

The Melbirdian

M E L B O C A Newsletter Number 76 Winter 2011

Intrepid “Waders” Tackle Yellingbo



Intersection of Beenak Rd and Macclesfield Rd after heavy rain caused flash flooding. Photo, Maryanne Anderson

Yellingbo Bird Walk – Sunday 6 February 2011

There we were, held back by water flooding across the intersection of Beenak Road and Macclesfield Road.

Well, this is a first! What do we do now? As the familiar cars banked up behind the “road closed” sign not far from the intersection, there were decisions to be made: do we try another route, or do we give up and do something else?

Meanwhile, David Ap-Thomas and his band of intrepid “waders” had arrived at the gate. They had to climb the fence before they could begin the walk down the access road to the depot. David described the situation like this:

“Water is flowing over the bridge

near the depot.

Went for our usual walk but found water flowing over the track where the big tree is horizontal over the lake. Another big tree has now done the same thing.

He went on:

“Retreated back to the depot and went along the fence that runs along the paddocks. Where the vehicle track goes along the fence a lot of water has flowed along the track and then down into a large lake where we look for, but rarely see, the Southern Emu-wren. The low part of the paddock had lots of Wood and Pacific Black Duck swimming around on the lake.

“We could go no further so headed back. Had lunch at the

gate and didn't even have time for a cuppa before rain started and we drove home.

“A fascinating experience seeing all that water. It was even more interesting seeing the mud and debris on bushes which showed how high the water had been.”

A count was duly reported for the day – twenty-four birds – amongst which were a group of four Sacred Kingfisher, Crested Shrike-tit and Mistletoebird.

The stranded group of eight, back at the flooded intersection, decided to make the best of the day by seeking a dryer spot. Sylvan Reservoir was close by and didn't seem to have suffered from the high rainfall as much as Yellingbo and surrounds.

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MELBOCA Branch Meetings: Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 24 May 2011 8:00pm

Atticus Fleming: "A new model for Conservancy – making a difference in the field"

Atticus is Chief Executive of Australian Wildlife Conservancy, which owns 21 sanctuaries around Australia to protect many species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians.

Tuesday 28 June 2011 8:00pm

Marian Weaving: "Frogmouths in the City"

Don't know much about Frogmouths in our urban surrounds? Marion has been doing research on this subject, and we welcome her to share her expertise with us.

Tuesday 26 July 2011 8:00pm

Pat Bingham: "Birding Costa Rica"

An unbeatable combination! John Barkla's photos and Pat Bingham's enthusiastic narrative of a tour to that birding paradise, Costa Rica.

Tuesday 23 August 2011

8:00pm

Bronwyn Merritt: "Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne: bush, birds and bandicoots."

Among her many duties, Bronwyn deals with the management of native animals and birds. We welcome this opportunity to learn more about the Gardens

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

Past Meeting Reports

25 January 2011

John Young greeted the attendees and steered the meeting through its African theme. The first speaker was Jill Wilson, who gave her Member's Choice segment, *A Day in Walvis Bay, Namibia*.

On tour in this arid country, Jill visited one of four wetlands recognised by the Ramsar Convention as having international importance. This is Walvis Bay Wetland, a 12,000 hectare site adjacent to the port area of the city of the same name, which is the main port of Namibia. The wetland has four habitats: lagoon, mudflats, ocean shoreline and salt works, supporting resident birds, migrants from North and Central Africa, and occasional Palearctic migrants. Greater Flamingo were common, also Hartlaub's Gull. Also present were Lesser Flamingo, Pied Avocet, Ruff, as well as Grey, Common Ringed, and Blacksmith Plovers, Cape and White-breasted Cormorants; plus shorebirds familiar in Australia such as Curlew Sandpiper, Kelp Gull, and Back-winged Stilt. It sounds like a great spot in such a dry country.

Leaving Namibia, John introduced a well-known travel identity, Chris Doughty, of Peregrine Bird Tours. Chris has been leading an annual overseas tour for BOCA for the past eight years and in September 2009 he led a tour to Egypt, the Land of the Pharaohs. Besides witnessing the autumn migration in the Nile Valley and seeing local bird species,

Chris included in the itinerary many of the famous ancient monuments.

A map of the world showed the N-S migration routes, and Egypt's position at the south of the Palearctic region. Birds migrate from Northern Europe to North Africa and the Sudan via Gibraltar, Italy or Israel, and it is this last route, going round the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, which uses the fertile Nile Valley.

The tour started in Cairo, the world's most populated city. Approximately 14 million people call Cairo home. The city has spread out as far as the Pyramids, and modern blocks lie cheek-by-jowl with ancient city walls. The first birding area was Lake Qarun, at an oasis to the southwest of Cairo, where they stayed in a flashy hotel on the shore and saw thousands of Slender-billed Gull and the restricted White-throated Kingfisher.

Then it was on to Suez via the Eastern Desert. Lunching, overlooking the busy Suez Canal, they learned that the cost per ship transit is approximately \$200,000. Early morning walks in the hotel garden were always exciting as hundreds of migratory birds arrived every night. The birds were very approachable as they were solely interested in feeding, having lost half their bodyweight.

A tunnel under the Red Sea took them to Sinai, which is very mountainous and

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Apart from light drizzle patches in the morning, the group remained dry for the rest of the day. Although the bird list could not be recorded for the day, notable sight-

ings were: two pairs of Rufous Fantails, Rose Robin, Varied Sittella, Golden Whistler and a very quiet Fantail Cuckoo.

Maryanne Anderson



A day to be remembered — flooding near the corner of Beenak Rd and Macclesfield Rd after heavy rain. Photo, Maryanne Anderson.

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arid. At the Springs of Moses they saw interesting Shrike – Masked, Woodchat and Red-backed. Mt. Sinai is sacred to Judaism, Islam and Christianity and Chris recommends a visit to St. Catherine's Monastery, said to be at the site of the burning bush of Moses. They were surprised at the number of birds here, even rare ones, and achieved Palestine Sunbird, Sinai Rosefinch, Tristram's Starling and Cretzschmar's Bunting. Further south, on the Sinai Peninsular, they visited the water treatment plant at Sharm el Sheikh, where there were thousands of resting White Stork. At Ras Mohammed National Park, at the southern tip of the peninsular, they saw Pallid Harrier, Western Reef-heron, Striated Heron, Levant Sparrowhawk, and flushed a migrating European Nightjar in broad daylight.

The party then traversed the Eastern Desert to Luxor on the Nile. The first visit was to the house Lord Carnarvon occupied at the time Howard Carter discovered the

"It is a manifest truth, especially to any who has seen it, at least if he have understanding, that Egypt is a gift of the Nile"

-- Herodotus, *Histories* (II.5)

tomb of King Tutankhamun. Wheeling above the Valley of the Kings were Buzzards, mainly Eurasian, but also Long-legged and one Honey Buzzard from Europe. After visits to the Temple of Queen Hepsupset and the Temple at Karnak they looked around Luxor, Chris remarking on the number of donkeys still used as the beast of burden; it was here they saw the Namaqua Dove, uncommon in Egypt.

