

Mornington Peninsula Birdlife



Volume 6 Number 2 June 2017



Crested Shrike-tit, photographed at Seaford Wetlands by Tim Van Leeuwen

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

With the BirdLife National Office deciding not to support branches hard copy newsletters the committee has to consider what is our response to this new directive.

We have decided that this June newsletter will be produced, printed and mailed locally. This will of course cost the branch financially, so we have to look at our options for continuing hard copy or otherwise the production of this much loved part of our branches operation. The National Office will continue to circulate the newsletter electronically and we know some members will be disadvantaged.

With this current edition you will receive an inset asking your options for the newsletter. Please study carefully and we ask you to return the form to the Secretary. Please be diligent in returning this form, as this will assist the committee in its decision.

COMMITTEE NOTES

The committee has been asked to do some monitoring of private properties in the Main Ridge area in conjunction with

the Greens Bush to Arthurs Seat Biolink Project, which is being funded over four years to link these two areas of the Peninsula. We have been invited to join the steering committee to progress this initiative. Our committee is willing to participate and we could gain funding from this exercise.

Please note the committee has moved the Christmas outing to Sunday the 26 November in lieu of the normal 17 December to alleviate the Christmas rush.

Max Burrows

Contents

1. Branch news
4. Habitat for wildlife
8. Outings program and reports
12. Eastern Treatment Plant wetland surveys
14. Mornington Ride
15. Pale-vented Bush-hen 7 Vs Cockram twitchers 0.5
16. Observations

Schools Environment Week at The Briars

The annual Schools Environment Week ran for four days from 20 - 23 March. Unfortunately, the Shire's planned facilities/roads upgrades fell on these dates, and needed to be hurriedly postponed.

This meant that the Education team for BirdLife Mornington Peninsula did not have the usual access to the large bird hide as in previous years. So, pared-down observations in the small bird hide with one birder was necessary, while Susan and I did activities with small groups in a small marquee next door. It ran surprisingly smoothly with small half-groups changing between BERG Mt Martha's Waterwatch program nearby, and our two activities.

Many thanks must go to the birders who took on the job of conducting birdwatching in the small hide under rather dark and cramped conditions; Max Burrows, Danny Vits, Denis Goss, Ray Pentland, Penny Gillespie and Keith Caldecott (who filled in as a last-minute emergency). You are all amazing! Special thanks to my colleague Susan Clark for her excellent work in designing and running activities with me in our little marquee.

We did find it was quieter being separate from the excited children with binoculars in the hide! Overall, it was a satisfying experience. The children were enthusiastic and well-behaved, and the weather was mild on the days we were there.

Pam Hearn

Devilbend on-water access for non-powered boats submission to Parks Vic

BirdLife Mornington Peninsula is a branch of BirdLife Australia, an independent science-based conservation organisation with more than 13,000 members and 100,000 supporters throughout Australia. Our primary objective is to conserve and protect Australia's native birds and their habitat.

We would like to register our opposition to the proposal to allow boats on the reservoir at Devilbend Natural Features Reserve.

Devilbend Reservoir is one of over 300 sites across Australia that has been designated by BirdLife Australia as an Important Bird Area (IBA) - now to be re-classified as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA).

Devilbend Reservoir was declared a KBA based on its importance to Blue-billed Duck. As such Devilbend Reservoir must be protected against any threats that may affect the area's ability to support Blue-billed Duck, including activities that will cause disturbance to the species.

BirdLife Mornington Peninsula is concerned that Park staff will not be able to monitor the Reservoir at all times, allowing inappropriate activities to occur both outside and within prescribed areas. In particular, we are concerned that staffing levels will be insufficient to meet the necessary policing of these boating activities.

Both Blue-billed Duck and the resident, breeding pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagle are vulnerable to disturbance, particularly from people engaging in water activities. The Reservoir wall area is an important area for Eurasian Coots



Woodleigh School Penbank Campus Grade 4 students in Boonoorong Hide.
Photo by Danny Vits

and as these are a prey item for the Sea-Eagles we are concerned that increased activity in the area will impact on the pair.

Although this proposal is for recreational fishing this will not preclude other non-powered boating activities to occur which in the long term may lead to a major degradation of the Reservoir and along the shoreline and adjacent areas.

We sincerely hope you will consider these ramifications in making your final decision on this most important site on the Mornington Peninsula.

Max Burrows and Committee, BirdLife Mornington Peninsula

Conservation Report

The main area of concentration has been Devilbend KBA. The issues there are the proposed unpowered watercraft, the lack of Ranger presence and the lack of enforceable regulations. A number of groups have sent good submissions to Parks Vic including BirdLife, SPIFFA, MEA, WPPC, BERG Mt Martha and a number of individuals. This is most appreciated.

Many threats remain - development driven by population increase in the whole area and by foreign owned housing in Victoria being about 20% - being the major one. Although the Hastings Port development seems the least likely of the three options - Melbourne Port Expansion, Bay West Option being the other two - a change of state government could see this being on the cards but it is unlikely for 20 years I think. Threats to places like Tootgarook Wetlands remain constant. Beach usage especially by people with dogs remains a threat to Hooded Plovers and Red-capped Plovers.

There has been great work by the BirdLife teams that do bird monitoring at the various places on the Peninsula including Woods Reserve, Tootgarook, Devilbend, Balcombe Creek and a number of coastal areas. This is so valuable. Also such things such as picketed, keep out areas at places like Balnarring Beach - by Mark Lethlean, Andrew Browne and others - for the protection of Red-capped Plovers is also much appreciated.

Roger Richards

MEMBER PROFILE

Stuart Cooney

Lives at Mt Eliza

How I started birding

I started birding when I was a Sales Rep. I found that I much preferred recording the birds I saw between visits to customers than I did spending lots of time trying to sell them things - I wasn't a very good salesman! On 23 May 1996, I made my first bird list, which started with a White-browed Scrubwren at the Portsea Surf Beach carpark. Years before, we had hosted a Norwegian exchange student, who was a birdwatcher, and I had always enjoyed watching birds and other animals. But it wasn't until 1996 when I finally combined this with my other love (of lists) and became a 'proper' birder.

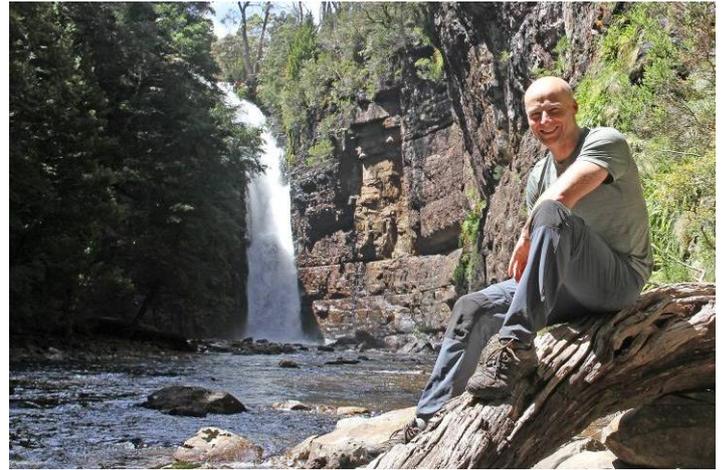
Favourite birding spots on the Peninsula

Having started birding, I quickly discovered the Braeside Wetlands and spent lots of time there sorting through the waders that seemed more abundant back then. Here I got lots of lifers as I learnt about the local birds. I still have a record of a Spotted Harrier from Braeside that I am now convinced was a misidentified Swamp Harrier! Other local spots that I love are Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve and have seen some great birds there such as Bassian Thrush, White-winged Triller, Varied Sittella and Sacred Kingfisher. In the 2000s I volunteered to staff the hide at the Edithvale Wetlands and this also remains one of favourite places to bird on the Peninsula (loosely defined!).

Other favourite birding spots

Other birding spots that I love are famous birding places. I spent a magical two weeks in Iron Range, Queensland in 2011. On this holiday, we saw most of our target species, including Eclectus Parrots on a nest, Palm Cockies, and a host of other FNQ specialties. A couple of week's work experience at O'Reilly's in Lamington National Park was also amazing. I remember racing to see a Noisy Pitta on one of my last days there, brushing aside Albert's Lyrebirds in my haste to check out a recent sighting! Bowerbirds, Riflebirds and fruit-pigeons all make Lamington an amazing place to bird. When I was doing my PhD near Katherine, a mate was working at Cooina Resort on Yellow Waters in Kakadu National Park. Most of my weekends were spent there, relaxing on the Alligator River, chasing birds and crocs and enjoying amazing sunsets.

Further afield, Kruger National Park in South Africa was amazing, with all the Spurfowl, Francolins and Guinea fowl amongst more exotic species such as Lilac-crowned Rollers, Vultures, Hammerkops and the iconic Weavers. In 2015 I went to Papua New Guinea, where after overcoming some altitude sickness on the first day, I managed to see ten species of Bird-of-Paradise, including the extraordinary King-



Stuart at Hartnett Falls, Cradle Mountain NP, Tasmania.

of-Saxony, the stunning Blue Bird-of-paradise and fleeting glimpses of Princess Stephanie's *Astrapia* with their amazing white tail! While these places are great, the Western Treatment Plant in Werribee remains one my all-time favourite places to go birding and the diversity and abundance of birds here always amazes me. I have now seen 179 species at the WTP, just 40kms from Melbourne!

