



Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo photographed by Desmond Wichems

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MELBOCA Branch Meetings

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

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

Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 23 June 2009 8.00 pm

Richard Loyn 'Birds and Places in Chile and Argentina: Coast to Andes, Forests to Deserts, Patagonia and Atacama.'

Come along for an armchair tour while Richard tantalizes us with the fascinating birds and stunning landscape of Chile and Argentina.

Who knows, you might find yourself booking a trip to see some of South America's jewels for yourself!

Tuesday 28 July 2009 8.00 pm

Annette Cook 'BOCA and Education for a Sustainable Future'

Annette's passion for education and birding is infectious – so there is good reason that she is at the helm of BOCA's Education initiatives!

BOCA's educational activities spread the word about birds and help to inspire the community to take action and become involved in conservation efforts. Do not miss this special opportunity to hear all about BOCA's approach to education from the woman in charge!

MELBOCA President's Report 2009

Your committee and volunteers have again achieved success in providing MELBOCA members and separate organisations with activities either programmed, or requested, during the past year.

MELBOCA has provided assistance to BOCA by:

- Providing 'guest speakers' to various clubs, organisations, etc. An excellent opportunity to promote both MELBOCA and BOCA.
- Running New Members Day in July.
- Education, in the form of school programmes and talks.
- City of Banyule's Breakfast with the Birds in October. Provision of leaders / guides for an early morning walk at Banyule Flats.
- Monthly monitoring of 6 of the 10 wetlands that Melbourne Water has contracted to BOCA

Continued MELBOCA activities include:

- Monthly meetings at the Evergreen Centre in Balwyn. A range of excellent subjects by guest speakers organised by MELBOCA's Speaker Coordinator, Sunny Fernie. Bird of the Evening presentations also consisted of a variety of subjects.
- Weekday Outings to birding sights within 150km of Melbourne with leaders organised by Dianne Tweeddale.
- Beginners Outings led by Michelle Judson, with assistance from many members, showing 'new starters' the finer points of bird observing in the field.
- Yellingbo on the first Sunday of the month. A survey, off and on, for over 50 years in a habitat for Helmeted Honeyeaters.
- Wednesday Wanderings tracing the 'birding spots' along the Yarra River from Warrandyte to Melbourne re-commenced in February, led by Celia Browne. This two & half year project now takes place on the fourth Wednesday of the month.
- Coach Outings to various locations near Melbourne, some with overnight stays.

Two important functions that MELBOCA performs for its members are the production of the MELBOCA bi-monthly newsletter, *The Melbirdian*, and the maintenance of the MELBOCA Website.

During the past 18 months, Chris Wichems was the editor of *The Melbirdian*. Chris's experience in writing and publishing introduced new concepts in the presentation of *The Melbirdian*. Unfortunately, due to work commitments, this issue, June 2009, will be her last in this volunteer role. On behalf of the MELBOCA Committee, I thank Chris for the time and dedication she has contributed in the production of *The Melbirdian* and wish her every success in her new job.

I am pleased to announce that MELBOCA's request for a new editor has been successful. Andrew Fuhrmann, a MELBOCA member, has volunteered to offer his services as the New Editor of *The Melbirdian*. The MELBOCA Committee met Andrew at their April committee meeting and look forward to working with him in the future. A handover of the role of editor will take place after the June edition of *The Melbirdian*.

Two years ago, MELBOCA stepped in to assist BOCA in organising the BOCA Coach Tours. The small committee of three, namely Veronica Goodwin, Jenny Mortlock and Lana Tinsley was formed to carry out this successful and rewarding activity. Unfortunately, due to other commitments, the present committee members will not be able to fill this role in 2010. My thanks to Veronica, Jenny and Lana for their past input and I look forward to new volunteers continuing this essential BOCA activity.