A photograph at Aswan showed the Nile to be a very narrow fertile valley. They

took a boat trip to the First Cataract and saw many birds, including over 20 migrating Little Bittern. At the Aswan High Dam they spotted Rüppell's Warbler. They visited the Temple of Isis at Philae, which was moved by engineers, preventing flooding by the waters retained by the Aswan High Dam. At the southern extremity of Lake Nasser is Abu Simbel, where they visited the two famous temples, which were also moved to avoid being submerged. Here, close to the Sudanese border, they spotted White-

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Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

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crowned Wheatear, Red-footed Falcon, Short-toed Eagle and African Pied Wagtail.

A flight back to Cairo heralded the end of the tour, but first they had to visit the spectacular Egyptian Museum, where Chris recommends spending a full day. The "must see" is the death mask of King Tutankhamun. Another highlight for Chris was seeing rows and rows of ancient boomerangs, dating from long before Aborigines used them. The very last bird of the tour was Common Redstart in the hotel garden in central Cairo. Chris finished with the quotation: the River Nile is Egypt, and Egypt is the River Nile.

Diane Tweeddale, a tour participant, gave Chris a warm thank-you for his talk, which had brought back great

memories for her.

John invited **Barbara Longmuir** to the microphone, and besides spruiking her stall, she highlighted the new stock at the Blue Wren Gift Shop at Nunawading, which includes stock donated by Birds Australia. **Graeme Hosken** told us about a very rewarding evening he and others had in Whittlesea, at a presentation given for concerned residents and bushfire victims. They subsequently visited a 300 hectare property in Kinglake West to record birds; with visits to several properties to monitor post-bushfire bird recovery to be ongoing. Graeme envisages a great opportunity for BOCA to be involved. He then recorded Interesting Sightings.

John highlighted forthcoming outings, showing that birding for 2011 is in full swing.

Daphne Hards

22 February 2011

An unusually chilly evening brought a big audience together. **Diane Tweeddale** took the chair and welcomed several visitors. She introduced **Sonja Ross** to present her photographic display, *Spring Is in the Air*. Sonja is co-ordinator of the photographic group within MELBOCA, and she broadcasts a theme to her members, inviting them to contribute their photographs which relate to that theme. Sonja then crafts them together computer-wise and we sit back and enjoy the show.

This presentation also had a soundtrack contributed by Howard Plowright, *Sounds of Foster*. We saw plumage changes, courtship displays, nest building, numerous chicks, feeding, predators, gaining independence, migration and dispersal.

After a few announcements, Diane welcomed **Chris Lester**, to give his extensive talk about birding in Peru, titled *Don't Just Go To Lima Zoo*. Chris works for the Titles and Surveying section of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and likes nothing better than birding in his holidays. He and Rosemary have made two trips to Peru, in 2008 and 2009. Peru lies totally within the tropics, and is dominated by the Andes.

These mountains reach a high plateau at 3-4000m in the north and 6000m in the south. The cold Humboldt Current in the Pacific influences the climate and, together with the geography, creates three different birding zones – the north, the central and the south. Chris and Rosemary have toured the north and south areas in order to tackle Peru's total of 1900 bird species; and when the birding was rough they could always indulge their other interest – archaeology.

They arrived in the capital, Lima, and spent two days acclimatising, which included a visit to the zoo. There were plenty of birds there, caged and un-caged, from the enormous King Vulture to tiny hummingbirds. Within the zoo is a museum of pre-Incan culture, and an archaeological dig site. A flight to the northern coastal city of Chiclayo took

them into a scene of dry sand and rocks, home to the Peruvian Thick-knee. On the beach were waders with Turkey Vulture aloft. The tour took them by road over the Andes to Tarapoto, where many endemic bird species can be seen in this northern area. They passed ancient pyramids, and saw the rare White-winged Guan, "back from the dead".

The occasional tarantula was spotted, and as the climb became steeper, shrikes appeared. Cacti harboured Little Inca-finch. They encountered heavy rain on the eastern slopes, causing landslides and delays. In the high cordillera of the Eastern Andes was cloud forest, and here were spectacular Spatuletails and other hummingbird species. In the cliffs around Tarapoto were caves, Incan dwellings from 1200s. A museum had well-preserved mummies and displays of Chachapoyan culture, an even older civilization.

They climbed over the Eastern Andes and descended into the Maranon River valley, where the locals keep dairy cattle, and the tourists can see parrots and woodpeckers. In Caccamaha the Spanish architecture was striking. *En route* for Trujillo they saw Pacific Pygmy-owl and Russet-bellied Spinetail. Back on the Pacific coast there were seabirds to spot, then a two-hour flight took them inland to Iquitos, on the northern Amazon.

Conjure up dense forest opening to a 20-30km clearing where this tourist town sits on the mighty river. The only transport is by boat, the party travelling half a day to their lodge. Here there were well-made tracks, an elevated walk, and visits to several river islands. These islands form from river sand and carry different bird species, according to the age of the island. A reserve of white-sand forest had poor vegetation, but rewarded with some rare bird species.

Back to Lima from which they made three side trips. A pelagic trip bagged gulls, petrel, albatross, storm-petrel, skuas and close encounters with dolphins. South at Pisco

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Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

they visited a group of small islands called Islas Ballestas, where guano had been mined.

There were cormorants, pelicans, Humboldt Penguin, boobies and seals. They then travelled inland through dry unstable canyons where, overhead, were Andean Condor. At 5000m there was snow on the peaks and a bog in the valley. This special habitat supported Puna Ibis, Puna Snipe and Diademed Sandpiper-plover.

The next stop was the ancient city of Cusco, which showed its pre-Incan, Incan and Spanish history. Chris recorded lots of exotic species, such as toucans, caatingas, trogons and tanagers; and at their lodge hummingbirds came in to feed. Squirrels ran about too, along with tayra, a weasel-like animal.

At the foot of the Andes the vegetation was lush. They travelled for ten days on the Alto Madre de Dios River, which feeds into the upper Amazon. At the Manu Wildlife Centre, the wildlife was prolific: birds included coquets, macaws, horned screamers, Muscovy Duck, parrots, ibis, parakeets and jabirus; here also were monkeys, piranha, the Giant River Otter, cayman and capybaras.

22 March 2011

This meeting was chaired by **Graeme Hosken**, who welcomed several visitors, then handed me, **Daphne Hards**, the microphone for my Member's Choice segment, *Who's Singing in Hungary*. In August 2011, I went to Hungary as a member of an international choir. After a week of rehearsals and a successful concert, I indulged in four days of birdwatching.

I set the scene with maps, showing Budapest on the mighty Danube, and Hungary on a plain surrounded by hills. The concert was in the far north east, almost on the Slovakian border, and the adjacent Zemplen Hills and the Ramsar-recognised Hortobagy National Park were highly recommended for birding. Hungary is also traversed by the Palearctic Flyway, making any wetland, especially Hortobagy, a good area to see migratory species.