Some memorable birding moments:

In addition to the above, one of my best birding experiences was my first pelagic trip off Port Fairy. Heightened by the anticipation of heading out to sea, the excitement of seeing my first albatrosses so close to the boat was thrilling! It was a great trip with some rarities, such as Sooty Albatross and South Polar Skua, as well as lots of other birds that were less uncommon. I remember watching tiny Storm-Petrels dancing across the sea at the back of the boat, kilometres from the nearest land, while Giant-Petrels barged about, bullying other birds to steal the burley. The rough seas resulted in a great trip; I was exhausted but exhilarated.

Birding ambitions

The biggest gap in my Australian list is from the Kimberley. I still haven't managed to get to the BirdLife's Broome Bird Observatory to see the Kimberley endemics or the (reputedly) amazing shorebird congregations of Roebuck Bay. I've also spent uncounted hours walking and driving across the grasslands of northern Victoria looking for Plains Wanderers - always without success! One year there was an abundance of Little Buttonquails, Stubble Quails and the odd Red-chested Buttonquail, which are great birds, but not what I was looking for. Another year, there were Hooded Scaly Fooths, Curl Snakes and Dunnarts, but these aren't even birds! Mostly, there is nothing, just a surprisingly cold wind blowing across the plains, and me eventually conceding that Plains Wanderer will have to wait until next time!

Other Interests

This year past, I have spent less time birding and more time on other things. As a middle aged man, I have decided to get fit and have enjoyed the different challenges that this brings. But birding is never far away as I work as a Consultant Ecologist for Ecolink Consulting, which is a small business that I set up with a partner a few years ago. This has been a great venture, allowing me to work for myself and from home, while allowing me to work on birds (often as a specialist sub-consultant) and other wildlife.

Contacting BirdLife Mornington Peninsula

President Max Burrows; 9789 0224
21 Moorhen Cres, Carrum Downs, Vic 3201

mornington@birdlife.org.au
www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlife-mornington-peninsula

Habitat for wildlife

Biolinks

A generous grant of \$300,000 from the PPWCMA through the OCOC (Our Catchment Our Communities) initiative is being deployed during 2017 to establish biolinks along Splitters Creek (Main Creek Catchment Landcare) and Drum Drum Alloc Creek (South West Mornington Peninsula Landcare). Dr Jacqueline Salter is coordinating this exciting activity under direction from a Steering Committee and with an Advisory Panel of relevant experts and representatives from interested parties such as the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA), Mornington Peninsula Shire and Parks Victoria.

The Linking the Mornington Peninsula Landscape (LMPL) project - being run by Michele Sabto - is in its third year of an ambitious, Peninsula-wide program of involving landholders in the establishment of coordinated biolinks connecting remnant vegetation and our national and state parks. Such biolinks improve the overall amenity and environment of the Peninsula and provide a critical path for the movement of indigenous species (mammal, reptile, bird and plant) that is essential to the long-term survival of many.

Red Hill South Landcare Group Biolink

Proposed biolink area roughly outlined in red. White-outlined properties are where Red Hill South Landcare has already undertaken on-ground bush restoration works (i.e. weeding, revegetation) under separately funded projects.

Dunns Creek Landcare Biolink

Dunns Creek Landcare Group have chosen a target area (in region of red lines) that connects Kangerong and Bald Hills Reserve along Dunns Creek.

Bernie Schedvin & Michele Sabto, Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network News March 2017



Red Hill South Landcare Group Biolink



Dunns Creek Landcare Biolink

'Citizen science' study of two estuaries

Volunteers working to preserve two Mornington Peninsula estuaries are being linked through a state government-funded citizen science program.

The "health" of the Balcombe Creek, Mt Martha, and that of Merricks Creek at Balnarring will be recorded as part of the project on the EstuaryWatch website, bringing the number of estuaries being monitored to 18.

The environment groups BERG Mt Martha and Merricks Creek's EstuaryWatchers, in collaboration with Melbourne Water, have organised a presentation on EstuaryWatch by Victorian coordinator Rose Herben and aquatic ecologist Steve Harefield at midday at The Briars, Mt Martha, on Saturday 4 March.

There will also be an introduction on how data is uploaded and used on the EstuaryWatch web portal.

EstuaryWatch was set up in 2006 at Corangamite Catchment Management Authority in response to community interest and a lack of long-term data on the condition of Victoria's estuaries. The data has been used to improve estuary management.

Volunteer groups are supported by the program's coordinators at Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Corangamite CMA, Melbourne Water and West Gippsland CMA.

Southern Peninsula News, 28 February 2017



Tale of two estuaries: The environmental health of Balcombe Creek estuary, Mt Martha and the mouth of Merricks Creek, Balnarring, is being studied as part of a citizen science program. Photos by Gary Sissons

Newsletter contributions

Thanks for your fantastic articles and photos. Keep sharing your sightings, observations, bird photos, daily birding activities, surveys, tips on bird identification and birding while travelling stories.

The newsletter is available on the BirdLife Mornington Peninsula website before hard copies are posted.

Send to Val Ford; 5981 1445 & fordandred@gmail.com

Deadline for September edition: 8 August 2017
Earlier articles appreciated.

Birdlife at Coolart

It's difficult to believe when we see floods and torrential rain in other parts of the country that here at Coolart the land is quite dry. We have barely come out of the millennium drought and it seems we are being plunged (if that's not a contradiction in terms) back into drought again. From a couple of years ago when the lagoon, wetlands, Home Creek and Merricks Creek were a continuous water way with fish migrating upstream - to once again having wetlands that have completely dried out.

The lagoon has held water surprisingly well but even its waters have fallen swiftly over summer. Nevertheless, it is still functioning as a haven for water birds and just recently the rare Freckled Duck has returned. Could this be a response to the recent duck hunting season or are some other factors at work? The water bird numbers began to rise in February - before the hunting season - so perhaps there are other reasons, although getting shot at would certainly be an incentive to find a quieter spot.

February saw 125 Chestnut Teal and 150 Eurasian Coots on the lagoon, in March there were Hardhead and an Australasian Darter - which we only see very occasionally and February we saw Red-kneed Dotterel, Baillon's Crake and the Freckled Duck which have built up in numbers to 14 in April.

The bird baths outside the office windows have been busy over summer with all sorts of small bush birds coming in to bathe and quench their thirst and attracting some rarely seen Coolart birds - a pair of Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters and a pair of Crescent Honeyeaters - nice to have a bit of lazy birdwatching just looking out the window.

Brian Thomas, Parks Vic Ranger, Friends of Coolart News Autumn Edition 2017

Friends of Coolart Hosting Book Launch

You are invited to the launch of two new books by high-profile editor and author Geoffrey Maslen - *An Uncertain Future: Australian birdlife in danger* and *Too Late: How we lost the battle with climate change*.

The launch will be held at the Observatory and the historic Coolart Homestead, 119 Lord Somers Road, Somers, on Saturday July 1st 2017 at 1.30pm for a 2pm start.

This is an unmissable event for all those concerned about the future of Australian birds, our wildlife and their environment. Former senator and environmentalist Dr Bob Brown writes in his introduction to *An Uncertain Future*: "Geoffrey Maslen's book is a clarion call for Australia's brilliant but disappearing birds."

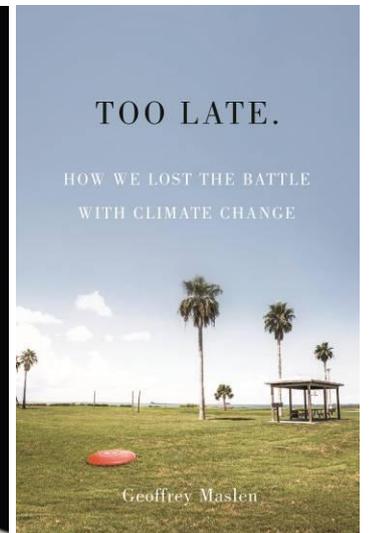
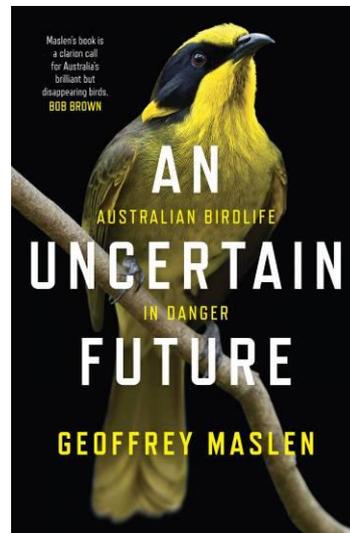
The book launch will involve a dramatic audio-visual presentation in the Coolart auditorium with Geoffrey Maslen, Dr Rohan Clarke, who took most of the book's wildlife photographs, and Max Burrows, President of BirdLife Australia's Mornington Peninsula branch.

A book signing will take place at the French Empire room Coolart Mansion when light refreshments and afternoon tea will be served. An auction of prints from Dr Clarke's beautiful photographs of Australian birds will also be held.

