



The Melbirdian

MELBOCA Newsletter Number 59
February 2008

Wednesday Wanderings Are Back!

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Back by popular demand, Series 2 of the 'Wednesday Wanderings – Warrandyte to Westgate' is commencing this month!

You are warmly invited to join our ramblings through the reserves and parks adjacent to the Yarra River between Warrandyte and the Westgate Bridge.

Walks will be held on the **fourth** Wednesday of each month, from February to November.

The original series lasted three years, commencing in June 2004 and ending in June 2007. By starting Series 2 at a different time of year, it will be interesting to compare bird lists for each reserve.

So lace up your shoes and join these popular morning walks along the Yarra!

Details for upcoming walks are as follows:

27 February 2008

Jumping Creek Reserve, Warrandyte State Park. (Melway 24 A11) 9:45 am. Meet in car park by the river. Toilets available. We will walk *upstream* to Blue Tongue Bend and return. Sturdy boots / shoes advisable. You are welcome to join us for lunch after the walk.

26 March 2008

Jumping Creek Reserve, Warrandyte State Park. (Melway 24 A11) 9:45 am. Meet in car park by the river. Toilets available. We will walk *downstream* towards Black Flat and return. Rocky ground so sturdy boots / shoes advisable. Join us for lunch after the walk.

Celia M Browne

MELBOCA Branch Meetings

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

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

Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 26 February 2008 8.00 pm

Chris Tzaros 'Orange-bellied Parrot Survey Update'

The Orange-bellied Parrot has been making headlines in recent times. On the brink of extinction, this bird has been ranked as one of the world's rarest and most endangered species. Chris Tzaros, the Orange-bellied Parrot Project Officer at Birds Australia, will bring us up to date on the status of this endangered bird – which should be of interest to us all.

Tuesday 25 March 2008 8.00 pm

Michael Seyfort 'Images from the Australian Bush'

Michael is an avid bird photographer and his images are absolutely stunning. Do not miss this special event!

*Sunny Fernie
Guest Speaker Coordinator*

The Melbirdian is published six times a year

Member birding-related stories and articles (up to 800 words) are invited

March 1 is the deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the April issue

“The Members’ Contribution Page was created to give MELBOCA members an opportunity to share and to seek birding information relevant to Melbourne.”

From the Editor

First, on behalf of the MELBOCA committee, I would like to express our deepest appreciation to Jennifer Rogers, who has been editor for *The Melbirdian* for more issues than I can count. A hearty thank you for your time and energy – and a job well done!

The 60th issue just around the corner presents a perfect opportunity to give *The Melbirdian* a fresh new look – and you may have noticed a few changes with this latest edition! The typefaces have been updated and the layout has been simplified to make it easier for you to find articles you’re interested in. I expect the ‘look’ to continue to evolve over the next several issues. This is your newsletter, so your feedback and

suggestions are welcome!

As always, member contributions are invited for inclusion in *The Melbirdian* – so put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard!) and send in your birding-related stories and articles!

I can be contacted either at the MELBOCA mailing address (which can be found on the last page of this issue) or via email at melbirdian@bigpond.com.

2008 is shaping up to be an exciting year – take a look at the great events on offer and be sure to join in the fun!

*Christine Wichems
Editor*

Have Your Say on the MELBOCA Website!

Did you know that the MELBOCA website (www.melboca.org.au) has a Members’ Contribution Page?

The page was created to give MELBOCA members an opportunity to share and to seek birding information relevant to Melbourne and environs. Members can post articles of interest (including photographs, if desired), seek information – such as assistance in identifying a bird, or where to find a particular species in the MELBOCA area and surrounds, and comment on items that have been posted. The range of material that could be covered is massive!

So the next time you are online, check out the MELBOCA website. Be sure to click on the Members’ Contribution Page, and follow the easy instructions to submit your posting – and have your say on the website!