I used the services of a guiding company, Saker Tours, and had the help of a guide for one (long) day in each location. It was worth every euro. In this presentation, I highlighted the Ural, Eagle and Little Owl which hunt during the day; the plethora of raptors – eagles, buzzard, harriers, falcons, hawks; and the delight of seeing 26 species of waders and water birds in a flooded paddock very early in the autumn migration. I can recommend Hungary as a rewarding country for birdwatching.

Graeme then introduced **Ken Osetroff**, who treated us to *Nature in Japan in All Seasons*. Ken is director of the tour company Destination Management, which takes travellers to several countries, in particular to lesser known parts of Japan. Ken was accompanied by his colleague and local guide, Mayumi, who is a BOCA member.

It was unfortunate that Ken had the backdrop of the current bad news from Japan, but he hastened to point

At the southern city of Arequipa they were at 5000m. They drove out to canyons with condors, pre-Incan ruins and bogs with the Chilean Flamingo. Arequipa itself has fine architecture and a memorable convent. Here, Chris concluded his travelogue, except for two items he left till last. He and Rosemary also flew over the prehistoric Nazca Lines, best seen from above, and thought to date from 500AD. Lastly Machu Picchu, the famous Incan ruins, still only partly uncovered.

I have not done justice to this colourful journey, especially the birdlife. **Virginia Morrison**, in her thanks, said this was an extraordinary account of two fascinating trips.

Dianne invited **Barbara Longmuir** to speak about shop items, and **Graeme Hosken** to update us on the Melbourne Water surveys. **Bill Ramsay** spoke about the most recent MELBOCA – BA Melbourne meeting, and then we were all ready for refreshment.

Daphne Hards

out that it is a big country, with lots of natural areas besides busy cities.

Summer is a poor time to visit as it is just too hot, but Ken can recommend all the other seasons, winter, spring and autumn for birdwatching.

Japan has an active Wild Bird Society and the National Parks generally have Interpretation Centres. We then enjoyed a display of many birds: the iconic Red-crowned Crane and endangered Blakiston's Fish Owl, the impressive Stellar Sea Eagle, lots of superb duck species, kingfishers, woodpeckers, bush birds, and ptarmigan. Canada Goose can also be found, though Japan is not in its natural range. Mayumi is an excellent bird guide.

The tours they put together are nature tours. In the autumn, deer are common in townships and in the spring Japan's cherry blossom is world-renowned.

Fox are widespread and wild bears can be seen on the northern island of Hokkaido, except in winter when they hibernate. Bears congregate for the autumn salmon runs.

The floral displays are great in May when the wild azaleas are at their peak. This heralds the season for butterflies and moths. Snow monkeys and Sero, a native antelope, live in the high forests, where there are generally very good walking tracks. Waterfalls abound, and the coastline of Japan is often rugged and remote. There are reliable marshes and wetlands, and the tours sometimes visit Rashiri Island off the northwest coast, which is good for both plants and birds. On Hokkaido, native people still live in thatched-roofed villages.

One can get around Japan via good railways including the

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Beginners Outings

22 January – Point Cook Coastal Reserve

Twenty-four members assembled at the Point Cook beach car park on a glorious sunny day. A circuit walk to the shore, dunes and heath produced a variety of birds including Singing Honeyeater and White-fronted Chat, with the highlight being good sightings of Brown Quail.

The group then drove to the old homestead, pausing *en route* to admire an Australian Hobby perched in a dead tree. The members walked to the Point at low tide and were rewarded with excellent views of eight Pacific Golden Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Common and Crested Terns as well as three cormorant species.

A shady spot was found for lunch where a male Rufous Whistler entertained the diners.

After lunch the group went to Spectacle Lake, which finally had some water in it after the years of drought. Hoary-headed Grebe, Chestnut Teal and Pacific Black Duck were on the lake, while European Greenfinch and Goldfinch were in the nearby bushes.

RAAF Lake also contained some water, though not many birds. The highlight here was a pair of Red-capped Plovers which appeared to be nesting at the edge of the lake.

A final stop was made at the last RAAF car park, but no extra birds were added to the tally of 53 species on a most enjoyable and rewarding excursion.

26 February – Birds Land Reserve

Heavy rain earlier in the month had washed away the bridges on the walking tracks and we were very fortunate that the paths had reopened just in time for the outing. A remarkable achievement in just three weeks.

The weather was also kind to us – fine and sunny with little wind. Thirty-one members set off across the newly restored bridges, noticing how high the flood waters had come and wondering what impact it would have on the birds.

An Australian Darter and Little Black Cormorant were seen perched on a log. Lots of Dusky Moorhen and Purple Swamphen were in evidence, but only one Eurasian Coot.

A small flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo flew overhead as did a Brown Goshawk. Several species of honey-eater were seen, New Holland being the commonest. The youngest member (primary-school age) was the first to see a Varied Sitella at the top of a dead tree. Whilst we were watching it, a pair of Mistletoebird was seen nearby, which was a new bird for several members.

After lunch, the bird call showed a pleasing total of 40 species.

A small group of members then drove to Ferntree Gully Picnic Area in a quest for a Rufous Fantail. An uphill climb behind the main tourist area along Burnett's Track brought us to a "hot spot" where several different species for the day were seen, including Eastern Yellow Robin and Eastern Spinebill.

A few minutes later, a Rufous Fantail emerged from the bushes and perched at the side of the track where we all had a good view. A fitting finale to a most enjoyable day. Ferntree Gully provided eight additional birds giving a total of 48 species for the day.

26 March – Pound Bend

A Wedge-tailed Eagle soaring overhead gave a flying start to the Pound Bend Beginners Outing. Several parrot species were also visible in the car park, including the Little and Long-billed Corellas.

It was overcast as we set off along the riverside track which made it hard, but not impossible, to identify the many small birds high in the canopy. It was good to see the vegetation looking so lush after all the summer rain.

When the cry went up that a platypus had been sighted in the river the birds were temporarily abandoned as everyone tried to see it.

Further along the path, a pair of Fan-tailed Cuckoo were spotted and everyone got a good look. Soon afterwards, a pair of Tawny Frogmouth were located across a paddock in their typical frozen, but this time not so well disguised, pose.

As the track turned uphill, Imperial Blue Butterflies were seen emerging from their chrysalises and a large mob of Eastern Grey Kangaroos was observed across the field.

At the top of the hill a large pudding basin-shaped mud nest of White-winged Choughs was pointed out. The birds themselves were not seen and it was thought that these dry-country birds probably hadn't appreciated the wet summer.

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Have you heard about ...

Climate Change and Bird Morphology

Among Eurasian Tawny Owl, plumage colour is hereditary, with grey feathers being dominant over brown. But a recent study in the journal *Nature Communications* finds that brown plumage is becoming increasingly the norm.

The study suggests that Tawny Owl are turning brown to survive the warmer climate, and that as winters become milder, grey feathered Tawny Owl are likely to disappear.

Quoted by the BBC, Dr Patrik Karell of the University of Helsinki, Finland, says "Climate-driven selection has led to an evolutionary change in the population."

What will the impact of climate change be on bird morphology in Australia? Are we already seeing the shifts?