Part of the proceeds from sales of the books and the auction of prints will go to the fund supporting the work of the



Hardhead at Coolart. Photo by Mark Lethlean



Friends of Coolart who help maintain this wonderful site for the public.

Geoffrey Maslen is a former industrial chemist, college lecturer in science and journalist. He was education editor at *The Age* for twelve years and founding editor of the global online *University World News*. He has written for a range of international publications and is the author of nine books.

To reserve a ticket: log onto <https://www.trybooking.com/277965> or email julieebott@gmail.com

Numbers are strictly limited. Books will be available for sale on the day plus the opportunity to meet and greet the author and have your books signed.

Birdwatching course

BirdLife Mornington Peninsula Committee members, Pam and Susan, will conduct a two-session course "Introduction to Birdwatching" for Mornington U3A members on 12 and 19 October 2017. One classroom session at U3A Currawong Street premises and one field session at The Briars.

Laser idea to deter ducks

Mornington Peninsula horticulturalist Lisa Brassington knows that crops and ducks sometimes don't mix, but the crafty inventor has come up with a simple solution to the problem that leaves both unharmed.

Ms Brassington, who works at Peninsula Fresh Organics in Baxter, has spent the past three years watching ducks shift from foraging for insects to organic leafy green produce as they take advantage of what she calls "the best buffet in Baxter". Wanting a solution that would save crops without hurting the ducks, she combined her education in rural planning and physics with her love of farming to come up with an idea using laser technology.

Ms Brassington is a finalist in the RIRDC Victorian rural women's award for her project – Duck: stirred not shredded – which uses information she gained from European and North American farmers who use laser bird repellent systems.

After studying data on weather and climate observations, citizen science counts of bird numbers, moon cycle information and farmer feedback, Ms Brassington came up with a system to model bird and bat behaviour and combine this information with the technology. She said all other efforts to defeat the hungry ducks were unmanageable, and current reactive methods of dealing with them, such as random loud sounds and decorative scarecrows, were ineffective.

Since the announcement of her entry, Ms Brassington has had interest from three universities and been able to help farmers work together towards a trial. The next step, she said, would be to bring universities, the Bureau of Meteorology, BirdLife Australia and market gardeners together to workshop the idea and come up with concrete plans she can take to HortConnections 2017 in Adelaide in May.

Liz Bell, Southern Peninsula News 21 March 2017

Girl's bid to help parrots survive

Six-year-old Abigail Court has become something of an orange-bellied parrot expert since learning of how close they are to extinction.

The youngster was taken to Moonlit Sanctuary, Pearcedale, by her mother Rebecca soon after the opening last year of a breeding aviary designed to help increase the number of orange-bellied parrots. The species is clinging onto survival with Zoos Victoria – which also runs a breeding program at Healesville Sanctuary – estimating there could be as few as 50 birds left in the wild.

The 200mm long mainly green and yellow parrots are larger than budgerigars and only breed at one location in Tasmania before flying across Bass Strait to winter on the mainland, including on the shores of Western Port. Experts fear the orange-bellied parrots will be extinct in the wild within three to five years. Since finding out about the parrots' dire straits Abigail, of Boronia, has collected more than \$1000 towards helping the breeding program at Moonlit Sanctuary. The money was raised through talks she has given to girl guides, her primary school class, Ferntree Gully Salvation Army and after telling her story to family and friends.

The orange-bellied breeding centre at the 10-hectare



Crop saviour: Lisa Brassington has found a way to protect both birds and crops. Image courtesy AUSVEG



Talking parrots: Abigail Court and the orange-bellied parrots that she is so determined to see survive.

Moonlit Sanctuary can house 40 birds and breed up to 100 birds a year. The off-the-ground aviaries are designed as a quarantine facility to prevent the spread of beak and feather disease, which can affect these parrots in the wild, and has two 12 metre long free-flight aviaries for non-breeding seasons.

When opening the centre in September 2016 sanctuary director Michael Johnson described it as "a huge step towards growing the captive population of orange-bellied parrots for release into the wild". He said partnerships between governments, community groups, zoos, and the orange-bellied parrot recovery team "is key to the survival of this critically endangered species".

The sanctuary has been involved in the orange-bellied parrot program since 2013 and has committed to spending \$500,000 over the next 10 years to run the new breeding centre. Zoos Victoria's acting general manager of threatened species, Dr Michael Magrath said the aviaries provided a "significant boost" to the parrot's captive breeding program.

The centre has a viewing platform for visitors, an educational space to learn about the species, and a nest cam to observe the breeding behaviours of orange-bellied parrots. Moonlit Sanctuary also contributes to recovery and breeding programs for regent honeyeaters, bush stone-curlews and spot-tailed quolls.

Keith Platt, Western Port News 11 April 2017

Natured Kids making pardalote nest boxes

The Spotted Pardalote is a small insect eating bird, weighing less than a 20 cent piece. It forages amongst the foliage of eucalypts, searching for sugary exudates (Lerps) on leaves and psyllids, helping to keep our native bushland healthy.

The 'Natured Kids' Junior Landcare group run by free-lance teacher Narelle Debenham, made nesting boxes from templates cut by members of the Mornington Men's shed (MMS), for these beneficial little birds today with amazing assistance from MMS members Keith, Tony and Mic, who were very patient, kind and helpful when working with the young people and sharing their skills. It was pure magic!

These weekly environmental sessions are held on the private Landcare property of naturalists Tony and Leanne O'Connor in Mount Martha and are attended by nature loving pre-school and local homeschool families (with children aged 4-16 years). Come and meet us and learn more about our Junior Landcare joint environmental projects during the 'Eco Expo' week at The Briars in Mt Martha, our 'hands-on' workshop and presentation is on Thursday 23 March.

Intergenerational teaching and learning is the most powerful of all, such deep and meaningful, long lasting experiences would not be possible without participation from the Mornington Men's shed, we are so thankful for their support of our 'projects for nature' over the years".

The link to the Spotted pardalote nesting box pattern, generously shared by 'Birds in Backyards', is http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/sites/www.birdsinbackyards.net/files/page/attachments/Spotted%20Pardalote_0.pdf

Narelle Debenham, Natured Kids Australia
www.naturedkids.com

Foxes on the run in Merricks North

Farmers near Buckleys Reserve, Merricks North, are being trained to kill foxes and rabbits. The training is part of a feral control project by members of Merricks Coolart Catchment Landcare Group. Dismayed by the high rates of native wildlife loss on the Mornington Peninsula, the group has received approval to implement feral controls, including culling.

The project is being funded by the Port Phillip & Western Port Catchment Management Authority through the federal government's National Landcare Program. "This is a great chance for landholders to work together to take positive action that will benefit local indigenous animals," Landcare group president Alan Costello said. "Rabbit reduction is critical in reducing damage to native plants, maintaining pasture and avoiding soil erosion. Residents are particularly excited about the opportunity to undertake fauna monitoring on their properties using motion-activated fauna cameras."

The Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network's Dr Jacqui Salter supports the project. "Much of the high quality habitat in the Merricks Coolart catchment region is privately owned," she said. "If landholders can undertake feral animal control in a coordinated manner, we can better support indigenous animals in the region, many of which are threatened by fox predation. In addition, rabbits can alter habitat and compete with indigenous fauna for food."

Endangered species in the area, including the growling grass frog and the blue-billed duck will benefit as both are threatened by foxes. Parks Victoria ranger Luke Ashford is



Working in the Mornington Men's Shed. Photos by Narelle Debenham



Feral fighters: Michelle Sabto, Malcolm Allchin, Jacqui Salter, Sam Graham (Parks Victoria), Alisson Bolden (Parks) and Alan Costello at Buckley Reserve, Balnarring. Photo by Gary Sissons

pleased community action is supporting fauna at the reserve. "We think this is a fantastic project... and look forward to seeing the results."

Southern Peninsula News 14 February 2017

The future looks bright for the Western Port Ramsar site

The PPWCMA welcomed a media release by Minister for Water Lisa Neville MP on 31 March regarding the new Western Port Ramsar Site Management Plan.

As part of the plan's implementation, \$640,000 is being allocated to the PPWCMA over four years to collaborate with key stakeholders and communities to deliver some of the priority conservation actions that protect the wetland's values and reduce threats.

PPWCMA April 2017 update

EVERYBODY'S WELCOME

Outings are held on the second Wednesday and third Sunday of the month, except in January, and are cancelled on total fire ban days.

Newcomers, beginners and visitors are welcome and members will help you with the birds. Binoculars for casual use are available on every outing. Bring lunch (optional) and a folding chair for bird call and chat.

To ensure the health the safety of everyone at outings, participants need to take responsibility for their personal safety. To assist with this, the Committee provides the following guidelines.

1. Wear name tag (write emergency contact name and phone number on the reverse side)
2. Wear suitable footwear i.e. closed shoes or boots
3. For areas where snakes are likely, wear gaiters
4. Always carry items you may need e.g. water, snacks, personal first aid kit, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, your name and residential address and, if you have one, a mobile phone with battery charged
5. Remain with the group at all times and advise leader or "whip" if you intend to leave before the walk ends.

For more information about an outing contact Max Burrows on 0429 947 893 or the leader listed.