A successful year would not have been possible without assistance to the MELBOCA Committee from the many volunteers, including Barbara Longmuir who arranges and manages the 'Shop' on meeting nights; Heather Mitchener who arranges supper on meeting nights; Eleanor Stephenson who works the 'door' on the same night; and the many members called upon to do the Bird of the Evening segment. Many thanks also to Maryanne Anderson (Yellingbo), Michelle Judson (Beginners Outings), Celia Browne (Wednesday Wanderings), Dianne Tweeddale (Weekday Outings), Damian Kelly (MELBOCA website) and the staff at the BOCA National Office. Thank you! To the MELBOCA Committee for their dedication in making this year a success, my thanks.

On a sad note, Linda Stock, a MELBOCA Committee member, passed away in early April after battling a recurring illness. Linda had a wonderful way with words, as you would have read in her 'write-ups' of the monthly meeting Guest Speaker presentations. She will be sadly missed.

Graeme Hosken
MELBOCA President

MELBOCA Treasurer's Report for the Year Ending 31 December 2008

Income Statement

Revenue:	\$	\$
Meeting receipts	2,523	
Donations	<u>30</u>	
		2,553
Less Expenses:		
Hire of meeting hall	1,256	
Gifts to guest speakers	174	
Sundry meeting expenses	78	
Name-card holders & stationery	42	
Website hosting fee	139	
Miscellaneous	<u>12</u>	
		<u>1,701</u>
Net Surplus for the year:		<u>852</u>

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2008

Equity:

Accumulated Funds		
Balance at 1 January 2008		1,286
Add Net Surplus for the year		<u>852</u>
Balance at 31 December 2008		<u>2,138</u>

Represented by:

Cash at Bank		<u>2,138</u>
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Notes:

1. Cash at Bank is an at call cheque account.
2. There were no outstanding liabilities at the end of the year.
3. Printing expenses for *The Melbirdian* are paid by BOCA and do not form part of the MELBOCA accounts.
4. MELBOCA is responsible for organizing Coach Tours but all income and expenses are included in BOCA's accounts.

Bill Ramsay
MELBOCA Treasurer

FOR SALE

As new Olivon 65mm Spotting Scope
Sell for \$400 (saving of \$80 on new)

Bonus Tripod included

20% of sale price to go to BOCA

Available for inspection at the
Blue Wren Gift Shop
Springvale Road, Nunawading

Interesting Sightings

Entered 01 May 2009

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

MELBOCA is collecting reports of White-plumed Honeyeater, Noisy Miner and Eastern Spinebill sightings within 60 km 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?

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

The following reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meetings (held at Balwyn on 24 March 2009 and 28 April 2009), via email or as WEB reports to the BOCA National Office.

White-plumed Honeyeater (WPHE)

Member comments:

Michael Norris maintains a database with over 3,300 records of WPHE sightings in the Bayside City Council area and has noted a general decline in the numbers recorded over the years. The possible reduction of Tree Lucerne in the City and lower nectar production in the drought may be possible reasons for the decline in this species. At the extremes, there were 112 records of WPHEs on TL in 1995, and none in 2005, 2008 and 2009. This year there has been an extraordinary increase in WPHE records: 17 up to 17 April with no more than six up to the end of April in the previous five years. Noisy Miners are uncommon along the 17km of foreshore.

Joan Kottek, who has lived in Canterbury Rd, Blackburn South since Nov. 1962, had many WPHEs in her garden, but no Noisy Miners. By the late 1980's, it was the exact opposite, no WPHEs but plenty of Noisy Miners and equally aggressive Rainbow Lorikeets. No small birds are coming into her garden now. Silvereyes and Brown Thornbills were regular visitors. In the early years she also had White-naped Honeyeaters visit.

Of the six sites that MELBOCA are surveying in the Dandenong Catchment for Melbourne Water, three sites recorded WPHEs each month during March and April, while two sites recorded WPHEs only on one month.

No other WPHE records were received.