From the BBC's *Earth News*



Education Report

Graeme Hosken presented an evening for residents of the fire-affected areas at Whittlesea on 20 January. This evening was followed two days later when Graeme, Annette Cook, Pat Bingham and I travelled to Kinglake West to help local residents identify birds in the field. Thirty-five species were identified during this morning walk.

Graeme also attended the Collingwood Children's Farm on 6 February. Unfortunately, the heavens opened and planned activities were cancelled.

Several BOCA members attended the Western Port Welcomes Waterbirds Education Workshop Day at Tooradin on 24 March. This day was organized by Annette Cook (BOCA Education Coordinator) and provided a venue to exchange ideas with representatives of other organizations who provide environmental education in various forms. We were inspired by teacher Robyn Cairns who left a well-established school with habitat and moved to Point Cook P-9 which is built on open paddocks and without habitat in the surrounding new housing estates. An excellent resources folder was provided to all the participants by BOCA. Thanks to Duncan Turnbull who assisted with preparation and helped out on the day.

In the afternoon, we travelled to Blind Blight to meet a bus load of grade five and six students from the Tooradin Primary School. Again the heavens opened and only the well

prepared were not soaked. Despite the wet conditions, all the children managed to see some birds. Four telescopes were used under a small shelter. I heard one group excitedly telling their teacher that they had seen 13 species.

During February and March, I gave PowerPoint presentations to a National Seniors Australia group in Kew, the Doncaster Garden Club and the Wantirna Friendship Group.

On 5 April, Graeme again represented us at the Western Port Review Seminar at the Cardinia Shire Council Offices in Pakenham. He was one of 200 people attending on that day.

Friends of Wilson Botanic Park Berwick held a bird walk and breakfast on Sunday 10 April. Graeme has led this walk on several occasions and did so again.

On 19 April, several MELBOCA members assisted with activities at the free family day at the National Rhododendron Gardens in Olinda.

My thanks to all who have assisted with Education activities. More assistance is always appreciated.

Janet Hand
MELBOCA Education Officer
(03) 9842 4177 or info@melboca.org.au

Outing Report: Jells Park, Wheelers Hill

April 18, 2011

A Pied Currawong called and Noisy Miner were common as our group assembled. Rainbow Lorikeet flew over and then a couple of us briefly saw an Australian King-Parrot.

Rob Grosvenor, our leader, noted a couple of Eastern Rosella foraging on the ground at the end of the car park not far from some Australian Magpie, while Little Raven called unmistakably in a tree top and Musk Lorikeet flew in and out of the canopy.

Rob led the thirteen of us out, past more miners and a colony of Red Wattlebird, before we encountered Purple Swamphen with well-grown young beside the path. On the grass, Magpie-lark foraged near a pair of Masked Lapwing but, despite concentrated observation by many of us, no lapwing young were detected. The lake contained Pacific Black Duck, a few "Donald Duck dinners" of very mixed parentage, and at least one male Chestnut Teal, iridescent in the sunshine. A female Australasian Darter flew over then later dried its wings while perching on a branch. A lone Cattle Egret in non-breeding plumage caused some initial identification discussion.

Australasian Grebe were relatively common and one bird was carrying at least one youngster on its back. The wind increased as we reached the far side of the lake, making detection of movement among the leaves difficult despite the sunny conditions. However, a Grey Fantail flitted out of the foliage and a pair of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

flew close. Young Dusky Moorhen were evidence of successful breeding while Superb Fairy-wren and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo were more heard than seen.

As we passed along the trail there was evidence of the violence of the past floods in the high-piled debris and the flow patterns in the groundcover. Not many birds were using the flood-affected area, though, at its edge we came across Brown Thornbill and Spotted Pardalote while a mature Grey Butcherbird perched watchfully on a fallen bough. Back near the cars and lunch, we relaxed and did the bird call, listing 35 species for the morning, including the obligatory last minute observation, a Galah.

Most observers elected to leave after lunch but three enthusiasts continued and investigated Valley Reserve, Mount Waverley, a small area among houses along Valley Creek. It was well vegetated, including mature trees, but had been badly flooded and bird life was sparse at first.

An hour was spent here and 14 species were recorded, including a Brown Goshawk, the only raptor for the day. Spotted Dove was present but we were pleased to record the absence of ferals, Rock Dove, House Sparrow, Common Myna and Common Starling, from the day's list. Feral honey bees in a nesting box had made another nesting site unavailable. The total day's list was 37 species, a tribute to the careful planning that Rob put into the day.

Diane Tweeddale,
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings





Interesting Sightings

Field Note Reports – Entered 30 April 2011

The following Field Reports were received from members attending the MELBOCA monthly meetings held at Balwyn on 22 February and 22 March 2011, Email and WEB reports to the BOCA National Office.

Oct 2010 – Apr 2011	Pied Currawong (1)	Yarra River (Victoria St)	Richmond
13 Jan 2011	White-plumed Honeyeater (1)	Chapel St	South Yarra
14 Jan 2011	Long-billed Corella (2)	Albert Park Lake (East side)	Albert Park Lake (East side)
13 Feb 2011	Eastern Yellow Robin (1)	Westerfolds Park	Templestowe
21 Feb 2011	Painted Quail (1)	Winneke Reservoir	Christmas Hills
23 Feb 2011	Black-tailed Native-hen (8)	Wells Rd near Mordialloc Creek	Wells Rd near Mordialloc Creek
24 Feb 2011	Song Thrush (1) – last seen in area 10-15 years ago	Eggleton Rise	Rowville
25 Feb 2011	New-Holland Honeyeater (2); Red-browed Finch (4)	Merri Ck Trail, Kirkdale St	Brunswick
09 Mar 2011	Buff-banded Rail (1) – in backyard of hobby farm (10+ acres)	Batesleigh Rd	Selby
23 Mar 2011	Little Corella (100+)	Mornington shopping centre.	Mornington shopping centre.
28 Mar 2011	Fantail Cuckoo (1)	Westerfolds Park	Templestowe
31 Mar 2011	Olive-backed Oriole (1)	Westerfolds Park	Templestowe
01 Apr 2011	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (1)	Westerfolds Park	Templestowe
02 Apr 2011	Brown Quail (1) – dead	Notting Hill	Notting Hill
05 Apr 2011	Grey Fantail (1) – previously recorded 8 Apr 2009 – foraging with a flock of Silveryeyes	Cooloongatta Rd	Camberwell
12 Apr 2011	Grey Fantail (1) – second record in 48 years	Bennett Av	Mt Waverley
13 Apr 2011	Wedge-tailed Eagle (1) – being chased by several Little Ravens	B J Hubbard Reserve	Nth Ringwood

Backyard Birds!



Although the MELBOCA survey is now completed, I received an email from Rob and Jacqui Sheppard on 12 April with a photo attached.

It shows a juvenile Nankeen Night-Heron in their backyard at Patterson Lakes. It stayed for 24 hours.

If MELBOCA members have photos of unusual birds taken in their backyards, the photo and your comments would be welcome.