Max Burrows, Outings Coordinator

Date	Time	Locality	Meeting place and other information	Leader	Phone
Wed 14 Jun	9.30	Stony Creek Road, Red Hill	Meet 9.30 at corner of Stony Creek Road and Mornington/Flinders Road. Mel 190 D7	David Ap-Thomas	9787 6691 0429939036
Sun 18 Jun	9.30	Point Leo Reserve, Point Leo	Meet 9.30 at general store Point Leo Road off Frankston/Flinders Road. Mel 257 C4	Denis Goss	0419921249
Wed 12 Jul	10.00	Coolart Reserve, Somers	Meet 10.00 in car park enter off Lord Somers Road near Beach Hill Avenue. This outing will be held in the observatory and will include morning tea and a speaker, then a walk to the bird hide at the lagoon. Mel 193 J9	Max Burrows	0429947893
Sun 16 Jul	9.30	Baldry Crossing Main Ridge	Meet 9.30 at car park on Baldrys Road where Main Creek crosses road. Mel 254 G6	David Ap-Thomas	9787 6691 0429939036
Wed 9 Aug	9.30	Gordon Rolfe Reserve Somerville	Meet 9.30 at gate in Yaringa Road off Whitneys Road from either Bungower or Pikes Roads. Mel 149 J8	TBA	0429947893
Sun 20 Aug	9.30	Peninsula Gardens Bushland Reserve	Meet 9.30 at entrance in Jetty Road. Mel 170 H10	TBA	0429947893
Wed 13 Sep	9.00	Braeside Park Braeside	Meet 9.00 at car park off Governor Road near corner of Springvale Road. Mel 93 F2	Max Burrows	0429947893
Sun 17 Sep	9.00	Buckley Reserve Merricks North	Meet 9.00 at corner of Balnarring Road and Myers Road. Mel 162 H7	TBA	0429947893
Wed 11 Oct	9.00	Tootgarook Wetlands	Meet 9.00 at car park equestrian centre, entrance off Boneo Road after Rosebud Country Club and before Browns Road. Mel 170 A9	David Ap-Thomas	9787 6691 0429939036
Sun 22 Oct	9.00	What Bird is That, The Briars Visitor Centre Nepean Highway Mt Martha	Meet in car park 9.00. Activities include bird walks, displays, information table, theatre presentation and morning tea and a chat. All welcome. Mel 145 E12	Max Burrows	0429947893
Wed 8 Nov	9.00	TBA			
Sun 19 Nov	9.00	Western Treatment Plant, Werribee	Meet 7.00 at the Baxter Tavern car park; enter off Baxter/Tooradin Road. We will proceed in convoy to the plant. Bookings (to Max) essential. Mel 107 B4	John Barkla Max Burrows	0417382966 0429947893
Sun 26 Nov	9.00	Christmas outing	Details in next newsletter.		
Wed 13 Dec	9.00	TBA			

SEAFORD WETLANDS, SEAFORD

Max Burrows: Wednesday 8 February

Species recorded: 47

"Did anyone see a Snipe?"

"Did anyone see a Snipe?" asked Max with a grin at bird call, the finale to a very warm morning's activity.

The expected top temperature was to be 34 degrees (it actually got to 36), as we set off expectantly for the Seaford Wetlands. After the recent rains there were generous levels of water in the swamp and perhaps some interesting bird sightings.



Latham's Snipe. Photo by Tim Van Leeuwen

As the morning drew to a close and the breeze was quickly warming up, we sat on the grass in the shade for bird call. "Snipe. Did anyone see a snipe?" A genteel chuckle went through the group. Did we ever! On the track to the west of the viewing platform (which was inaccessible as it had been badly burnt by vandals), we had watched many small groups of Latham's Snipe bursting skywards from the reeds, and dropping down to forage briefly in the mud before disappearing into the swamp grasses. Seemingly invisible, their camouflage perfect. Rising up and dropping down is part of both courting display and territorial defence. However, breeding occurs in Japan in the Northern summer.

A couple of estimates put the numbers at over twenty birds, many of them not more than 70 metres in front of us. With a quick phone call, Sean Dooley was consulted on the numbers and he said that the greatest number that he was aware of in recent years was about twenty-five birds at any one time. Forty or fifty years ago it would not have been unusual to encounter up to four hundred Latham's Snipe. Over some ten or fifteen minutes, we all clearly picked up their distinctive markings – pale belly with bold black, brown and white patterning of the upper body, and long straight bill. A memorable birding moment indeed.

Further along the trail, there were several sightings of Golden-headed Cisticola, with just a trace remaining of their breeding plumage; Australian Reed-Warblers heard and seen clinging to the reeds; a pair of White-necked Herons, one still immature as its neck was not completely white; a flock of White-faced Herons flapping laboriously overhead; several Australian Pelicans gliding gracefully high above us; White-plumed Honeyeater; a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike; the high pitched whistle of a Crested Shrike-tit was heard, not the usual cackle and bark ripping noises, and was eventually spotted – an unusual one for this area; Royal Spoonbills were seen earlier in the day; and the re-appearance of a raptor overhead during bird call – an Australian Hobby.

Most of the group departed after bird call to escape the midday heat, but some who stayed for lunch were able to witness a pair of Swamp Harriers, a female and a darker juvenile harassing unseen waterfowl towards the centre of the wetlands. The Magpie-larks clearly nervous took to the near-by trees, ignoring our proximity, whilst the raptors wheeled and swooped for several minutes. We do not think they were successful in their hunt.

The total bird count was forty-seven. An exciting and enjoyable morning of birding. Many thanks to all who attended.

Barbara Goldfinch, Lilydale

FLINDERS BEACH MUSHROOM REEF

Penny Johns: Sunday 19 February

Species recorded: 13

Fifteen members arrived at an overcast Flinders beach with sunny breaks and a high tide submerging a good part of the reef.

Our leader Penny set up on the stairway landing and we immediately saw a Sooty Oystercatcher right in front and a group of Kelp Gulls both adults and juveniles. Further down



Captivated by the Latham's Snipe show. Photo by Danny Vits



Australian Reed-Warbler, Seaford Wetlands. Photo by Tim Van Leeuwen



Overlooking mangroves at Blind Bight. Photo by Danny Vits

the beach a large gathering of birds including Silver Gulls, Crested Terns and a Great Cormorant whilst overhead a Pied Cormorant headed out to the wild looking surf, which on inspection we spotted a large flight of Short-tailed Shearwaters.

In the car park the birdlife was active with Singing Honeyeaters calling, Little Wattlebirds and Spotted Doves were flying around and then the weather turned ugly, the rain drove us into our cars to sit and wait? The rain continued and with no break visible we decided to head home. Thank you to Penny for leading us, however brief.

Max Burrows, Langwarrin

BLIND BIGHT COASTAL PARK

Susan Clark: Wednesday 8 March

Species recorded: 47

A stunning morning greeted the twenty-two attendees as we pulled into the car park next to the boat ramp at Blind Bight. The clear blue sky, a couple of wispy clouds, sunlight bouncing off the water in the Bight, surrounding mangroves and flitting birds got us in the mood for a morning walk and bird watching.

Our bird count got off to a cracking start in the car park with Yellow-faced and White-eared Honeyeaters. These were present for the entire walk. Welcome Swallows flitted around the boat ramp, a White-faced Heron flew over, there were plenty of Silver Gulls, a Golden Whistler, a Little Pied Cormorant perched high on a dead branch, several Noisy Miners and a lovely Grey Butcherbird calling.

First stop was the elevated viewing platform overlooking the mangroves and the Bight. Pacific Gulls including a juvenile flew past. On the shoreline of the nearby pond we had good views of Australian White Ibis, Royal Spoonbill (one limping) another White-faced Heron, many Silver Gulls and some Common Myna.

The main path through the bushland reserve containing short trees with plenty of dead branches and lots of bracken made for a bird's paradise and there were birds aplenty. We quickly saw many Noisy Miners, Red Wattlebirds, Spotted Doves, Grey Fantails and heard Masked Lapwing flying overhead. Detouring to look over the fence at another pond in a paddock, we had close views of several perky Striated Pardalotes on a telephone pole. On the pond were Grey and Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Eurasian Coot and a reported Hardhead. Other sightings were a Crested Pigeon on the pond bank, a Black-faced Cuckoo shrike perched on a fence post before taking off, a Spotted Dove on a dead tree was joined briefly by a Superb Fairy-wren then by an Eastern Rosella, and several Common Starling flitting. Two Rainbow Lorikeets, lit up by the sun, flew over, making a stunning sight. Magpies were calling beautifully and Magpie-lark hopped about.

Back on the main path an Australian Raven, calling, flew low overhead. We heard White-browed Scrubwren calling in the bracken and eventually some saw one in a tree. Spotted Pardalote were heard and some saw them. More Striated Pardalotes were on the branches of a dead tree and we watched them for several minutes before an exciting interruption by three Mistletoebirds trying to chase the Pardalotes away! Some saw a Brown Goshawk overhead, and we all had a good view of a juvenile Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

At bird call we added New Holland Honeyeater, Common Bronzewing, White-plumed Honeyeater, Grey Shrike-thrush and Silvereye to the day's list.