Noisy Miner

Member comments:

Mrs G E Taws has indicated that since January 2009, her small garden in Lilydale, containing Japanese Lanterns, Grevilleas and other native plants, has been invaded by a group of 4-6 Noisy Miners. The Noisy Miners tolerate a few Magpies and several Little Ravens, but have driven off the New-Holland Honeyeaters and a pair of Eastern Spinebills. The Miners re-visit many times a day. Even Red Wattlebirds do not seem to be immune to the Miners.

Denise Jackson has lived in Bayswater North for nearly seven years with large numbers of Noisy Miners were present all that time, mainly next-door, where Gum trees existed. Since the Gum trees were removed, a smaller number of Noisy Miners has moved into her garden with other native birds appearing only occasionally.

Noisy Miner Sightings			
21 Feb '09	2	Albert Park Lake Reserve	Albert Park
07 Apr '09	20	Tyrrell Street	Blackburn
20 Apr '09	4+	McEvoy Street	Kew

Interesting Sightings Cont'd

Eastern Spinebill Sightings			
24 Jul '08	2	Royal Botanic Gardens	Melbourne
Daily	2-4	Tacoma Street	Park Orchards
10 Mar '09	1	Bennett Avenue	Mount Waverley
24 Mar '09	2	Magnolia Road	Ivanhoe
24 Mar '09	2	Ascot Stret	Doncaster East
24 Mar '09	1	Jennings Road	Bayswater North
?? Mar '09	1	Vista Street	Bulleen
06 Apr '09	1	Maroondah Highway	Lilydale
07 Apr '09	1	Robin Lee Avenue	Burwood East
17 Apr '09	1	Neville Street	Carnegie

Other Sightings				
21 Jan '09	Powerful Owl	1	100 Acres	Park Orchards
08 Mar '09	Common Bronzewing	1	Gardiners Creek Wetland <i>(a single Common Bronzewing was recorded near here two years ago)</i>	Ashwood
08 Mar '09	Ring-necked Dove	1	Gardiners Creek Wetland	Ashwood
09 Mar '09	Crimson Rosella	1	Sandgate Avenue	Glen Waverley
	Crested Pigeon	1	Sandgate Avenue	Glen Waverley
	Masked Lapwing	2	Sandgate Avenue <i>(First sighting of these three species in this area for 47 years!)</i>	Glen Waverley
12 Mar '09	Rufous Whistler	1	Maranoa Gardens	Balwyn
24 Mar '09	White-throated Treecreeper	2	---	Coolart
25 Mar '09	Pied Currawong	?	Victoria Golf Club	Black Rock
29 Mar '09	New Holland Honeyeater	1	Bennett Avenue <i>(first time seen in garden in 46 years)</i>	Mount Waverley
30 Mar '09	Grey Fantail	2	Bennett Avenue	Mount Waverley
08 Apr '09	Crimson Rosella	2	Bennett Avenue	Mount Waverley
10 Apr '09	Scarlet Robin <i>(male and female)</i>	2	Blackburn Lake Reserve	Blackburn
15 Apr '09	Yellow-faced Honeyeater <i>(dead)</i>	1	Southern Cross Station	Melbourne
23 Apr '09	Pied Currawong	16	Doris Street <i>(first time in 75 years in this suburb)</i>	Murrumbeena
26 Apr '09	Little Eagle	1	Royal Park	Parkville
26 Apr '09	Little Grassbird	2	Royal Park	Parkville
27 Apr '09	Pied Currawong	12	Virginia Park	Bentleigh East
27 Apr '09	Gang-gang Cockatoo	2	Mount Street	Eaglemont
27 Apr '09	Crested Pigeon	21	Marg Walker Playground	Preston
28 Apr '09	King Parrot	2	Mullum Mullum Creek Reserve	Doncaster East

Bush Fire Birds

Since Black Saturday, MELBOCA has received many reports of small to large flocks of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, mainly during March and April, in the eastern suburbs. Presumably, they were searching for food, and more often than not found in large pine trees with plenty of cones. Other species have also appeared in members gardens for the first time.