*Damian Kelly & Bill Ramsay
Website Committee*



*Frog Hollow Wetland
photo by Bill Ramsay*

Melbourne Water Wetland Bird Survey Update

Some interesting bird sightings have turned up in the four wetlands being monitored by MELBOCA as part of the Dandenong Catchment Survey that BOCA is doing in conjunction with Melbourne Water. A total of 83 species have been recorded since June 2007. Some of the highlights include Buff-banded Rail, Red-kneed Dotterel, Baillon’s Crake and Australian Spotted Crake. In addition, eight duck species have been seen – with Blue-billed,

Pink-eared and Australasian Shoveler among them. Horsfield’s Bronze-Cuckoo, Singing Bushlarks and Skylarks have also been seen. A full report is attached on sightings for November and December. Note the Melway references for each of the wetlands for when you have some free time for birding!

Graeme Hosken

Past Meeting Report

27 November 2007

After welcoming all to the final meeting of 2007, Linda Stock introduced the Guest Speaker, Patrick-Jean Guay. Originally from Montreal, Canada, Patrick came to Australia in 2003 in order to undertake PhD studies at the University of Melbourne Zoology Department. His talk '**Ecology, Mating Behaviour and Conservation in Musk Ducks**' was based upon his research.

Of all the Australian waterfowl, Musk Ducks have the largest size difference between sexes and males may be up to three times heavier than females. In addition, the male has a distinctive lobe below the mandible that varies in size during the year, and emits a musky smell during the breeding season. During breeding season, males perform spectacular splashing and whistling displays on open water within their territory to attract females. Patrick showed a short video of these displays, illustrating the 'paddle', 'plonk' and 'whistle' kick.

Though uncommon among ducks, it has been suggested that the Musk Duck is polygamous. To better understand the mating behaviour of the Musk Duck, Patrick chose the population of Musk Ducks at Lake Wendouree, Ballarat for his investigations. Patrick used genetic analysis to determine paternity and examined the importance of certain characteristics in mate selection. Despite the lack of water in the lake, there were 40 resident birds present. Males were territorial and genetic analysis revealed that the males were in fact polygamous. Mating behaviour showed sexual selection, meaning that the females chose mates based on certain characteristics. Patrick found that the females preferred the heaviest male birds. Since the size of the lobe was a good determinant of body size, Patrick postulated that females use the lobe as an indicator of overall body size. Interestingly enough, the male bird always oriented itself sideways during displays to the female in order for the lobe size to be evident! Patrick believes that polygyny in Musk Ducks may have evolved because females reach breeding maturity one to two years earlier than males, resulting in a larger number of breeding females than males.

Musk Ducks were thought to be stiff-tailed ducks related to Blue-billed Ducks, but DNA studies have revealed that they are related instead to Pink-eared Ducks. These ducks can be found in two discrete populations in Australia – one in southwest Australia and one in southeast Australia. Patrick has undertaken research to determine whether these two populations of Musk Ducks were the same species, or whether they were subspecies. Comparison of lobe size in males from the eastern and western populations revealed little difference. However, the two separate populations had calls that were quite different and research into the genetic variation using mitochondrial DNA showed that the two populations of

ducks were indeed separate subspecies. Patrick stated that separation probably occurred approximately 37,000 years ago, coinciding with the end of the last long wet period, and since then the Nullabor Plain has become a geographic barrier.

Musk Ducks breed well in captivity, but they also display some odd calls – including the mimicking of the Pacific Black Duck. Because domestication in many animal species is associated with a decrease in the brain size over the generations, Patrick wished to see whether this was so in the captive bred population of Musk Ducks. He found a decrease in the size of the brain cavity in skins of captive versus wild Musk Ducks, which may have some bearing on the low reintroduction success of the Musk Duck. All in all, Patrick put across many scientific facts and a great deal of detail via an impressive power point display and generated a lot of interest in his project if the questions asked are anything to go by.

After congratulating Patrick on a wonderful talk, Janet Hand thanked all volunteers who helped with the Breakfast with the Birds at Banyule Flats at the end of October. Reg Johnson notified the members of the passing of Holton Pettit, for many years a valuable member of BOCA and past president.

The Bird of the Evening was replaced with a Bird Knowledge Challenge run by Chris Wichems and adjudicated by Bill Ramsay. Many avian-related questions of a 'true / false' nature were asked and the last person standing – Damian Kelly – became the winner. Also, the three finalists, Damian Kelly, Howard Plowright and Fred Smith, took part in a 'Who am I?' segment – the correct bird being the White-throated Gerygone.