A wonderful outing was had by all and this first-timer with the Mornington Peninsula group enjoyed the friendly atmosphere.

Thanks to Susan for leading us. The Blind Bight Foreshore Reserve should be on everyone's list for a great bird walk.

Danika Sanderson, Box Hill North



Following the leader. Photos by Pam Hearn



On the trail. Photo by Danny Vits

FRANKSTON NATURE CONSERVATION RESERVE

Neil Shelley: Sunday 19 March

Species recorded: 27

On a warm to hot Sunday morning thirteen members assembled in the car park of the reserve. Lucy Allinson from the Mornington Shire attended and gave a talk on her role as lead person in the Shires Climate Ready campaign to the assembled group. This campaign is intended to inform the public of actions they can take to ameliorate the affects of climate change on their personal circumstance.

Neil alerted us to a pair of Tawny Frogmouths in an adjacent tree, a good start to the day. We walked to the reservoir wall and a plethora of birds greeted us; Blue-billed Ducks, Hardhead, Pacific Black Duck, Musk Duck and Australian Wood Duck were all prominent as well as Eurasian Coot, Silver Gull, Little Pied Cormorant, Pied Cormorant and a party of Superb Fairy-wrens bathing in the shallows. We headed for the heathland and saw the usual suspects Grey Fantail, Grey Butcherbird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater and New Holland Honeyeater. Parrots were scarce on the day only a sole Eastern Rosella and Rainbow Lorikeets flying overhead.

With the weather hotting up we adjourned for bird call under a shady tree and then dispersed. Thanks to Neil for leading us on the day.

Max Burrows, Langwarrin

LANGWARRIN FLORA & FAUNA RESERVE, LANGWARRIN

Max Burrows: Sunday 16 April

Species recorded: 37

Easter Sunday and seventeen birders gathered at this very treed area on a fine but overcast morning. Birds were scarce, except for White-eared and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, for the first 500 metres along the bisecting road of the reserve.

A flock of approximately thirty Spotted Pardalotes got our attention and the area also revealed Grey Shrike-thrush, Eastern Rosella, Grey Currawong and New Holland Honeyeater. Birding continued in a sporadic manner with honeyeaters being the exception as they appeared to be everywhere. A flock of Little Black Cormorants flew close and Dusky Woodswallows were evident when we were looking skywards.

As we turned into a denser, scrubby area, mixed feeding flocks were evident. They consisted of Brown and Striated Thornbill, Silvereye, Spotted Pardalote and Grey Fantail. Also seen were Grey Shrike-thrush and Golden Whistler.

Meandering our way back to the car park, the vegetation became less dense and the birdlife changed to include White-naped and Brown-headed Honeyeater, Superb Fairy-wren and Flame and Eastern Yellow Robin. In the final 3-400 metres we were delighted to watch three Mistletoebirds at close range and the resident Brown Goshawk who flushed from his perch and showed us his aerial ability.

Albeit poor light for most of the morning, it was an easy walk with thirty-seven species recorded. Photographers however, did not have a good morning.

Graeme Horskins, Glen Waverley

BALBIROORO COMMUNITY WETLANDS, BALNARRING

Danny Vits: Wednesday 12 April

Species recorded: 57

What a perfect day it was for the outing to the Balbirooro Wetlands; sunny and warm, hardly a cloud in the sky. Twenty-four people enjoyed the outing and we recorded fifty-seven species of bird; an amazing number.

The highlight was undoubtedly the twenty-five (at least) Freckled Ducks. Some were sitting on the bank snoozing with heads tucked under wings but a number were swimming around and showing off their plumage and square heads. A few had the red on the face showing that they were males in breeding plumage.

Over on the far side of the lake were a couple of male Blue-billed Ducks with their blue bills easily seen. Australasian Shoveler, Pacific Black Duck, Grey and Chestnut Teal made up the total of seven duck species.

Both species of small grebe were in good numbers. Australasian Grebes were on our side of the lake showing off



Rainbow Lorikeet enlarging the very tight hollow in the trunk entrance at Langwarrin. Photo by Danny Vits



Male Freckled Duck at Balbirooro. Photo by Con Duyvestyn

their yellow face marking whilst the Hoary-headed Grebes with their more upright stance were over on the far side. There were lots of Purple Swamphens, Dusky Moorhens and Eurasian Coot foraging in the grass. The young moorhens and young coots were hard to differentiate at times. An Eastern Great Egret was standing high in a tree on the far side of the lake and a Little Pied Cormorant circled round overhead gaining altitude until it was hard to see. Black-fronted Dotterels and Masked Lapwings completed the list of birds around the lake.

Bush birds were quiet at first but soon found their voices. Superb Fairy-wrens skittered around and Grey Fantails hawked for insects over the bushes. A Shining Bronzecuckoo was briefly heard. We sorted out the many Brown Thornbills and a small party of Striated Thornbills and saw (and heard) Spotted Pardalotes with the males in bright breeding colours. The Golden Whistlers were easy to hear but difficult to see but we had good looks at a Grey Shrike-thrush. Eventually we had a co-operative Eastern Yellow Robin perched on the side of a tree.

Yellow-faced, White-eared, White-naped and New Holland Honeyeaters all made their presences heard but the Eastern Spinebill was surprisingly quiet. Both Red and Little Wattlebirds were seen and heard.

The total of fifty-seven species was very good for this time of year and it is interesting to see so much activity among the birds when they are supposed to be settling down for winter.

Thanks Danny Vits for a most enjoyable outing and your excellent leadership. We all had a great time.

David Ap-Thomas, Mt Eliza

RETURN OF FRECKLED DUCK, RED-KNEED DOTTEREL, RED-NECKED AVOCET AND FLAME ROBINS AT ETP

26 February 2017: Excavation to remove the build-up of silt and associated phragmites beds in Effluent Holding Basins 3 to 6 has commenced with rows of spoil ready for transportation to tip sites. An area adjacent NE corner of SEHB is the first to be utilised. Green algal mats cover parts of the surface of the Forebay and EHB 1 & 2; the deep water areas.

Seventy-five bird species were logged of which forty-one were wetland dependant, (eight shorebirds), seven were raptors and twenty-seven were non-wetland dependant. Variety and abundance of waterbirds has risen considerably.

Of special note were our first Freckled Ducks (2) for over a year, 320 Pink-eared Ducks, 510 Hoary-headed Grebes, and a large influx of Eurasian Coots, 6,400 being counted. Red-kneed Dotterels are back after an absence of many months and our first Intermediate Egret for several years. Other highlights were two White-bellied Sea-Eagles, two Wedge-tailed Eagles, and a Mistletoebird that was heard but not seen. This is a rare bird on the Plant, there being only a handful of records.

Yellow-billed Spoonbills have hatched three young in the nest being constructed last month at the Donut. A White-necked Heron was at Golden Triangle.

19 March 2017: Seventy-one bird species were logged of which forty-two were wetland dependant, (eleven shorebirds), six were raptors and twenty-three were non-wetland dependant. Variety and abundance of shorebirds has risen considerably.

Of special note is the increasing numbers of Grey Teal (1,400 today), Red-kneed Dotterels (130) the return of Red-necked Avocets (7) Double-banded Plovers (3) and our first Whiskered Terns (2 newly fledged young passing through) for this summer! Numbers of Red-necked Stints (75) and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (110) are the largest so far this summer. The three young Yellow-billed Spoonbills reared in the nest at the Donut are now well grown and it looks as though another pair may be building a nest.

23 April 2017: Seventy-four bird species were logged of which thirty-four were wetland dependant, (only five were shorebirds), ten were raptors and thirty were non-wetland dependant. Variety and abundance of shorebirds has plummeted partly because Palearctic breeding waders have migrated and WEHB is now flooded leaving a shortage of muddy and shallow water and habitat.

Highlights included three White-bellied Sea-eagles and two Wedge-tailed Eagles on the same day and our first Buff-banded Rail for several months was at Golden Triangle. Flame Robins have returned for their winter sojourn at the ETP, the resident pair of Whistling Kites has at least one chick in their nest at the Donut and a second pair of Yellow-billed Spoonbills has built a nest in a different tree at the Donut.

Mike Carter, Mornington



Pink-eared Duck skimming the surface to feed on the Forebay.



Yellow-billed Spoonbill at nest with three young at the Donut.



Red-kneed Dotterels on the WEHB. Photos by Andrew McCutcheon



Flame Robins (this is female or juvenile male) have returned to overwinter at the ETP. Photo by Alison Kuitert

JUVENILE WHITE-NECKED HERONS AT BANYAN

5 February 2017: Forty-two species were recorded of which twenty-seven are wetland-dependent or raptors, an increase of eleven since December. Wetland birds have also increased in abundance. The highlights were the sudden appearance of 470 Eurasian Coots and six White-necked Herons, five of which were juveniles.

13 March 2017: Forty-six species were recorded of which twenty-nine are wetland-dependent or raptors, increases of four and two respectively since February. The highlights were the return of Eastern Great Egrets after an absence of several months, an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle and two Wedge-tailed Eagles.

16 April 2017: Disappointingly, it now seems evident that Banyan will remain inundated throughout the year. Fifty species were recorded of which twenty-seven are wetland-dependent or raptors. Highlights included a Red-necked Avocet, a Red-kneed Dotterel and the return of Flame Robins and Cattle Egrets.