Has your garden or a park nearby been visited by a 'new' species since the fires?

Please note that all of the above records cover the area within 60 km of the Melbourne GPO.

Refer to Melway Street Directory, Pages 1 and 2.

All MELBOCA Outing Reports may be found on the MELBOCA website: www.melboca.org.au

Graeme Hosken, Recorder

Past Meeting Reports

24 March 2009

Graeme Hosken opened the meeting and welcomed the new members and visitors from other branches. Arthur Carew presented the bird of the evening as an illustrated talk on the birds seen during the Melbourne Water Survey. MELBOCA is assisting by monitoring 6 of the 10 wetlands. Though the surveyed areas are very close to housing and quite small, 123 species have been observed to date. These areas are essentially a water filtration and flow control system. Introduced species included both House and Tree Sparrows and European Goldfinch while many native duck and crane species are present, with breeding being observed in many cases (including Australian Wood Duck and Australasian Grebe) despite the presence of off-leash dogs in contravention of the reserve rules. The varied habitat also includes mature River Red Gums and supports a suite of woodland birds.

The main speaker was Bronwyn Isaacs, whose PhD thesis formed the basis of her talk entitled 'Powerful Owl: Habitat Use and Prey Availability in a Suburban Park in Melbourne.' Bronwyn is studying how Powerful Owls use habitat in the Dandenong Valley Parkland, and she is the first in Australia to use GPS technology to do so. Her studies will provide new information on the habitats that are important for the owls' survival.

As the largest Australian owl, the Powerful Owl is listed as threatened in greater Melbourne, rare in Victoria and is reasonably common elsewhere in its distribution along the east coast of Australia. It has recently become more tolerant of urbanisation in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, but has a limited ability to breed in suburban parks because of the shortage of suitable nest hollows.

Bronwyn showed us how she places a transmitter on the owls to enable her to track their movements. We were fascinated and impressed by the amount of work involved in locating, following and catching the birds. She uses call playback and nets to catch the birds, then volunteers help to calm, measure and weigh the bird before a transmitter is attached by a backpack harness.

Tracking the transmitter signal revealed that the size of the owls' home range varies with prey availability and the life/breeding cycle. The usual home range is 1000ha, but the young male in this study used only ~400ha in the phase just before a chick fledged. After the chick fledged, the male made smaller nightly forays over ~200ha, primarily using parkland. In a subsequent phase, the male expanded his range to include a golf course and used several roosting sites. During the breeding cycle, the owl hunted away from the natal area initially, which allowed possum numbers to increase near the nest. Once the chicks fledged, these local possums became tasty meals!

Suburban parks, including golf courses, are clearly important in the conservation of this fascinating species.

These areas provide both ample and varied habitat to accommodate the owls' partitioning of prey and habitat throughout the breeding season. At the end of Bronwyn's talk, we had many enthusiastic questions; then Howard Plowright gave the vote of thanks, saying how impressed he was to learn of the owls' 'possum farming' techniques.

Graeme announced the retirement of Chris Wichems from the MELBOCA committee and from the post of editor of *The Melbirdian* because of increasing work commitments. Thanks went to Chris for her valuable contributions. Howard Plowright delivered a eulogy for Harold Crouch. Harold was an expert on birdsong recognition and a talented sound recorder. BOCA, Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) and Outback Spirit Tours are collaborating to organise small group coach birding tours including Lake Eyre in May. Brian Snape announced that AWC has recently purchased Bowra Station, but bird groups will continue to have regular access. AWC need to raise a further \$1,000,000 to complete the purchase and a tax-deductible donation campaign has started. Graeme reported on the unusual and interesting sightings, which are published elsewhere in *The Melbirdian*. Fred Smith, a BOCA Life Member, celebrated his 86th birthday so we congratulated him in song and celebrated with cake at supper time.