A juvenile Nankeen Night-Heron spotted in a backyard at Patterson Lakes – photo courtesy of Rob and Jacqui Sheppard



Interesting Sightings (cont'd)

Members Comments

Lyn Easton has been keeping records of bird sightings for over eight years at Banyule Flats along the Yarra River Trail towards Templestowe. Bell Miner were a common sight almost every day from August 2002 until they totally disappeared in July 2009. What could have caused their disappearance?

A female White-throated Treecreeper became a "first" during Lyn's walks on 22 December 2010, and Lyn has since recorded it on 2 and 26 January 2011. It is a species that

has evaded the observers on the yearly Breakfast with the Birds at Banyule. Perhaps this year might be a first as well.

Lyn also reports Eastern Spinebill and Brown Thornbill in her garden at View Bank, but neither Wattlebird species allows the Spinebills to linger.



Australian Magpie with 'complete albinism' at Batman Railway Station, Coburg. Photo, Russell Edis

Albinism in Birds

From time to time, Interesting Sighting email reports have photos attached. In two instances, photos of 'white' species were received, one being a Superb Fairy-wren, the other, an Australian Magpie. To identify the degree of albinism in each species my thanks go to Bill Ramsay for the following summary, 'Albinism in Birds' from Wikipedia.

Albinism is a rare occurrence. A true albino has white feathers in lieu of coloured ones. A bird naturally white, an egret, for example, is not an albino.

There are at least four degrees of albinism:

Partial: Certain feathers lacking the melanin pigment.

Imperfect: Where the pigment is partially inhibited. For example in the skin or eyes.

Incomplete: Total absence of pigment from the skin, eyes or feathers, but not all three

Complete: Lacking any pigment at all. The eyes being red or pink from the blood showing through and the beak, legs and feet are very pale or white. Rarely spotted in the wild.

On examining the photos it was thought the Superb Fairy-wren was 'Incomplete Albinism' and the Australian Magpie, 'Complete Albinism'. What are your thoughts?

The full-colour and unedited photographs of each may be found on the MELBOCA Website.

My thanks to Karen Russell for the Superb Fairy-wren photo taken at a property in Lysterfield and to Bernie Stock's friend, Russell Edis, of the Australian Magpie photographed at Batman Railway Station, Coburg.

All MELBOCA Outing reports may be found on the MELBOCA Website, www.melboca.org.au

Graeme Hosken, Recorder



Superb Fairy-wren with 'incomplete albinism', Lysterfield. Photo, Karen Russell





Beginners Outings (cont'd)

Continued from page 6

Also missing from the ridge were the Scarlet Honeyeater that had caused so much excitement on last years' Beginners Outing to Pound Bend.

After lunch in the car park, the bird call gave a total of 38 species being recorded.

A short afternoon walk to the tunnel did not produce any extra species, though everyone enjoyed watching the Welcome Swallows performing aerobatics over the turbulent water. Once again, Pound Bend had produced another great birding day.

23 April – Cranbourne Botanical Gardens

Twenty-four members gathered at the Stringybark Picnic Area on a fine Easter Saturday morning.

Dusky Woodswallow, often seen at the car park, were observed for the entire walk.

The first real hotspot occurred near the boundary fence, which provides a popular perch for many species including Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Yellow-rumped Thornbill and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.

Across the paddock, sharp eyes spotted a number of Flame Robin. On the Wylie Wetlands, both Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebe were busy diving for food. A pair of Wedge-tailed Eagle was seen soaring in the dis-

tance, whilst nearby three Black-shouldered Kite were alternating between chasing and hovering.

White-faced Heron were wading at the edge of the next pond and a Little Black Cormorant was perched on a rock. Mixed flocks of honeyeaters were feeding in several different areas but parrots were in short supply, with two Eastern Rosella the only record for the morning.

The afternoon walk set off from the Australian Gardens car park towards the Trig Point Lookout.

From this track a Brown Goshawk was seen harassing a Wedge-tailed Eagle, while from the top of the lookout there were excellent views of Striated Pardalote as well as many honeyeater species foraging in nearby trees. What a treat for the beginners to see them close-up and at eye-level!

As the group returned towards the Australian Garden, a young Southern Brown Bandicoot was quietly feeding near the edge of the path. It ignored the delighted onlookers and provided an added bonus for the many keen photographers.

A total of fifty bird species was recorded for the day with many memorable sightings.

Report by outings leaders, Hazel and Alan Veevers

Past Meeting Reports (cont'd)

Bullet Train. This company then uses charter buses to reach their destinations. They stay at impressive western style hotels, and it is quite possible to admire majestic Mt Fuji from your balcony. The meals are varied; they enjoy food from street stalls, restaurants and hotel buffets, and lunch is often bought at a convenience store. Signs are a big challenge for the visitor, especially in the countryside; Mayumi can always interpret.

The last pictures of Japan showed the Winter Festivals, five of which were included in one tour. Sapporo, the main city of Hokkaido, has a spectacular one. There are impressive snow sculptures with night illumination, and the chance of skating and tobogganing. Even ice fishing on the frozen river. It is possible to take a trip on an ice-breaker in the Sea of Okhotsk.

Ken also wanted to mention their forthcoming tour to Costa Rica, which is well known for its animal and birdlife. The country has a mountainous spine with the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Caribbean Sea on the other.

Ken showed canopy walkways, and nice lodges with balconies in the canopy. Lots of hummingbirds come in to feeders and colourful small frogs appear everywhere. The climate of the cloud forests suits orchids, lizards, monkeys and sloths; and we finished with Roseate Spoonbills and

the Resplendent Quetzal, a stunning bird of the tropics.

For more information about Destination Management head to www.toursgallery.com.

John Bosworth thanked Ken for showing us a country which, by its position on the collision line of two tectonic plates, has such beautiful scenery and great diversity in nature.

Graeme highlighted the continuing need for help with various tasks at HQ in Nunawading, and made a couple of announcements relating to training workshops, a scientific study review and a working bee weekend in Benalla.

Bill Ramsay reported on the BA Vic – MelBOCA meeting in March, and Graeme said that part of our April meeting would be devoted to discussion about the proposed merger.

Barbara Longmuir advertised t-shirts and books; Graeme spoke about past and forthcoming outings, took interesting sightings, and then called the meeting over.

Daphne Hards



Outing Report: Bellarine Peninsula

February 14, 2011

Flooding had been extensive the previous week but 13 of us assembled in the golf club car park. Fred Smith led us, at first along the Belmont Common where we noted flood debris nearly a metre above the track. Water lay in all depressions and frogs called loudly.

Chestnut Teal were the most common ducks and some juveniles were intermediate in markings between Chestnut and Grey Teal, perhaps the result of hybridisation. Magpie-lark were also numerous and vocal. No mud was visible, so it was unsurprising that crakes, rails and snipe were not recorded. Passing on to the wetland birdhide, we saw Black Swan nesting. The sitting adult was adding to the recent structure of the nest and it is probable that a nesting attempt before the flooding rain of 4 February ended in failure. Little Grassbird called, unseen as usual, but Australian Reed Warbler were briefly sighted flying between reed beds.