ROYAL SPOONBILLS AT BOGGY CREEK

5 February 2017: Twenty-five bird species (eighteen of which were wetland dependant or raptors) were logged here today. Highlights included nineteen Royal Spoonbills, an exceptional number, five Australian Pelicans and a White-necked Heron. Four Eurasian Coots which are uncommon here especially in recent times were also seen.

13 March 2017: Thirty-one bird species (nineteen of which are wetland dependant or raptors) were logged here today. Highlights included an adult White-bellied Sea Eagle, a Wedge-tailed Eagle and ninety-four Eurasian Coots, normally uncommon here. The Australian Reed Warblers and Fairy Martins have apparently flown north for the winter.

16 April 2017: Seventeen bird species (fourteen of which are wetland dependant or raptors) were logged here today. The Black Swans nest shown in last month's report has been inundated and abandoned with the eggs left exposed on the sodden nest.

NO GOOD HABITAT AT SERPENTINE

5 February 2017: No good wader feeding habitat available. All sludge pans are full with dry sludge. Twenty-three species of birds were logged of which thirteen were wetland dependant or raptors.

13 March 2017: Twenty-eight species of birds were logged of which fourteen are wetland dependant or raptors. Waterfowl have increased.

16 April 2017: Thirty-nine species of birds were logged of which sixteen are wetland dependant or raptors. Wetland birds have increased in diversity but decreased in abundance. Flame Robins are back.

Mike Carter, Mornington



Little Pied Cormorants, pair of Chestnut Teal and a Pacific Black Duck at Boggy Creek.



Some of the nineteen Royal Spoonbills, an exceptional number, at Boggy Creek. Photos by Mike Carter



Eurasian Tree Sparrow on left (first record for this site) and House Sparrow (adult male) at Serpentine. Photo by Alison Kuitert



Common Sandpiper at the ETP Supernatant Holding Basins. Photo by Andrew McCutcheon

MORNINGTON RIDE

On a perfect summer's day - not too hot with a refreshing breeze, we set out early for a day of birding.

The first stop was The Briars. We ambled along to the Chechingurk Bird Hide where we watched a pair of Magpie-larks sporting on the window ledge, the male trying to fend off his own reflection in the glass. We were able to get close up views of the facial differences between the sexes - the black-faced male and the white faced female. As Geoff Deason has said to us, the male never washes his face so it is black, the female washes hers clean. We watched a pair of swans, but saw no sign of the fledged cygnets mentioned by the ranger.

A male Superb Fairy-wren with female entourage played on the nearby muddy bank. Suddenly a raptor appeared over the tree line, circling closer, we could see its white rump. It targeted the far end of the pond and with talons drawn, down it swooped. We feared for the Australasian Grebe nestlings. The Swamp Harrier, aborting its strike, wheeled and disappeared behind the trees, only to be seen moments later doing a rapid clip southwards, climbing rapidly, pursued and harassed by two much smaller birds (unidentified).

We admired the reflections in the pond and then walked to the lookout, completing the circuit back to the Ranger's Hut. We had good sightings of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Red Wattlebirds, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas, Grey Fantails, White-browed Scrubwrens, Silvereyes and a White-faced Heron.

Our next stop was the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery to view the exhibition entitled "Flight Paths in Australian Art". This was comprised of photographs, paintings, prints, sculptures and even tea-towels depicting various birds in various states of life and death in European style and aboriginal.

Several well know artists were exhibited - Arthur Boyd's "Lovers in a Boat at Hastings" with a menacing, elongated swan flying over them; Albert Tucker with two paintings, dark, but not as dark as some of his work; a stylized Bret Whitely print in blue and white of a large bird (species unknown) floating on stormy waves; Hans Heysen's "Bronzewings and Saplings", a typical Heysen scene, but the Bronzewings were not of the Common variety but were in fact turkeys; Brook Andrew's "Parrot", a mirror image of taxidermied rainbow lorikeets, very much larger than life, looking absolutely terrifying with their big pointed bills and bulging dark eyes.

Two works particularly took our interest - John Wolseley's work in his familiar style of naturalism depicting Mallee scrub with a precisely drawn "Embroidered Merops" and a "Spinifex Grasswren"; Martin King's "Green Mist Black" depicting the 1932 one shilling lyre bird stamp, with the word "postage" changed to "hostage", "Lyre Bird" changed to "Lyar Bird" and quirkily, the insertion of a couple of human skulls into the bird's tail feathers; and the best Leila - Jeffreys' Gang Gang Cockatoo. We had hoped to avoid seeing their advertising photo of a budgie in a girl's mouth as it smacked of sensationalism. But it hit you in the eye when you walked in. We had to give it some credit however as the message apparently is that not only are we consuming birds (chooks, ducks, turkeys, think Christmas), but that we are also devouring bird habitat. A worthy theme but did it have to be so confrontational? In all quite thought-provoking.



Superb Fairy-wren.



Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Photos by George Sawenko



Martin King, Green Mist Black, 2014;
Penny Byrne, Jake and Errol - Melbourne Museum, Bower Birds, 2011.
Photos from MPRG Facebook page

Our last stop was the main street of Mornington to look over the Wednesday market and to find the all important lunch establishment. We eschewed the trendy smashed avocado and feta facilities, opting for a pub meal. Delicious with a glass of red.

With apologies to The Seekers!

Barbara Goldfinch, Lilydale

PALE-VENTED BUSH-HENS 7 VS COCKRAM TWITCHERS 0.5

On Boxing Day we set off in our small campervan for Cairns and from there flew to Lockhart River/Iron Range on Cape York Peninsula with Chook and Traci Crawford, Close-Up Birding Adventures. With a lot of hard work and a good deal of luck we managed views of Red-bellied Pitta, Yellow-billed Kingfisher, Frilled Monarch, Green-backed Honeyeater, Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher, Yellow-legged Flycatcher and a Fawn-breasted Bowerbird whose bower was the best we'd ever seen; stick ramps at each end decorated with fresh bunches of green berries with the bower itself stained red with freshly squeezed berry juice.

Peter also saw a Northern Scrub-robin and a male teenage Magnificent Riflebird (a mixture of black and brown splotches) while Lisa had good views of a Marbled Frogmouth and a black-winged Monarch. At the Lockhart sewerage pond there was one only lonely Spotted Whistling-Duck – a lifetime tick for us. High fives all round. On Mt. Lewis Road, Julatten we dipped on Blue-face Parrot-Finches but saw a large Tree Kangaroo sitting right above the road nonchalantly munching leaves.

We drove 18km of narrow twisting road up the Paluma Range only to find Ivy Cottage closed but we had two wonderful experiences. A Noisy Pitta flying along the road, a darkened tunnel through the rain forest, its wing patches flashing like neon light and secondly hearing a chowchilla calling at close quarters with a volume like a lyrebird on steroids.

On the trip up we naturally stopped at Tyto Wetlands, Ingham. Within two metres of our legally parked van was a Bush Stone-curlew beside a nest with two eggs. On the return journey we again stopped at the wetlands to check on progress, but the Curlew sat tightly on her nest. We could only hypothesise that the eggs had hatched. On one of the pathways there we came across a section of two to four metres of track covered with thousands of baby cane toads. We wondered whether the Black-necked Storks and Egrets taught themselves not to eat these toads. North of Emerald we unexpectedly came upon a field of approximately 200 Brolga in small groups some of which were dancing.

The unanimous highlight of our trip occurred at Marlborough, a dot of a town north of Maryborough, Queensland. A pair of Torresian Crows was feeding a fledged Channel-billed Cuckoo. The young cuckoo's pure white head, neck and breast contrasting with the black of the crows. While this was going on, Lisa was taken with a Forest Kingfisher feeding his mate in a tree termite nest.

Why did we subject ourselves to hoards of hungry mosquitoes and energy sapping heat and humidity? Of course to try for the eighth time to tick the Pale-vented Bush-hen! The Tablelands Caravan Park at Julatten bordered a huge field of metre high green grass. At first light we set up our chairs at the junction of high and cut grass and waited. Half an hour later a Bush-hen silently ventured out of the high grass. We scrambled to raise our binoculars and the alarmed Bush-hen vanished. In the five seconds that the bird was visible we ID'd it. We'd obviously set up too close to the high grass and also didn't move slowly and quietly. The next morning before dawn we again set up but this time much further back, but, of course, the Bush-hen didn't show. At Atherton we set up very early on a long straight road at



Papuan Pitta (Red-bellied Pitta).



Yellow-legged Flycatcher.



Yellow-billed Kingfisher. Photos by Andrew Browne

Hastie's Swamp with high grass both sides. Naturally the Bush-hen didn't show but at least we saw 20 to 30 Wandering Whistling-Ducks on the swamp which is now mostly covered with reeds and has very little open water.

We had learned from the Internet of a very rare sighting of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper

So on the last day of our trip we diverted to Lake Murdeduke near Winchelsea, Victoria. We were very fortunate to find the bird and so finished with another life time tick. On our trip we saw a total of 272 different species and three lifetime ticks.

Ah, the life of obsessed twitchers.