Diane Tweeddale

24 February 2009

Despite the cold weather, a large crowd attended our April meeting. Diane Tweeddale welcomed everybody and introduced Bill Ramsay for the Bird of the Evening segment. Bill spoke on the five MELBOCA outing types. He explained what happens to the bird list data collected during an outing and how these results can be viewed on the MELBOCA website. To date, bird lists from 105 outings are available on the website. If you are interested, you can search the outings on the MELBOCA website to: a) see what species were observed on a particular outing; b) see where you may find a particular bird and c) view photographs of the different types of the birds found in the areas covered by MELBOCA outings. Bill concluded in thanking the coordinators, leaders, photographers and webmaster Damian Kelly for making this type of information available to all possible. Be one of the next 5,000 hits to log onto www.melboca.org.au!

The Guest Speaker, Dr William Steele, is a Senior Wildlife and Wetlands Scientist. Will was recently appointed Waterways Biodiversity Conservation Program Leader for the Melbourne Water Western Treatment Plant and is responsible for the management of biodiversity conservation activities for Melbourne Water. He spoke to us about one of our favourite birding destinations in the greater Melbourne area, the Western Treatment Plant.

Past Meeting Reports, cont'd

Will began with a brief history of the Western Treatment Plant (WTP). The WTP was originally constructed in 1896 and in the early days land filtration was the main method used to treat sewage. The site for the WTP was chosen because it was downhill from Melbourne, had low rainfall and had the desired soil type for filtration.

In 1930, the lagoon method of sewage treatment was established. This method uses a series of lagoons to treat sewage; as the sewage passes slowly through a chain of ponds, the water gets cleaner and cleaner as bacteria already in the water breaks down organic material. This method is still used at the WTP today but is supplemented with more recent technology for sewage treatment.

We birders know that the WTP is a twitcher's paradise, and for good reason! This 11,500 hectare area, which is the size of Phillip Island, has 179 constructed wetlands, many natural wetlands and significant coastal salt marsh. These wetlands attract an amazing array of birds, some of which fly 12,000 kilometers south from Siberia to avoid the harsh northern hemisphere winter. In 1921, part of the WTP was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary, and in 1982 the area was listed as a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance.

A Wildlife Consultative Committee was formed in 1989 to advise on, and assist with, the management of this important habitat. Many surveys and management/action plans have taken place since then. Will talked about some of the different Management Plans that proposed to protect the habitat that supports various species of wildlife, including ducks, migratory birds and frogs. Full details of these plans (and their associated challenges) can be found in the February 2009 edition of *The Bird Observer*.

Management responses to protect the habitat include slowing water flows, adding timber to the ponds, dewatering some ponds as well as adding nutrients and sewage sludge.

The annual budget of \$800,000 is split three ways; about a

third of the budget is needed for weed and animal control. Foxes and wild cats provide a constant challenge, but the managers of the WTP think that they are 'winning' the cat fight. The second third of the budget is devoted to research (e.g., what birds eat, ecology studies and laboratory studies). The last third of the budget goes towards monitoring and evaluating the habitat. This includes bird counts, frog counts and water depth readings. An annual report sent to Canberra depicts the WTP's performance against set targets.

The future challenges for managing the habitat at the WTP are to reduce effluent nutrition discharge, increase recycled water output, long-term reductions to inflows and land use changes. Will noted that there had been a 20% reduction in water flow into Werribee's WTP since the 3A water restrictions came into force and that, despite this, last year this area was home to 71% of all the waterbirds found in Victoria.

Will was thanked by John Barkla, who is the BOCA representative to the Wildlife Consultative Committee at the WTP.

Jenny Lau, one of BOCA's Conservation Officers, asked if there was any support for surveys/activities to be conducted in the recent bushfire areas. She is collecting names of volunteers interested in lending a hand. If you didn't get the opportunity to put your name down at the meeting, Jenny would welcome a telephone call at National Office.