Driving on to Balyang Sanctuary, we combined a lunch stop with admiring the nesting colony of Australasian Darter over the river. Young darters at different stages of maturity perched on nests and branches and Little Pied Cormorant also nested in the area. The lake added two families of Australasian Grebe, the first with two chicks and the second with three slightly older chicks. Other young included Eurasian Coot and Silver Gull, the latter mooching around the picnic tables but being outdone in boldness by the male Magpie-lark which walked the tables in search of food for a hungry juvenile. House Sparrow also found the park congenial, to judge by their numbers.

Retracing our route, we by-passed the very full Hospital Swamp rather than risk bogging in the approach, so drove on to Tait Point where the picnic area had been developed in the past year. Much vegetation had been re-

moved to provide car parking. Small birds were noted but farther away than in the past – Superb Fairy-wren, Yellow-rumped and Brown Thornbill all foraged in the same flowering melaleuca, along with a pair of Willie Wagtail. Raptors were the highlight in this area with Swamp Harrier, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Whistling Kite quartering over the far bank. Then a Nankeen Kestrel was added to the list as we drove off. Our first Australian Pelican was here, plus more Australian White Ibis and White-faced Heron, though the reduced numbers possibly reflected dispersal after months of rain.

Passing south to Black Rock, the beach initially seemed to contain only Silver Gull and a lone Pacific Gull but multiple eyes soon added Red-necked Stint (one with an orange leg flag), a Great Cormorant and a well-camouflaged Black-faced Cormorant. Then Ruddy Turnstone challenged us as they slipped between the rocks.

Moving up the beach, to improve the viewing of the turnstones, we realised a female Red-capped Plover was feigning injury to decoy us from her nesting area or chicks. There was a very slow and careful retreat of bird-watchers to the lower damp sand leaving the bird watchful near some dead grass. Crested Tern and Australasian Gannet also appeared and we added Singing Honeyeater and Silveryeye in the heath behind the beach. Next was the Barwon estuary where the low tide made scopes very useful. The highlight here was a Bar-tailed Godwit, though Caspian Tern and a small flock of Common Greenshank were also added. By now we had exceeded our allotted time for the day so bird call went ahead. The species count was 70, even without a visit to Drysdale or Hospital Swamp, and we thanked Fred for sharing his knowledge and making it a memorable day.

*Diane Tweeddale,
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings*

Picnic for Reg Johnson

In January Reg Johnson had his 90th birthday, and celebrated with his family and close friends. A gaggle of BOCA campers and ex-campers were not prepared to let this anniversary go by without a squawk, so a picnic was arranged in a Wattle Park. It was a great chance to catch up, and Reg and Kathleen enjoyed seeing everyone.

(Photo, Daphne Hards)





Report of Meeting: MELBOCA and BA Vic Group

15 Mar 2011

In preparation for the possibility of a BA/BOCA Amalgamation, a fourth meeting was held between MELBOCA and BA Vic Group to discuss how both groups would operate if the amalgamation occurred. The meeting was attended by Jess McVicar (BA/BOCA Project Manager), Janet Hand, Graeme Hosken and Bill Ramsay representing MELBOCA, and Mark Anderson, Stuart Dashper and Chris Lester representing BA Vic Group.

Report by Jess McVicar:

Jess gave a verbal report to the meeting on recent BA/BOCA developments. The main points were:

- The information package to be provided to all BA and BOCA Members is planned for mail out next week.
- The proposed Constitution for BirdLife Australia will soon be on the BA and BOCA websites.
- Supplementary information will be added to the BA and BOCA websites as needed.
- On behalf of the BA/BOCA Working Group, Jess thanked the MELBOCA and BA Vic Group representatives for their input.
- The BA/BOCA Working Group would like some schematics of how we see the communication lines between National Office, Regional Councils & Branches for functions such as reporting, financial matters, newsletters, etc.

In reply to our question on the auditing requirements, Jess indicated that groups would only require professional audits if they had a turnover in excess of \$50,000. Effectively, this means that the audit requirements for Branches will remain as for current BOCA Branches.

Items arising from the meeting on 8 Feb 2011

1. A Preliminary Proposal for a BirdLife Australia Melbourne Branch Committee was agreed in principle – refer to attached.

There was discussion on membership of the Victorian Region. It was agreed that all BirdLife Australia Members living in Victoria would automatically be considered as members of the Victorian Region unless they elected to opt out. Members living close to Victoria, but in another state, would have the opportunity to opt in as a Victorian Region Member if they felt they had a closer affiliation with Victoria than their state of residence. This is of particular relevance to members living just north of the Murray River.

Items for Discussion at the Next Meeting

1. BA Vic Group representatives to prepare a draft proposal for a BirdLife Australia Victorian Regional Council for discussion.

Review of draft organisation schematics prepared by Mark Anderson.

The next meeting is planned for 8:00pm, Tuesday 10 May 2011, at BA's National Office in Carlton.

Future Actions

MELBOCA recognises that some of the issues affect all Victorian BOCA Branches. As with the previous reports, it is planned to forward this document to all Victorian BOCA Branches for comment and input, with an invitation to Victorian BOCA Branches to have representation at future meetings.

Bill Ramsay
MELBOCA

Preliminary Proposal for the Formation of a BirdLife Australia Melbourne Branch Committee

Outlined below is a preliminary proposal for the formation of a BirdLife Australia Melbourne Branch Committee that has been agreed in principle with the MELBOCA and BA Vic Group representatives meeting to discuss how a new Birdlife Australia Melbourne Branch would operate if the merger proceeds. Decisions on some matters may need to be deferred until a new Melbourne Branch Committee is formed.

1. **Role of the Committee:** To manage the meetings, activities and business for the Members of the Birdlife Australia Melbourne Branch and to prepare and distribute a newsletter to members.
2. **Transition Period:** A transition period to operate from 1 July to 30 September 2011 for the current MELBOCA

and BA Vic Group Committee Members to work together.

3. **Start Date:** 1 October 2011
4. **No of Members:** 10
5. **Initial Election:** BA Vic Group and MELBOCA provide 5 members each, elected by each group as they see appropriate.
6. **Subsequent Elections:** 5 members elected by the new Melbourne Branch at their AGM. If 6 or 7 nominations are received, it is probably better to increase the size of the committee rather than have an election – see also Item 14.

Continued on page 13



Continued from page 12

7. Term of Office: Each member is elected for 2 years, 5 retiring each year, 5 continuing for the next year. Prior to the first AGM of the new Melbourne Branch, the committee decides which 5 will retire early (they may wish to seek renomination for a further two years).

8. Office Bearers: The committee to elect the office bearers from within the committee. Office bearers shall be: President, Secretary, Treasurer, Education Coordinator, Conservation Coordinator, Activities Coordinator, Meetings Coordinator & Newsletter Editor. Some committee members may have more than one role. Other positions such as Website Manager, Various Outings Coordinators, Newsletter Assistant Editor, etc do not need to be committee members.

9. Committee Meeting Schedule: February, April, June, August, October & December each year, on a fixed date to be agreed, eg second Tuesday of the month.

10. Committee Meeting Time: MELBOCA Meetings have been held during the day in the past but this is not realistic for the new committee. Evening meetings will be required.