Jennifer Marriner, the Volunteer Coordinator at National Office, was introduced and highlighted items from the shop on special. Graeme Hosken then noted the interesting sightings and also called Patrick to come up and draw the winning ticket for the door prize, which was a framed picture of 'Australian Goatsuckers' (also known as Tawny Frogmouths) generously donated by Celia Browne.

The evening concluded with good wishes from the MELBOCA Committee for a safe holiday and good birding in the New Year, and an invitation to enjoy a bit of Christmas cake and a cuppa.

Linda Stock

Interesting Sightings

Entered 31 December 2007

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

Currently, we are collecting reports of Currawong, Corella, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Crested Pigeon, Song Thrush, Brown Thornbill and Little Wattlebird sightings within 60 km Melbourne, plus other Field Reports. The following reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meeting (held at Balwyn on 27 November 2007), via email or as WEB reports to the BOCA National Office.

Currawong Sightings			
Pied Currawong			
From 1962	---	---	Eltham
Most days Oct-Dec '07	---	Buckmaster Dr	Mill Park
All days Nov '07	1 + y	Anderson Cres	Croydon South
16 Dec '07	1	Bessazile Ave	Forest Hill
Grey Currawong			
Most days since Sep '07	1 or 2	Bannons Lane	Yarrambat

Corella Sightings			
Long-billed Corella			
Most days	100+	Bannons Lane	Yarrambat
Little Corella			
No reports in this period			
Corella species			
Most days	10-20	Ascot St	Doncaster East
29 Nov '07	1 or 2	BOCA HQ	Nunawading

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo Sightings			
03 Sep '07	4	King's Domain / Linlithgow Ave	Melbourne
03 Sep '07	12	Collingwood Children's Farm	Collingwood
08 Sep '07	12	Shepherds Bush	Glen Waverley
02 Oct '07	---	Toolangi State Forest	Toolangi
04 Oct '07	6	Calder Hwy	Gisborne
15 Oct '07	5	Eastern Fwy / Station St	Box Hill North

Crested Pigeon Sightings			
?? Sep '07	1	Ballam Park	Karingal
Most days Sep-Oct '07	6	Bannons Lane	Yarrambat
Most days Nov-Dec '07	5-7	Tally Ho Reserve	Mount Waverley
04 Nov '07	2	Holmes Rd	Moonee Ponds
23 Nov '07	3	Birrarung Park	Templestowe
09 Dec '07	2	Simpson's Park	Mitcham
11 Dec '07	1	Forest Rd	Forest Hill
16 Dec '07	2	Travencore Park	Flemington
18 Dec '07	2	Royal Park	Parkville
Mid Dec '07	2	Daisy St	Murrumbeena
31 Dec '07	1	Glen Waverley North Reserve	Glen Waverley
Most days Dec '07	---	Mill Park Reserve	Mill Park

Song Thrush Sightings			
17 Nov '07	1	Magnolia Rd	Ivanhoe
24, 25, 29 Oct '07	2	Holmes Rd	Moonee Ponds
6 Nov '07	2	Holmes Rd	Moonee Ponds
24 Nov '07	1	Derson St	St Albans
26 Nov '07	1	Heatherton Rd Wetlands	Dandenong
01 Dec '07	1	Buckmaster Drive	Mill Park
24 Dec '07	2	Kernan St	Strathmore

Brown Thornbill Sightings			
Most days '07	---	Bennett Ave	Mount Waverley

Interesting Sightings Cont'd

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

Is your suburb listed?

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

* Suburbs added, November–December 2007.

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

Other Sightings

18 Oct '07	Sacred Kingfisher	1	Valley Reserve	Mount Waverley
Mid Oct '07	Crested Shrike-tit	--	Maribyrnong River	Braybrook
26 Oct '07	Laughing Kookaburra	1	Jenkins St	Northcote
27 Oct '07	Laughing Kookaburra	1	Cnr St Georges Rd / Holden St	Fitzroy
01 Nov '07	Olive-backed Oriole	1	Montrose Brickworks	
08 Nov '07	Black-winged Stilt	1	Feeding in water on the edge of Frankston-Dandenong Rd	Between Dandenong South and Carrum Downs
06 Nov '07	Scaly-breasted Lorieket	1	In the company of Rainbow Lorikeets on Sandfield Dr	Carrum Downs
12 Nov '07	Large-billed Scrubwren	1	---	Eltham North
17 Nov '07	Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	1	Hawks Rd	North Warrandyte
19 Nov '07	Rufous Fantail	1	Sheperds Bush	Glen Waverley
23 Nov '07	Sacred Kingfisher	1	Birrarung Park	Templestowe
02 Dec '07	Rufous Fantail	1	Yan Yean Reservoir	Yan Yean
02 Dec '07	Black-tailed Native-hen	4	Yan Yean Reservoir	Yan Yean
28 Dec '07	Wedge-tailed Eagle	3	Sedan Ct	Rowville