The meeting followed with the usual assortment of announcements, bird sightings, shop goods and ended with a cuppa and chat.

MELBOCA apologises for the non-functioning microphone during the latter part of Will Steele's presentation. We are taking steps to try to avoid this happening again.

Janet Hand

Vale – Linda Stock

Linda Jane Stock born 29th November 1942, died 31st March 2009.

Linda will be remembered by *Melbirdian* readers for her wonderful ability to write detailed and articulate meeting reports.

She was a keen birdwatcher and she participated in a number of BOCA camps with her husband, Bernie. As her most recent battle with illness overcame her, her birding trips were restricted to visits to Mill Park Wetlands and Banyule Flats (her regular walking ground) with Bernie behind her wheelchair.

Linda's optimism, warmth and friendliness were infectious; her willingness and enthusiasm in the many tasks she involved herself in were obvious. It was a privilege to know this lady who remained gracious right to the end. She is missed by us all.

Lyn Easton

Outing Reports

Weekday Outings

17 March 2009

The Gurdies

Showers marked our drives to the meeting place but by the time we arrived they had passed and the cloudy day was dry and breezy. Not ideal weather, but 23 optimists led by Max and Ann Gillespie set off down the track. The open Stringybark forest was termed “quality bush” by one member. Australian Magpies seem to be thriving despite the drought. We also enjoyed observing Grey Fantails and a pair of Scarlet Robin. Both Eastern and Crimson Rosellas flew through, while Golden Whistler and Superb Fairy-wren were audible.

At the start of the walk we passed an area that had undergone a ‘controlled burn’ a couple of years previously. Some trees had been killed and the understorey consisted of tall dense grasses. No shrubs, saplings, bracken or groundcovers were present. The ecology of the area may take many years to recover, if at all. We didn’t spot any birds here; however, the adjacent unburnt areas, and even the machinery debris-strewn property beside the reserve, had birds calling. A “purple patch” added Brown, Striated and Yellow-rumped Thornbills plus a Rufous Whistler. Then a search of the gully revealed White-throated Treecreeper, Eastern Yellow Robin and both Lewin’s Honeyeater and White-eared Honeyeater. Raptors were scarce; however a Nankeen Kestrel and an Australian Hobby flew overhead and were seen by several while a Brown Falcon soared closer to the cars and was viewed by most.

After lunch we drove to Ann and Max’s property where the spring-fed dam is an unfailing water source. Here, a Sacred Kingfisher was the initial highlight but the dam also held Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Dusky Moorhen, Australasian Grebe (with young) and Laughing Kookaburra. Up to the ridge we walked and were rewarded with sightings of Jacky Winter as well as Scarlet Robin, Rufous Whistler, Willy Wagtail and a flock of Yellow-rumped Thornbill.

Who looked up in time to call “Swifts”? Yes, White-throated Needletails were flying with the weather fronts. Returning to the cars we realised the force packed by the December 2007 windstorm. Large trees had been uprooted and piles of substantial timber debris had been created to clear the hillside. It was a birding day and only one Eastern Grey Kangaroo was seen but there was plenty of wombat evidence and some of their holes were enormous. At bird call the total species count for the day was 40. Thanks to Max and Ann for sharing your area with us.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings



*Scarlet Robin photographed at The Gurdies
by Arthur Carew*

20 April 2009

Banyule Flats Reserve,
Viewbank

The fog was thick as 26 people met in the car park. Traces of blue sky appeared as we started walking. We were not too fussed by the mist as the bird list from the car park was quite formidable, so much so that there was an opinion that we really did not need to walk; we could just wait for the birds to come to us.