11. Committee Meeting Venue: At BirdLife Australia's new National Office, assuming it is in Melbourne.

12. Constitution: Not required, the Melbourne Branch to comply with the aims and objectives of BirdLife Australia as in its constitution. Where necessary, an operating procedure can be documented and minuted for future reference.

13. Name: Branch to be known as the BirdLife Australia Melbourne Branch.

14. AGM: AGM's to be held sometime between 1 March and 30 June, prior to a regular monthly meeting. Timing will need to consider production schedule of the newsletter, if pre-election information is to be distributed by mail without additional cost.

15. AGM Venue: Either at the new National Office if in Melbourne and monthly meetings are being held there OR at MELBOCA's current meeting venue in Balwyn. May need to alternate? May need to consider which meeting is

attracting the greater attendance?

16. Nomination and Voting for Committee Members: Nomination Forms to be included in the newsletter in sufficient time prior to the AGM to be processed. If the number of nominations exceeds the number of vacancies (or a reasonable number of nominations in excess of the number of vacancies) an election will be required at the AGM. Voting to be by show of hands at the AGM with no proxy votes.

17. Appointment of Committee Members: If the committee numbers fall below 10, the committee may appoint additional members. Such members would be the first to retire at the next AGM.

18. Appointment of Non Committee Member Coordinators etc: The committee is empowered to appoint non committee members to roles of coordinator or similar for activities as required.

19. Banking: MELBOCA has a Bendigo Club Cheque Account (no fees, no interest) at the Mt Waverley Branch. This account to continue under the name of the new committee until the new committee decides otherwise. Signatories at present are any two of President, Secretary and Treasurer which will continue.

20. Existing Assets: It needs to be resolved how the combined existing assets of BA Vic Group and MELBOCA will be apportioned between the new Victorian Regional Council and the new Melbourne Branch.

21. Newsletter: To allow for production lead time, the first issue of the new Melbourne Branch Newsletter to be February 2012 (assuming the new National Magazine(s) are produced to the current timetable).

22. Website: All discussions on the MELBOCA Website to be on hold until the new National Office resolves how Regional Council and Branch Websites are to operate in the new organisation. In the interim, the MELBOCA Website to continue as the MELBOCA Website, but with an acknowledgement that it is the Website of the BirdLife Australia Melbourne Branch and is under reconstruction.

Bill Ramsay
MELBOCA

Member's Choice Segment – Call for Contributors

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

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

Or maybe you have a collection of birding photographs. A tale of birding obsession? A quest? Or just a question? Let us know!

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





Outing Report: Newport Lakes, Newport,

March 30, 2011

The weather forecast had been for developing showers, maybe. However, the sky was blue and the air mild as 24 enthusiasts assembled in the car park near the "porta loos", which had replaced the demolished toilet block. Elsmaree Baxter led us out toward the lookout over the south lake, but we kept pausing to investigate the calls on either side of the track.

Early on, the list included Crested Pigeon, Superb Fairy-wren, Little Raven, Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets (the latter proving quite a challenge among the leaves of the flowering eucalypts). Welcome Swallow wheeled above and Willie Wagtail scolded from the lower branches. Spotted Pardalote were initially heard and then a brilliant male made his appearance.

The lake was not heavily populated as waterbirds could disperse thanks to the wet season, but numerous Australasian Grebe swam and dived. European Goldfinch were watched with interest as they foraged among the seed cones of a casuarina, rather than the more expected thistle heads. A female Golden Whistler was a more challenging identification and later an immature bird was also seen.

We continued around the north lake, adding Little Pied Cormorant, White-faced Heron and Grey Teal, while Purple Swamphen and Dusky Moorhen used a smaller pond beside the track.

A bird-poor part of the track kept our interest with the brilliant red "brain" fungus beneath the trees, which matured to a "basket" shape. Crossing the rock causeway near the amphitheatre we were accompanied by three hopeful Black Swan, clearly used to soliciting a handout from visitors. They were disappointed. Three large dead carp lay beside the stepping stones, presumably left by fishermen, and the smell was not pleasant. Looking over the adjacent pond some of us were able to glimpse a grey-gold carp as it broke the surface. A search for turtles proved unsuccessful.

Near the lookout we surprised a blue-tongue lizard which decided that our invasion was the cue for a determined retreat. Walking on down through the arboretum there were not many birds and one of the last to join our morning list was a Eurasian Skylark.

More than thirty species had been recorded in this revegetated quarry site, a tribute to the hard work and planning which had gone into its creation. It was interesting that the honeyeaters included Red and Little Wattlebird and New Holland and White-plumed Honeyeater but no Noisy Miner.

Some of our group had to depart at lunchtime, but 17 continued on down to the Maddox Rd extension.

This was a very different environment, coastal sandbars with mangroves in the estuary. Here Silver and Pacific Gull and Australian Pelican roosted on a spit of dumped tractor tyres. Black Swan (two bearing neck bands which

were recorded), a few Little Pied Cormorant plus a small flock of Common Greenshank were also present, as were Masked Lapwing, Australian White Ibis and, later, Chestnut Teal and Crested Tern.

A Brown Falcon was flushed and with it rose a large flock of Common Starling, which presumably decided there was safety in numbers. Common Greenfinch perched and Little Grassbird was heard rather than seen but White-fronted Chat flew over briefly.

A bonus for a few stragglers was a brief sighting of a female Rufous Whistler.

By the end of the day the bird list totalled 52 species and we thanked Elsmaree heartily for introducing many of us to this fascinating area.

Diane Tweeddale,
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Seagulls: how they loaf

Waves of sleep in bird colonies

Many animals sleep in groups, but we know little about how sleeping patterns are structured within these groups.

Taking it in turns to do "sentry duty" is the obvious solution, but there is no documented evidence of this occurring in animal groups. On the other hand, it's possible that individual animals arrange their sleeping patterns independently of each, but this would be hazardous if too many individuals happen to sleep at the same time, leaving the animals open to attack.

A new study in the journal *Ethology* shows that some animals, like loafing gulls (*Larus spp.*), adjust their sleeping patterns according to whether the group as a collective deems it a safe to sleep. In short, they watch one another. So, as more and more individuals fall asleep, their companions may decide that conditions must be safe and also fall asleep. But when fewer gulls are sleeping, an individual may decide to curtail sleep, given that it would be more vulnerable than other vigilant group members should an attack occur.

Guy Beauchamp, author of the study, describes the behaviour as "waves of sleep" and "waves of vigilance" that he recorded passing through the gull colony, with the proportion of sleeping or vigilant gulls rising and falling through time.

Beauchamp writes that "These results add more weight to the now increasingly supported view that vigilance in general is a social phenomenon and suggest that adaptive behaviour at the level of the individual can lead to collective phenomena such as waves of sleep in animal groups."