Additional Notes

- An Australian Magpie (Albino) was seen for four weeks prior to 7 Dec '07 at Memorial Drive in Plenty by Edward Skiba.
- A Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (Albino) was seen between Bacchus Marsh and Pentland Hills. Denis Kelso would like to know if other sightings of this bird have been recorded. Please advise Graeme Hosken, email info@melboca.org.au
- The lake at Mill Park Reserve has been rewarding for local member Michael Dickins. A pair of Grey Teal with several ducklings arrived on the lake in early December. Clamorous Reed-Warblers returned in October. Early October, 12 Little Egrets were seen feeding, plus, for the first time, an Australasian Grebe was sighted.
- Both Tree and House Sparrows frequent the garden of Kathleen Fitzgerald in Ocean Street, Hampton.

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

Graeme Hosken, Recorder

Outing Reports

7 November 2007

Woods Reserve, Tuerong

Today I think I set another record.

Some years ago when leading our weekday outing shortly after The Briars Park opened to the public, I was overwhelmed when 112 birdos arrived. Today there were only five, including myself! Melbourne Cup hangover? Or did the change to Wednesday confuse people?

On arriving at the reserve, thornbills, wrens, shrike-thrush and pardalotes were active and calling. Somewhere nearby a Pallid Cuckoo called briefly. A small dam a short distance into the reserve produced two Australasian Grebe and two tortoises basking in the sun on a large log in the water. A Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and the resident Grey Butcherbird flew back and forth.

Taking a track through predominantly Messmate Stringybark, we headed toward a paddock outside the perimeter of the reserve. An Olive-backed Oriole called persistently; although we searched for about ten minutes we could not find it. Just as we moved off, a Southern Boobook flew out of a 4–5 metre bush in front of Geoff, and then Anna spotted a Koala to the side of us. Crimson and Eastern Rosella, Spotted Pardalote, Grey Shrike-thrush and Grey Fantail were active around us. In the paddock area were Little Raven (also calling) Magpie-lark and the usual Noisy Miner group. Straw-necked Ibis flew overhead.

Back on to the central track, the trees now were mainly Manna Gums. We heard another Olive-backed Oriole, but it continued to elude us. Moving along the track to a small tributary now flowing again due to the rain, we listed White-naped and White-plumed Honeyeaters, Eastern Yellow Robin, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Dusky Woodswallow, Common Bronzewing and a colony of Bell Miners.

Retracing our steps, we once more heard the Olive-backed Oriole and at last we managed to obtain a good view. On the track looping around the dam we again heard the Pallid Cuckoo, and while eating lunch a Rufous Whistler called clearly. Just before leaving, an Australian Pelican flew overhead, bringing the total for the morning to 39 species.

Joan Peters
Leader

19 November 2007 Shepherds Bush, Glen Waverley

The day was very warm and windy with a top temperature predicted at 37°. There were fifteen of us under the leadership of Norman Eyre-Walker, and all were slightly bemused about our levels of sanity. Many Noisy Miners flew around the meeting place as we welcomed Serge

from Canada and Trevor to the group. The planned route led across Dandenong Creek and then circled back to the cars through a pleasant wooded area of eucalypts, Black Wattle and melaleucas. Rainbow Lorikeets screeched overhead and Eastern Rosellas called. A racket of Noisy Miners alerted the group to the presence of a perched Australian Hobby. A Spotted Pardalote came close enough to afford people very good views. Our Canadian visitor obtained good sightings of those so-Australian birds, the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Grey Fantail and White-plumed Honeyeater. A Rufous Whistler called but wasn't seen. No cuckoos were heard but the birds of the morning were agreed to be a Rufous Fantail and a Sacred Kingfisher. At this stage of the year there were various young being fed by their parents, and the begging calls of Australian Magpie, Grey Butcherbird, Noisy Miner and Magpie-lark were all noted. Noisy Miner and Pied Currawong were both seen on nests so it was not surprising that small birds were rather scarce in patches of the park. The heat was becoming oppressive and shade was welcome, but the far side of the creek was sheltered from the wind. This resulted in considerable discomfort and some of us turned back to the cars. Shortly, all were reunited by the siren song of 'lunch'. Bird call yielded 43 species and given the steamy weather it was unanimously agreed to give up on the planned afternoon walk in Jells Park. A vote of thanks to Norman for leading on the day and for such a species haul – when most of us had privately guessed a couple of dozen species at the most.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

December 4 Woodlands Historic Park, Greenvale

What a difference a fortnight makes! Today the air was mild, the breeze gentle and the sun tempered with clouds. The previous day's cloudburst had passed, leaving slightly scoured paths and a little muddy water in the pond and the creek bed. Eighteen of us met in the car park, where Tree Martins wheeled overhead. Under the leadership of Leonie Robbins, we headed out along the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail. This area repays quiet birding with sightings of nests and young birds. There were Sulphur-crested Cockatoos screeching around tree hollows and Red-rumped Parrots calling and flying in groups. Laughing Kookaburras followed a predictable flight path as they arrived with prey – large insects and the occasional lizard. With their mouths full, the kookaburras called and entered the territory of a pair of Willie Wagtails, who were none too pleased. Calling in agitation, they did their best to drive off the kookaburras by mobbing, diving and pecking at their heads. Near the toilet block, adult White-plumed Honeyeaters were tending a very young nestling on the ground. The chick was still very fluffy with poorly developed feathers, but it was able to run into shelter and the adults were assiduous in their care. Perhaps it would survive. Other species in this area were

Outing Reports Cont'd

Sacred Kingfisher, Red-browed Finch, Crimson and Eastern Rosella, Grey Fantail, Australian Magpie, Little Raven and Grey Shrike-thrush.

Butterflies fluttered around wherever we looked and cicadas shrilled while the loud, frequent over flight of Qantas and Virgin planes was ignored by all wildlife. Serge from Canada saw his first Blue-tongue Lizard, and a small mob of Eastern Grey Kangaroos were a lot more interesting than the occasional Rabbit. A brilliantly coloured male Superb Fairy-wren called from among the pink-flowered canes of a feral rose bush. Did he choose his display for the colour contrast? Raptors were hoped for, but a pair of Peregrine Falcons heard calling and seen flying over the car park was beyond most people's expectations! Further along the walk, a Brown Falcon and a Collared Sparrowhawk were also observed. Surprisingly, no lorikeets were heard or seen. Perhaps they had already dispersed in search of flowering trees. At the end of the walk, there was a bird list of 37 species and an enthusiastic vote of thanks to Leonie for her preparation leading to a successful end of year walk.

*Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

10 November 2007

Wonthaggi Coach Tour

It was a beautiful day for the trip to Wonthaggi. Upon reaching the town, we were met by local naturalist, Nola Thorpe, who took us to some remarkable sites and carefully pointed out just what to look for.

The first site, an old rifle range, is now a system of shallow wetlands surrounded by grassland. A Friends Group is

restoring the old ecology and revegetating the site. Our first sighting was a solitary Emu. Birds in the wetlands included Royal Spoonbill, Australian White Ibis, White-faced Heron, Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Australasian Grebe, a single Red-kneed Dotterel and a pair of Black-winged Stilts. Latham's Snipe flew up from time to time, Golden-headed Cisticolas kept popping up all over the place, and Skylarks sang overhead. Two Nankeen Kestrels circled for a while.

After lingering for some time at the wetlands, we walked on past a big earth mound where Striated Pardalotes were nesting and into a regenerating Manna Gum woodland. Birds here included White-eared, Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters, Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Butcherbird, Grey Fantail, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Common Bronzewing.