Despite the large flocks of Crested Pigeon, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo and even the three Australian King-Parrot in a bare tree, the highlight of the car park were three Tawny Frogmouths huddled along a low branch just over our heads. To our gratitude they were pointed out by a local couple walking their dog and were the first of several sightings of this cryptic species. A late-arriving birdo declared with loud satisfaction “Ah, there they are!” on peering upward.

Another car park highlight was a bird dropping an object as it flew into the bushes by the cars. Inspection revealed the rather mangled remains of what appeared to have been a Welcome Swallow. The consensus was that the flying bird was probably a Grey Butcherbird.

Walking down to the billabong, we added Pacific Black Duck, Australian Wood Duck, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal plus Black Swan. Dusky Moorhen and Purple Swamphen were present but Eurasian Coot were notably absent from the recently refilled billabong. The only grebes present were Australasian. A White-faced Heron objected, unsuccessfully, to a Cattle Egret landing in the same dead tree, while a flock of Red-rumped Parrot charmed us with the vivid colours of the males. Thornbills were mostly Brown but a few Striated were also claimed. We admired the growth of the BOCA centenary planting. Walking around the western side of the billabong we noted several

Outing Reports, cont'd

Eastern Grey Kangaroos quietly watching us from the tall grass. Another highlight occurred when we reached the Grotty Pond. Initially, a pair of Magpie-lark and a couple of juvenile Dusky Moorhen were visible but then the cry of "Crake!" caught everyone's attention. Eventually everyone saw a rather elusive Spotless Crake, which, despite the earlier aggression of a Magpie-lark, even bathed in the sight of many. An extremely dark male Chestnut Teal with a brilliant green head had us pausing to check for a rarity but we decided that what we observed was instead an interesting light effect. We headed back to lunch but not before stopping below three Whistling Kites soaring above the trees.

After lunch we headed down the track toward the confluence with the Plenty River. Rabbits were aplenty but we did not spot any hoped-for Wedge-tailed Eagle. We did, however, see an Australian Hobby and a Brown Goshawk.

Honeyeaters were scarce. Red Wattlebird and Noisy Miner were seen frequently and the other honeyeaters spotted included brief sightings of a Little Wattlebird and a White-plumed Honeyeater. Rainbow Lorikeet and Musk Lorikeet were foraging among eucalyptus flowers, so, presumably, some nectar was available.

Several Common Bronzewing either perched or walked by the river. Bike riders at speed were often a hazard but we persevered and were rewarded by a delightful Australian Owlet-nightjar watching us from a hollow branch. The weather had been good, the birds even better and at the end of the day the bird list was 59 species. It was a very satisfactory day, especially for those who can only infrequently make it to the weekday outings.

*Diane Tweeddale,
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

Melbirdian Editor: New Beginnings

This issue marks my last as Editor. It has been a wonderful experience, largely because of the fabulous people that I have had the privilege of working with during the past 18 months. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the MELBOCA Committee for the wonderful opportunity to work on such a fantastic publication. A hearty thanks also to each and every one of the many contributors that work so hard to make this newsletter possible. Your energy, enthusiasm and passion for birds is unsurpassed!!

Now, I would like to introduce you to the new Editor, Andrew Fuhrmann. He is just terrific - chock full of ideas and enthusiasm – and I hope that you will make him feel welcome.

*Chris Wichems
Editor*

As of July, I'll be taking up our branch banner as editor of *The Melbirdian*, but Chris Wichems and the rest of the committee have kindly invited me to formally introduce myself before the handover.

I'm a cheerful twice-a-week inner-city birdo with only a fraction of the birding experience and expertise our current editor has, but I have a lot of, I suppose, infant enthusiasm. My favourite haunts include the Yarra cliffs between Dights Falls Park and River Retreat, Banyule Flats, Yarra Flats, Wilson Reserve, the Merri's length from Coburg to Collingwood, Melbourne Zoo *et environs* and the wait-a-bit tree, *Corymbia citriodora*, that overlooms my Fitzroy shack. Every couple of weeks I venture out beyond the city and explore some of the more substantial habitats around Victoria. This last summer I focused on Long Forest out by Bacchus Marsh. My last major interstate adventure was a trip to Deep Creek, South Australia, just after Christmas, where, alas, though several big bipennate ticks were earned for my Little Blue Book, the elusive Southern Emu-wren was not among them.

When I'm not birding, I go to, and write about, the theatre; I also read indiscriminately and compose fairly mediocre verse, usually not bird related. I'm keenly interested in conservation issues and have been, in the past, a regular volunteer with Conservation Volunteers Australia on the Merri Creek. I look forward to expanding my involvement in conservation issues as my involvement with MELBOCA develops. Finally, I'd like to thank Chris, the committee and all MELBOCA members for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

*Andrew Fuhrmann
Upcoming Editor*

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.melboca.org.au



MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of
Bird Observation &
Conservation Australia

The Rare Stick Bird

During the March Wednesday Wanderings Outing, we wandered an easy upstream walk along the Yarra, searching the branches of the ancient Yellow Boxes for birds.

A light sprinkle of rain had freshened the air, making it very pleasant walking, and the bird list slowly grew.

About mid-morning, a sharp-eyed member of the group sighted a partly submerged mass of tree branches from where we were standing on a bridge across the Yarra. A 'bird' stood motionless in the distance, in the middle of the river, near the tree branches. Perched as it was, it appeared to be looking for food in the water. The 'feathers' on its back were brown to grey and it had a very slim body shape.

The cynics amongst us stated "Oh, it's only a stick bird" and a ripple of laughter ran through the group. THEN IT MOVED, just a slight movement of the head.

What could it be? We went through the possibilities as it was being photographed. Was it a Nankeen Night Heron? No, the color and shape were wrong, Bittern maybe? What a find, we thought, and the excitement escalated.

We decided to get a closer look. Leaving the bridge and the track, we scrambled down a slight incline to a position right opposite the bird. If Reg Johnson had caught up with us, he would have executed an ID immediately.

Now, most bird watchers are familiar with 'stick birds'; their habitat is in the upper canopy and middle canopy of trees, also the shrub layer and sometimes even on the ground. Only very experienced birdos get to see the rare Yarra River Stick Bird!! We could only assume a droplet of water had moved along its 'head' and in the weak sunshine some of us were convinced of movement.

No one can ever accuse bird watchers of not having vivid imaginations and a sense of humor!

Cecily Falkingham



*Can you spot the 'bird'?
(center, on top of brush)*



*The 'bird' on closer
inspection*

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

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

Table 1. Bird species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

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

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	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6
Australian Magpie	X	X	X	X	X	X	Welcome Swallow	X	X	X	X	X	
Pied Currawong							Fairy Martin			X			
Grey Fantail	Ns			N	N		Tree Martin						
Willie Wagtail	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	N
Australian Raven				Ns			Song Thrush						
Little Raven	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common Starling	X	X	X	X	X	X
Magpie-lark	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common Myna	X	X	X	X	X	X
Scarlet Robin					N		Red-browed Finch				N	X	
Flame Robin							House Sparrow	X	X	X	X	X	
Horsfield's Bushlark							Eurasian Tree Sparrow			X			
Eurasian Skylark							Australasian Pipit			N		X	
Golden-headed Cisticola			X	X	X		European Goldfinch			X	X	X	
Australian Reed-Warbler		X	X	X	X		Common Greenfinch	X		X		X	
Little Grassbird	X												
Brown Songlark							Feral Duck	X		X	X		
Silvereye					X		Feral Goose			X	X		

Total number of bird species seen at each site during the current survey months:	47	28	56	48	57	28
Total number of bird species seen at each site to date:	81	58	96	83	88	42
Total number of bird species seen at all MELBOCA sites to date:	127					

Table 2. Other species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

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

Key:

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

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

Ns Denotes new species seen on non-survey day.

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