Ethology, Volume 117 (4) 326–331, April 2011



Dates to remember

Weekday Outings

Wed. 8 Jun. – Yarra Bend Park, Fairfield

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 30 H12). Park near toilets on Yarra Bend Rd. Leader, Leonie Robbins. *Contact Leonie, 03 9815 1845.*

Mon. 18 Jul. – Woodlands Historic Park, Greenvale

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 178 B6). From Somerton Rd, park near toilets. Leader, Graeme Hosken. *Contact Diane, 03 9836 8692.*

Tue. 16 Aug. – Coranderrk Bushland, Badger Creek

10:00am to 3:00pm (Mel 278 F8). Meet in main car park, Healesville Sanctuary. Bushland gate locked 10:10am *sharp* till 3:00pm. Toilets available. Leader, Arthur Carew. *Contact Diane, 03 9836 8692.*

Beginners Outings

Sat. 28 May – Braeside Park

10:00am (Mel 88 D8). Meet in car park by visitor centre. *Contact Hazel, info@melboca.org.au.*

Sat. 25 Jun. – Woodlands Historic Park

10:00am (Mel 178 B6). Meet in the car park off Somerton Road. *Contact Hazel, info@melboca.org.au.*

Sat. 23 Jul. – Westerfolds Park, Templestowe.

10:00am (Mel 33 F1). Meet in lower car park by canoe launching place. *Contact Robert, 03 9886 1027*

Sat. 27 Aug. – Lillydale Lake.

10.00am (Mel 38 G7). Meet in the first car park on left off Swansea Road. *Contact Hazel, info@melboca.org.au.*

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

First Sunday of the month (5 June, 3 July, 7 August)

Take Warburton Hwy to Woori Yallock and turn right to Yellingbo. At Yellingbo, turn right towards Seville, then left into Macclesfield Rd. After 2.5km, turn right at large pine trees. Gate opens at 10:00am. Walk starts at 10:30am. On-site toilets available. Bring lunch and gumboots. Mel 305 G11.

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

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

Outing Report: Greens Bush, Mornington Peninsula

March 15 2011

Thankfully, we assembled at Baldry Crossing in fine conditions. The rain two-days previous had delayed any plans for a controlled burn, which would have prevented us from entering the area.

Joan Peters led the group of 13. Our initial observations in the car park made us think that most birds were in that area. Seen or heard were Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Little Raven, Crimson and Eastern Rosella, Noisy Miner, Magpie-lark, Grey Shrike-thrush, Common Myna, Spotted Pardalote, White-throated Treecreeper and Grey Butcherbird (the last eating a large dragonfly). Initially, as we walked along the track there was certainly much less bird life, but we did add Eastern Spinebill (briefly), Grey Fantail (frequently) and Red Wattlebird (noisily). Yellow-faced Honeyeater was heard before they were seen in the canopy, and later the characteristic "lolly-sucking" call of the White-naped Honeyeater was identified.

Initially, the White-eared Honeyeater called invisibly, but later one posed on the end of a dead branch in very good light. We admired the plant growth since the rain. The grass trees in particular were looking very healthy and the occasional hyacinth orchid was still in flower. Bracken was growing vigorously and effectively concealing the

smaller birds calling near the ground. Eventually most of us saw White-browed Scrubwren, if fleetingly, though Superb Fairy-wren were shyer. Finally, wrens appeared by the path ahead, then they were joined by an Eastern Yellow Robin. Then our almost incoherent cries went up for "Rufous Fantail" beyond the robin. Most of us achieved sightings, if brief, before the inconsiderate bird disappeared into the undergrowth.

Another highlight, though again brief for most of us, was a male Satin Flycatcher. However, a Fan-tailed Cuckoo took no notice of our group and stayed clearly visible on a dead branch giving everyone very good views.

As we returned to the cars a Laughing Kookaburra was added to the list which totalled 31 species by lunch time. We decided to finish then, which turned out to be a good idea as Sea Winds, the planned post-lunch walk, proved to be closed pending a controlled burn. The grass trees there should flower afterwards and provide food for the local honeyeaters. We thanked Joan for her careful preparation which resulted in a very successful walk.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings



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We're on the Web!

www.melboca.org.au



MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of Bird
Observation &
Conservation Australia



Dandenong Catchment Survey

January to March 2011

Just when the MELBOCA Survey Teams thought water levels would stabilise in the New Year, flooding rains in mid-January caused extensive damage to the infrastructure surrounding some of the six wetlands. Fences were pushed over due to the weight of rubbish brought down from the catchments, large reed beds were up-rooted and dumped on wetland banks and nests occupied by waterfowl washed away. The good news is that re-nesting was recorded in February at some of the sites.

Waterbird numbers are still down, especially ducks, perhaps due to the inland flooding in central Australia. Australian Wood Duck was recorded at all sites but not every month, and Chestnut Teal was not recorded at South Golf Links Rd (SGR) at all. Hardhead was only sighted at Waterford Wetlands (WW) in February and March. All other sites missed out. The only site to record an Australasian Darter for the period was SGR.

The following sites added new species to their list but no new species were added to the combined list for the six sites.

Waterford Wetlands: Pied Cormorant, Little Wattlebird and Grey Butcherbird in February.

Both River Gum (RGC) and Hallam Valley Rd (HVR) added a Peregrine Falcon in January. As the sightings were one day apart, could this be the same bird? A pair of Sacred Kingfisher were recorded in February but this species had previously been sighted at this location on a non-survey day.

SGR: Australian Spotted Crake and Spotted Pardalote in January, Black-fronted Dotterel in February and a Silvereye in March. Both Tree and Fairy Martin were seen at SGR in February.

Although no cuckoos were recorded, another summer visitor, Latham's Snipe was still at HVR and WW in March but was recorded earlier at RGC in February and SGR in January & February.

Black-winged Stilt, Red-kneed Dotterel and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper must have

decided that water levels were too high and were not recorded at any site for the summer period.

The highlight for the three-month period was recording four Scaly-breasted Lorikeet at RGC in March. As indicated in the December Summary, it was thought the normal pair of Scaly-breasted that frequented a hollow in an old Red Gum at RGC could have used the hollow for nesting. Perhaps the additional two birds may be their offspring?

Frogs, mammals and fish are also recorded on a survey day. The only fish species recorded being European Carp, normally seen jumping or swimming close to the surface. Fisherman are often seen trying to catch this species. Mammals recorded at some sites are European Rabbit, Brown Hare, Red Fox and Feral Cat. A Red Fox was a first in March at Kilberry.

Frog species recorded this period being Spotted Marsh Frog at Frog Hollow (FH) and RGC in February and the Striped Marsh Frog only at RGC in January and March.

At the end of March, the following MELBOCA sites have recorded the following number of bird species on survey days:

FH – 85
KB – 67
RGC – 103
SGR – 97
HVR – 105
WW – 52

A full tally of all species recorded may be found on the MELBOCA Website www.melboca.org.au

The Annual Report on the Community Monitoring of Bird Utilisation of Constructed Wetlands in the Dandenong Catchment, July 2009 – June 2010, prepared by Jenny Lau, was released in January 2011. The report is produced by BOCA for Melbourne Water and may be viewed at the BOCA National Office Library in Nunawading.

The report is the third in a four year program which ends in June 2011 but which may be extended.

Graeme Hosken

The *Melbirdian* is published four times a year. Member birding-related stories and articles are invited. The deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the Spring Edition is 18 July 2011.