After lunch we went for a walk in the Wonthaggi Heathland and Coastal Reserve. For a while, we shifted our gaze from the birds to the ground. The wildflowers included a beautiful specimen of the Dotted Sun-orchid. Birds in the heathland included several of the same species as in the woodland, and also the Eastern Yellow Robin, Rufous and Golden Whistlers, Superb Fairy-wren, Brown Thornbill, White-browed Scrubwren and Dusky Woodswallow. We had good close-up views of White-naped Honeyeaters.

Finally, we visited Skip Lane Swamp, a deeper wetland on private land, with many clumps of bulrushes. This was rich in birdlife. Species included the Black Swan, Musk Duck, Australian Shelduck, Eurasian Coot, Royal Spoonbill, Great and Little Black Cormorants, Masked Lapwing, Clamorous Reed-Warbler and Little Grassbird.

Geoff Lacey

Autumn Coach Tours – Book Now!

Join us on a coach tour this autumn!

Western District Wetlands

Saturday 15 March 2008

Leader: Robert Missen
Cost: \$55.00 BOCA members
\$60.00 non-members

Werribee Plains Area

Saturday 19 April 2008

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

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

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

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

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

Contact MELBOCA

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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

Birding in the News ...

Avian Globetrotters Rack Up Frequent-Flyer Miles

Bar-tailed Godwits are migratory shorebirds with a range that long-distance jets would envy.

Scientists have long known that the annual wanderings of the 40-cm bird take it from Australia and New Zealand to the Arctic Circle. This year, thanks to satellite technology, researchers have a more complete picture of just how far – and how fast – the Bar-tailed Godwit migrates.

Last February, scientists attached satellite transmitters to 16 godwits in New Zealand to track their migration speed and routes. One bird stayed in New Zealand, and eight either turned around or their transmitter stopped working.

The remaining seven reached the coasts of the Yellow Sea, where they remained for one to two months to fatten up for the next leg of the trip. The flight to Asia – a distance of 10,219 km – was completed nonstop in about seven days!

Some Like it Hot

The megapodes, a group of birds including the Malleefowl, Australian Brush-turkey and Orange-footed Scrubfowl, are the only birds in the world that do not use their own body heat to incubate eggs. Instead, these birds lay eggs in giant mounds made of leaves, roots and other material which generate the warmth needed for incubation.

The nest of the Australian Brush-turkey can exceed one metre in height. Males build the mound and tend to them alone after the females lay their eggs. Females mate with several males during the breeding season

Six of the godwits then flew about 6500 km to the breeding grounds in Alaska. The seventh migrated 4500 km to breeding grounds in Russia.

On September 7, 2007, the female godwit dubbed 'E7' made history when she touched down in New Zealand after flying at least 11,570 km *nonstop* in 8.5 days on the southbound journey from Alaska – the longest nonstop flight ever recorded for a land bird. All up, she clocked over 29,000 km flying from NZ to China, over to Alaska to breed, and then back to New Zealand.

Three other godwits completed a similar journey south but stopped short of New Zealand at New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. All of the 16 satellite-tagged godwits in this study are expected to eventually make their way back to their original capture sites in New Zealand and many people are on the lookout for them.

and lay eggs in many different mounds.

For many years, researchers have known that females appear to assess a mound's 'quality' before deciding to mate with the owner. Recently, Ann Goth, a brush-turkey expert in Sydney, found that mounds with internal temperatures of 32–35°C received more eggs than hotter or colder mounds. In addition, the females laid larger eggs (which produce the healthiest chicks) into these mounds. In the January 2007 issue of *The Auk*, Ann noted that 'this observation appears to suggest that females choose mounds rather than males.'

Volunteers Needed!

MELBOCA educational activities are a wonderful way to spread the word about birds and inspire the community to take action and become involved in bird conservation efforts.

Already we have two speaking engagements lined up for February. The first is in Dandenong at the Victorian Seekers Club, a large gold prospecting Club, where they wish to learn about 'The Birds of the Golden Triangle'. The second appointment is with the Balwyn Ladies

Probus Club. The topic will be 'An Introduction to Birdwatching and the Birds of Balwyn.'

Education activities for MELBOCA are continually evolving – and they take place with support from many people. Do you have time to spare? Would you like to help to increase public awareness about birds? Then why not join the MELBOCA Education Committee! It's fun – be in it! Contact Janet Hand, MELBOCA Education Officer, at 9842 4177.