Peter Cockram, Blairgowrie

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

These reports, some from Birdline Victoria, are not authenticated records. Researchers are advised to check with the observers before citing. Please report your sightings, for example arrival and departure dates of migrants, to Val Ford: 5981 1445 or fordandred@gmail.com

Date	Species	Location	Comments	Observer
6.2.17	White-necked Heron (1)	Hastings Foreshore Reserve	Our first sighting in 20 years of observing at this site.	S & S King
7.2.17	Cape Barren Goose (3)	Dromana	At dam beside freeway near Range Road.	Marianne Punshon
11.2.17	Buff-banded Rail (3)	Tootgarook	Two adults, one chick at Tootgarook Wetland Reserve.	Stephan Megroz
17.2.17	White-throated Needletail (45)	Rye ocean beach	Two smaller birds seen in the flock; too quick for definite ID.	Colin Mulvogue
22.2.17	Olive-backed Oriole	Main Ridge	Nesting in car park at Baldrys Crossing.	Keith Caldecott
4.3.17	Australian Spotted Crake (2)	Hastings Foreshore Reserve	And a possible Lewin's Rail. From boardwalk behind motel.	S and S King
5.3.17	Powerful Owl (1)	The Briars, Mt Martha	In the north east corner of the Wildlife Sanctuary.	Stacey Lethlean
11.3.17	White-throated Needletail (4)	Capel Sound	Flying over Village Glen retirement village.	Val Ford
14.3.17	Blue-billed Duck (1) Hardhead (4) Australian Shelduck (2)	Tuerong	On a private dam.	Danny Vits
18.3.17	Satin Flycatcher (1, f or imm)	Capel Sound	In eucalypts at Village Glen retirement village.	Val Ford
20.3.17	Australasian Shoveler (1, f)	The Briars	Seen from Boonoorong Hide.	Danny Vits
23.3.17	Cape Barron Goose (54)	McKirdys Road Tyabb	Regularly seen at this location during March-April.	Dennis Gosper
25.3.17	Powerful Owl (3)	Flinders	Two adults and a juvenile roosting in King Street.	Per Penny Johns
27.3.17	Black Kite (2)	Old Tyabb	Hovering in northerly winds. First time seen at this location.	S & S King
2.4.17	Australian Raven (1)	Langwarrin	Overflying Parkvalley Crescent. Identified by call.	Max Burrows
2.4.17	Black Kite (1)	Tyabb	At Gordon Rolfe Reserve, Perched and flying; good views.	Keith Caldecott
13.4.17	Flame Robin (2, m)	Langwarrin	On Centre Break at Flora and Fauna Reserve.	Lee Denis
13.4.17	Cattle Egret (12+)	Somerville	At Inghams in Grants Road.	Max Burrows
13.4.17	White-headed Pigeon (1, m)	Red Hill South	On a seat beneath our berry covered Washington thorn tree.	Andy McLeish
14.4.17	Powerful Owl (1)	Shoreham	At Iluka Girl Guide Camp Site (restricted access).	Scott Chandry
19.4.17	Yellow Thornbill (7)	Blairstown	Enjoying my bird bath.	Bob Dunball
23.4.17	Varied Sittella (4)	Greens Bush		Roger Skipsey
24.4.17	Powerful Owl (1)	Bittern	Hunting ringtail possums whilst we enjoyed a pre dinner drink.	Penny Gillespie
3.5.17	Flame Robin (1,f)	No 16 beach	On the cliffs.	Lois Greene

Corellas take over neighbourhood trees

Mornington residents have become quite accustomed to seeing large numbers of Little Corellas taking over neighbourhood trees and leaving them in tatters, the ground below covered in shredded leaves and the remains of any fruits that may have been on the trees.

In our street we have a considerable number of Manchurian Pear trees, a decorative pear which does not normally set much fruit. However, this season these trees had a much heavier fruiting than usual, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the marauding corellas. On a number of mornings a number of them visited early to feast on the small pears. But they limited the number of days of visiting, it seems that they are smart enough to not establish a pattern recognisable by possible predators, and they did not make a return visit, despite the presence of an ample supply of remaining fruit.

Con Duyvestyn, Mornington



Little Corella feeding on Manchurian Pears. Photo by Con Duyvestyn

Birding at the Village Glen

White-necked Heron at golf course lake

As expected, the forecast high temperature on the day of the February walk kept a few regular residents away. However, thirty-seven species were identified. Swamp Harriers and an Australian Hobby were the only raptors seen, but a small group of pelicans was noted cruising in thermals over Browns Road way to the south.

Increasingly dry conditions in the swamp are forcing numbers of Purple Swampheens onto gardens and lawns searching for more tender grass, rushes etc. Swampheens can be aggressive towards other species. In a park along the upper Yarra I once watched an adult swamphen attack and kill a tiny Pacific Black Duck, which was ripped to pieces and fed to its own offspring.

Golfers will have noted the flock of Australian White Ibis habitually resting around the golf course lake, sitting atop posts. Rather unsightly and often soiled, maybe due to its habit of feeding at the tip, plus a long decurved bill which isn't able to effectively groom its feathers, this bird is an Australian native and, therefore, a protected species. This ibis has benefited greatly from our pastures, farm dams etc.

Photographed by Jeanette on 16 February at the golf course lake was this most attractive White-necked Heron. Not a newcomer to the village, this bird is a bit of a "loner" and about 30 cm larger than the more common White-faced Heron. The "headlights" on the bend of the wing in the flying bird and the spots on the sides of the neck are a noticeable feature.

Spotless Crake, Hoary-headed Grebe and Satin Flycatcher

Our March walk was very successful with forty-five species being identified by thirteen birders during the walk along Chinamans Creek to the Clubhouse. The highlight was a Spotless Crake. We detoured briefly to overlook Tootgarook swamp but recent dry conditions meant only Golden-headed Cisticolas and Little Grassbirds were noteworthy and no raptors were sighted.

In the last weeks of March there were two additions to the ever-growing list of village birds: a Hoary-headed Grebe seen by Val at the golf course lake, who also saw a Satin Flycatcher close to her villa. The Village list now numbers a very credible 107 species.

Frisky black ducks and a possible greenfinch

The April bird walk took place in excellent conditions - sunny and calm which meant birds were easy to spot and thirty-four species were identified. Although we spent 20 minutes surveying the swamp, no raptors were sighted which was unusual, however we were distracted by small bird, perhaps the size of a sparrow, with greenish frontal colouring, glimpsed in the gently waving "aniseed". First thoughts were that it could have been a Common Greenfinch but it was too distant for definite identification. At the golf course a pair of Pacific Black Ducks was displaying in the channel and Ian's sharp ears picked up the call of Crescent Honeyeaters south of the 6th tee.

During April there were two sightings of Mistletoebirds in the village and Nancy and Rex bragged about the Common Bronzewing which regularly visit their garden birdbath.

Celia Browne, Capel Sound



White-necked Heron over golf course lake. Photo by Jeanette Marshall



Hoary-headed Grebe on golf course lake. Photo by Jeanette Marshall;
Spotless Crake at Chinamans Creek. Photo by Marianne Punshon



Plains-wanderer near Terrick Terrick. Photo by Mark Lethlean

Plains-wanderers, Terrick Terrick NP

On 12 April 2017 I went on a private property with researcher David Baker-Gabb and several Bendigo Latrobe students, including my daughter Abby, and their lecturers. We saw five birds, with one male brooding at least two chicks. David considered this an amazingly successful night. I think having several pairs of young eyes spotting from the back of a ute was very helpful in finding the birds.

Since 2010 there has been a 90% decline in the population of Plains-wanderers in the NSW Riverina and Northern Victoria. To learn more, a great article is "Haunting the Fields" in the September 2015 edition of the Australian Birdlife magazine.

Mark Lethlean, Red Hill

Long-billed Corellas

Just letting you know we saw a six of these birds chewing up the grass at Beauty Park in Frankston. Two were on the ground, and four flew in to the palm tree above.

Identified them using page 135 of Field Guide Birds of Australia by Ken Simpson. It is a Long billed (slender-billed) Corella. It is further south than the distribution map indicates.

Narelle Debenham, Frankston

Ravens attacking swans

While on a visit to Swan Lake on Philip Island in early February, we witnessed an event that we have never heard of, or would think not possible.

There were several groups of four or five Black Swan cygnets browsing on the dried out part of the lake, which were in the grey to black stage, so the size of an adult bird. There were adult birds on the water around 50 metres away and also Cape Barren Geese close to the cygnets.

There were a small number of Little Ravens present of which two, working together singled out, and attacked one of the cygnets, one jumping on its back and grabbing its wings, and the other trying to keep it from getting near the water by pecking its head.

The swan could only try and stay upright and head for the water, collapsing three times, appearing to get weaker each time, the last time being down for around 20 seconds which looked as though that was the end of it, however, it seemed to find the energy for one last push to cover the last 20 metres or so to the water with the ravens continuing the attack all the way. Once in the water the ravens gave up.

There were four other carcasses of birds the same age and size, on which there were other ravens feeding, which I believe to be earlier victims. All the time it was going on, none of the adult swans or the Cape Barren Geese seemed to be interested in helping the unfortunate bird out.

We followed up on the observation with Deakin University researcher Laura Tan who responded "Pretty amazing observation! According to Mike Weston the size of prey is unusually large; we have published reports of raven hunting and killing adult shorebirds, but not swans".

Keith Caldecott and **Jeff Maltman**, Somerville

Bird invasion

The Moonah have finally bloomed where we live in Blairgowrie. Today, 13 February, we have been invaded by Brown Thornbills, Silvereye, Eastern Spinebill and Grey Fantail. All buzzing around together, totally interacting with each other. I would say collectively about thirty plus birds.

Actually had three spinebills around the bird bath at the same time. And of course the Grey Fantails seem to be making it more of a game by chasing each other than any serious eating. What a sight.

Sadly no Lorikeets. They just keep flying overhead.

Malcolm Barrow, Blairgowrie



Long-billed Corella at Beauty Park. Photo by Narelle Debenham



Raven attacking cygnet. Photos by Jeff Maltman



Striated Pardalote near power pole holes. Photo by Pam Hearn

Nesting in power poles

Regarding the Striated Pardalote photographed near a power pole hole by Pam Hearn on the Devilbend outing. The pardalote most likely has a nest in the horizontal cross member of the power pole, using the small round holes to enter and exit. I have seen them doing this elsewhere in Victoria and also in South Australia.

I contacted the South Australian power company about this and they said that the smaller holes were specifically designed to allow the entry of smaller native bird species and exclude larger introduced species.

Neil Shelley, Mornington

Rosellas sucking ends of flowers

We have a butterfly bush in our garden which is attracting a pair of Eastern Rosellas. They have stripped the tree of flowers this week, sucking the ends of the flowers like we used to do as kids with honeysuckle flowers. Nectar is listed in their diet. The bush is now seventeen years old and we have had easterns around all that time and this is the first time we have witnessed it. Image is not super clear as taken through glass window and at full zoom.

We have almost an acre of land with a seventeen year old garden that has native and exotic plants. Little Wattlebirds, Noisy Miners, Australian Magpies, Spotted Doves, Common Blackbirds, Grey Butcherbird, Eastern Rosellas, White-browed Scrubwrens and Brown Thornbills are permanent residents. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Little Ravens, Eastern Spinebills, Galahs, Grey Fantails are regulars. Crimson Rosellas and Australian King-Parrots come and go.

Rainbow Lorikeets and Musk Lorikeets are around when our flowering gums are in season. Pardalotes, Common Bronzewing, Buff-banded Rail, Turquoise Parrot, Swift Parrot are among our rarest sightings in our garden. Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos prune our banksias in the spring time. Australian White Ibis fly over regularly and Wedge-tailed Eagles fly overhead at times as well as some other birds of prey we haven't identified although we think Nankeen Kestrel and maybe Brown Falcon.

We used to have Superb Fairy-wrens but they disappeared when a new neighbour moved in with two cats!

Faye and Peter Gerdson, Flinders

Western Port Wader Survey

For our 3 December activity we joined with BirdLife Australia for the Western Port Wader Count, which is conducted three times a year. It was a cool still day, perfect for counting waders, and our members split into three groups to cover the three main wader roosts.

Our group went to Tortoise Head, which involved a walk through the saltmarsh and mangroves to reach the high-tide roost. There were very few birds on the saltmarsh apart from a small number of Black Swans and Australian Shelduck. We arrived well before high tide but nevertheless walked out to the end of the spit and checked what was there.

A small number of Ruddy Turnstones and Red-necked Stints had flown in prior to the high tide. A Caspian Tern flew above us in an agitated manner and we were later to discover a nest containing two eggs. One of the eggs had a hairline crack through it so we were unsure whether the chick was about to hatch or the egg had been damaged. We climbed to the top of Tortoise Head, carefully avoiding Shearwater burrows and snakes, to check the saltmarsh on the other side but again there were very few birds apart from a small number of Pelican and one Swamp Harrier, the only raptor sighting for the day.

Meanwhile the tide had come in and the birds were flying in to the roost. A large flock of 176 Eastern Curlews was counted and 4 Whimbrel were spotted amongst them (thought to be the largest number of the species in many years). The Turnstone and Red-necked Stints had increased in number and a large flock of Crested Terns was recorded.



Eastern Rosella sucking butterfly bush flowers. Photo by Peter Gerdson



Ken Harris at Tortoise Head. Photo by Walter Mitchell

Other species seen were Pied and Little Pied Cormorants, Silver Gull, Pied and Sooty Oystercatcher. Walking back to Tankerton we observed small flocks of White-fronted Chats in the saltmarsh.

Bett Mitchell, FOFI News March 2017

Pardalotes on the move

On 13 March 2017 I observed, through my lounge room window, a flock of about thirty Spotted Pardalotes flying/swirling around for a short time. Then they were gone.

In hindsight I realised that for the previous week Spotted Pardalotes around our villa had been calling incessantly, and increasing in number. I have not heard more than one or two pardalotes since so it looks like they were off on their annual dispersal/migration.

Whilst I had seen Spotted Pardalotes in numbers before the huge numbers I saw at Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve on 26 March 2004, where every bush or shrub had them flying in over or around, is still a vivid memory. On checking my bird list to see if I had recorded numbers I found that I had written "zillions of Spotted Pardalotes".

Val Ford, Capel Sound

Meet the Red-capped Plovers

Feisty Red Caps have managed to prevail this breeding season despite the masses, their off lead dogs, foxes and even a decaying whale carcass. I guess it's all they've known on the Peninsula over summer for many years now.

These beach nesting birds seem very small after monitoring Hooded Plovers, and it takes a little adjustment to spot them after being tuned in to Hooded Plover behaviour.

Red Caps are more common than Hooded Plovers and nest on beaches and inland lakes. Not a great deal is known about their habits. Thus the Red-capped Plover monitoring project is gaining steam. With beach monitors spread over several beaches to monitor the Red Caps most of them settled at Pt Leo, Shoreham and Balnarring on the Peninsula this summer.

The first thing I noticed when monitoring at Pt Leo/Shoreham was that when approaching a nest Red Caps stay on the nest longer than Hooded Plovers. Thus you can get closer to them before they scurry off. This may be due to their size and lack of visibility to us, but we don't really know for sure what they are thinking! They may charge at you if you are too close, and display the distraction tactics that Hooded Plovers do to get you away from the nest. The partner off the nest will lead you away from the nest early, and they may also perform broken wing displays.

Nests are not always easy to find. A couple of nests were most likely in the grasses of the dunes at Pt Leo as two chicks emerged in early January with no nests being noted. These two chicks made it through to fledging during the peak of the Christmas/New Year break and the warm weather of the summer school holidays. Dodging hundreds of dogs and thousands of beach goers they have really beaten the odds.

Red Caps have smaller territories than Hooded Plovers and there can be vociferous territorial disputes. Quite often! We had three pairs nesting across a 150 metre stretch at times. Once eggs have hatched and chicks are on the beach things can become quite communal and the whole group will vigorously protect the chicks from interlopers. Chicks are fluff balls on long legs and take about 35 days to fledge.

Red Caps also change territories more readily than Hooded Plovers and at Pt Leo have moved up and down the beach as they chose. As these Red Caps are not banded it isn't possible to know who is with whom and which territory they usually occupy. The male has a deep red cap and the female a much lighter red cap. Juveniles show little colour and have more mottled feathers. Once chicks are on the beach the Red Caps are moving up and down the beach and it can be a challenge to count them effectively. Throw in anywhere from 12-120+ Red-necked Stints and it becomes very interesting at times!



Just fledged Red-capped Plover at Pt Leo. Photo by Mark Lethlean

As with Hooded Plovers education is very important in our interactions with the public. Most beach walkers, even those with off lead dogs, are interested when you chat with them and explain about the Red Caps and other birds on the beach. Whilst not all compliant with dogs, most comply when near nests and chicks and avoid getting close to birds, nests and chicks. However a chick was taken by a dog right in front of an observer in January. Which was disheartening... The most common question I've been asked on the beach by dog walkers this season is "Why are these birds so stupid? Why do they nest on this beach and try to breed here during the school holidays?" Education is key and with Pt Leo/Shoreham not being part of the Mornington Peninsula National Park dogs both on and off lead have been a major problem for Red Caps and their chicks.

It's been a long season with two chicks on the beach in late March. The highest tides of the year may have claimed them in the last couple of days. Or perhaps a fox. Fox prints were noted where the chicks were last seen.

Three chicks fledged this year at Pt Leo so far. Twenty-two nests, 40 eggs and 10 chicks. At Balnarring 10 nests were recorded, with 19 eggs, 8 chicks and 2 fledglings. Four hundred and 21 surveys were completed across 16 sites with an average of 26 surveys per site. There was an average of one dog per survey with dogs twice as likely to be off lead as on.

It pays to be feisty and it ain't easy but these tough little birds have successfully raised several chicks and are now flocking. With thanks to all who have monitored this season and especially to Mark Lethlean for coordinating the project and training us all.

Andrée Austin, Dromana

Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

birdlife.org.au

Add your voice

join us

Enjoy the rewards of membership, making a real difference for our native birds

volunteer

Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help

donate

Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats