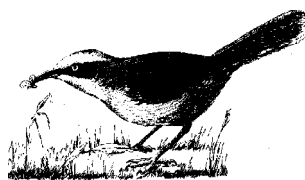


The Babbler



An occasional newsletter of the Murray Goulburn Branch of the Bird Observers Club of Australia

No. 23, May 2007

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New name for BOCA

History was made on 12 May 2007 when the Annual General Meeting of the Bird Observers Club of Australia voted to change the name of the organization to **Bird Observation and Conservation Australia**. A spirited and heartfelt debate preceded the vote, which was passed 277 for the name change and 80 against, thus narrowly achieving the 75% in favour needed for the proposal to pass.

A number of speakers opposing the change were concerned, not so much about the change of name, but more about procedural issues. It was argued that the Board had initially indicated that the proposal was to change the organization's operating name to Bird Observation and Conservation Australia, while retaining Bird Observers Club of Australia as the trading name. It was only at the AGM that many members became aware that the proposal would totally remove the old name.

Speakers in favour of the name change stated that conservation had always been a significant aspect of BOCA's activities, and it was important for the future growth of the club that this was reflected in the new name. It was also felt that members had been given many months to consider a new name, and to make their views known.

All other items put to the vote were passed.

Our AGM in Murchison

On 2 June we will meet in Murchison for our first outdoor Annual General Meeting on the banks of the Goulburn River. Anne & Warwick have kindly made contingency plans if the weather drives us indoors.

After lunch we will bird in the district, probably around the site of the WWII Prisoner of War Camp. Hooded and Red-capped Robins have been recorded in the area.

Kathy Costello will not be seeking re-election as branch president, having filled this position for the past seven years. Our branch will have a strong future if members are willing to share leadership roles. We look forward to the appointment of a new president for 2007/08. Please give this matter serious thought.

Correction – July outing

Please note that our visit to Youanmite Nature Conservation Reserve will be held on **Sunday 8 July**, not Saturday 8 July as typed in our programme.

Another correction on our programme relates to Extra Events at the bottom of the page. The date for the annual **Superb Parrot Survey** in the Picola district has been brought forward two weeks, from 2 December to **18 November**. Please contact the organiser Sue Logie if you wish to participate.

Western Australian Birds

Don Roberts reports on his trip with two birding friends in March 2007

The aim of the trip was to see the endemic species in the south west of Western Australia. Also high on the wish list was the Numbat, a termite eater of the Dryandra Forest.

Like most of southern Australia, this part of WA was very dry. The first morning was spent at Bungendore Park, Armadale, on the outskirts of Perth. Our first endemics; Red-capped Parrot, Western Rosella, Western Spinebill, Western Wattlebird and Western Yellow Robin.

We then drove south towards Bunbury and camped at Leschenault Peninsula Conservation Reserve just north of Bunbury. Here we saw 12 Regent Parrots, further west than usual because of the drought, and 15 Caspian Terns on the estuary. On the other side of the road to the estuary was degraded grazing land, but the Golden Plovers liked the conditions – 12 observed.

In Bunbury the estuary and sea wall barrier were fruitful, with three Grey Plovers, two Greenshanks, 20 Pied Cormorants, many Little Black Cormorants and Crested Terns.

That night we camped at Wellington National Park, inland from Bunbury, where we saw our first Red-eared Firetail, White-breasted Robin and Red-winged Fairy-wren. At night, the rare Western Ringtail.

Next day back towards the west coast via Collie, Donnybrook and Busselton. On the way we stopped at the Capel Wetland, which is an old mine site rehabilitated into numerous wetlands and bush plantings.

After leaving Busselton our next stop was Cape Naturaliste, a marvellous coastal heathland where we had great views of a pair of Red-eared Firetails and approximately 50 Short-billed Black Cockatoos, the latter feeding in the crowns of Hakea shrubs. That night we stayed at Yallingup, where the Brushtail Possums had become very tame, feeding from one's hand.

South Coast birding

South along the coast there are many caves, some open to the public, with information centres, toilets etc. Mammoth Cave car park produced Red-winged Fairy-wren, Western Spinebill and Owlet Nightjar calling. Conto Campground within the Leeuwin-Naturaliste

National Park was our next night. Brown Bandicoots were a highlight, feeding at my feet. Next morning was spent at Jewell Cave near Augusta, to try to find the western form of the Crested Shrike-tit. No luck, but did have good views of the Long-billed Black Cockatoo, very similar to the Short-billed so much care has to be taken in identification.

Next stop Cape Leeuwin lighthouse, where the Indian and Southern Oceans meet, so do Sooty and Pied Oystercatchers – Sooty on rocks, Pied on the beach.

We travelled east to Pemberton and visited the tourist attraction the Gloucester Tree, which you can climb if you are mad enough. The birds are very tame; two Western Rosellas landed on my head, not at the same time. Just as we were about to leave two Crested Shrike-tits appeared, quite different from our eastern birds in plumage and calls. We then moved east to camp at Peerup Nature Reserve where we were privileged to see approximately 50 Long-billed Black Cockatoos come in to drink at the camp just on dusk.

Next day as we left the reserve we observed our first Western Corellas in adjacent farming land. They are like Little Corellas, but with a longer bill but a little shorter than a Long-billed Corella. Also there is not as much red in the plumage.

Heading south we visited Lake Muir which has an excellent boardwalk and hide, but not a drop of water. The lake covers an area similar in size to Waranga Basin.

Next Mount Franklin National Park. The mountain was climbed by two of our party but not by me. Whilst they were away I had prolonged views of a pair of Red-eared Firetails and Red-winged Fairy-wrens. The campground at Fernbrook Falls within the national park produced three Bush Rats, a very handsome species.

South again to Walpole, east to Denmark and the Valley of the Giants Tree-top Walk; half a million visitors a year do the walk. This was only the second place we observed White-browed Babbler.

Albany region

East to Albany to look for the Rock Parrot. No luck so we went further east to Waychinicup National Park. Waychinicup is a wonderful coastal heathland with taller forest patches along a creek, a hot spot for WA rare species such as Noisy Scrub-bird, Western Bristlebird and Western Whipbird. We heard the scrub-

bird many times without seeing it, but had great views of the bristlebird.

We had 2 days in the national park and moved on to Cheynes Beach Caravan Park, only a stone's throw away. The Arpenteur Nature Reserve adjacent to the caravan park produced a Noisy Scrub-bird sprinting across the road twice, and a more sedate Western Bristlebird feeding on the edge. I also heard a Western Whipbird. We also saw Honey and Pygmy Possums and a Quokka.

West again to Albany via Betty's Beach, a chance to see the Whipbird, no luck. After leaving Albany, north to Stirling Range National Park. Topography similar to the Warby Ranges in Victoria, but more habitats, from tall forests to Mallee heaths. We had 2 nights at Moingup Spring Campground within the park. Long-billed Black Cockatoo came in to drink at dusk, and a pair stayed at the camp with a young bird the whole day; great views were obtained.

We saw our first Western Thornbill in the taller forest, very like our Buff-rumped Thornbill. Even the call was similar. The Grey Butcherbirds were more black and white than the eastern birds. The Mallee heath in the park produced Southern Emu-wren, a couple of Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters, and the jewel in the crown, a Western Whipbird. Great views were obtained at close range. Two others were calling in the distance.

Dryandra Forest

We then went north to Narrogin. On the way we saw Elegant Parrots in grazing land, a flock of ten. Narrogin is the gateway to the Dryandra Forest, famous for the Numbat. We saw our first Rufous Treecreeper, Restless Flycatcher, Yellow-plumed, Brown-headed, and White-eared Honeyeaters, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Painted Button-quail, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Blue-breasted Fairy-wren (eclipse). We also heard a Bush Stone-curlew. The second observation of the rare Shrike-tit was a bonus.

After 3 days of searching for the Numbat we were unsuccessful. Other mammals were much more co-operative. We saw Woylie, Tamar Wallaby, Western Brush Wallaby, Western Grey Kangaroo and Brushtail Possums, many of which had white-tipped tails.

From the Dryandra we moved to the north of Perth. On the way we observed Peregrine Falcon, Spotted Harrier and many Wedge-tailed Eagles and Western Corellas.

North of Perth

Lancelin, a coastal town 100km north of Perth was our next location. The beach produced many Ruddy Turnstones, 20 Sanderlings, one Common Sandpiper, one Pectoral Sandpiper, 3 Caspian Terns and 3 Roseate Terns. We took a short boat trip to Lancelin Island and observed hundreds of Bridled Terns, three Sooty Terns and 100 Common Noddys. At last we had found Rock Parrots, a flock of 16 birds.

On the way to Cervantes we observed a Rufous Fieldwren in low heathland. Still heading north we spent the next night and morning at Lesueur National Park which is mainly heathland. A beautiful park where we observed Tawny-crowned, White-cheeked and Brown-headed Honeyeaters and Western Thornbill.

Coastal Green Head was as far north as we ventured. Here we saw a lone grey form of the Eastern Reef Egret feeding amongst rocks at the water's edge.

Back in Perth we boarded the ferry at Fremantle to spend the day on Rottnest Island. We hired bikes and birded for six hours, observing Osprey, Grey-tailed Tattler, Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked Stint, Grey Plover, Banded Lapwing, Caspian, Crested, Roseate, Fairy and Bridled Terns, Sacred Kingfisher, Red-necked Avocet, Black-winged and Banded Stilts and Red-capped Robin.

Our last day in WA we drove from Perth to Brookton to the east to try to find Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens. We were successful, but didn't see a coloured male for the whole trip. In fact we only saw a handful of coloured Red-winged Fairy-wrens. Other species were all in eclipse plumage, these being White-winged, Splendid and Blue-breasted.

In total we observed 166 species in the 23 days, and were privileged to see all the southern endemics.

Grey-crowned Babbler Project

Dates of activities 2007

Friends of the Grey-crowned Babbler have arranged the following activities in our district to assist the continued survival of this wonderful yet endangered bird in northern Victoria.

Sunday 3 June

Babbler monitoring Koonda district, near Violet Town. Meet 9.30am corner of Violet Town-Dookie Road and Sloans/Paynters Road. (Vic Roads map 47 D2). BYO lunch and binoculars.

Sunday 24 June

Babbler monitoring Barmah district, Nathalia. Meet 9.30am corner of Murray Valley Highway and Yielima North Road (Vic Roads map 22 E8). BYO lunch and binoculars.

Sunday 24 June

Babbler monitoring Brimin district, near Rutherglen. Meet 9.30am at Boorhaman Golf Course (Vic Roads map 34 F5). BYO lunch and binoculars.

Sunday 29 July

National Tree Planting day at Rob and Hilary Heal's property, Walkers Road, Moglonemby. This planting along a creek line will follow-up previous plantings in 1999, 2004 and 2006. Start 9.30am, finish by lunch. Vic Roads map 47 A4.

Sunday 12 August

Tree planting at McDiarmid property near Violet Town. Access from Violet Town-Murchison Road west of Violet Town. Start 9.30am, finish by lunch. Vic Roads map 47 C-D 3-4.

For more information about the survey and planting days, contact Tobi Edmonds email tobi.edmonds@dse.vic.gov.au phone 58245524

The Friends group newsletter (no 8, April 2007) reports that over 150 sites have now been fenced or planted as part of the project. Although Grey-crowned Babbler numbers continue to decline in parts of Victoria, there has been some encouraging news at project sites. Babbler numbers in the Violet Town area have increased by 28% since 1992, from 117 to 150 birds. Increases have also been recorded at Rutherglen and Barmah. The Superb Parrot project at Barmah has had a positive impact in improving habitat for babblers as well as the parrots.

Balmattum Reserve

Noisy Miners are gradually being removed to evaluate their impact on bird diversity. Small birds such as Weebills, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Brown-headed Honeyeaters and White-plumed Honeyeaters are now established in the interior of the reserve, and there are two groups of Grey-crowned Babblers now using this area. Babblers had not been seen in the reserve since 1992, when surveys began. Eleven new species were recorded in the reserve in 2006-07.

Balmattum Reserve was purchased by Parks Victoria to provide habitat for a number of woodland bird species, and it is significant that 4 of the 17 target species were recorded in the reserve for the first time in 2006-07. They are Southern Whiteface, Varied Sittella, Brown-headed Honeyeater and Restless Flycatcher.

(Extract from Friends of the Grey-crowned Babbler newsletter no 8 April 2007)

Reports of outings

Chateau Tahbilk Wetlands 10 February 2007

The winery owners at Chateau Tahbilk, south of Nagambie, have recently established a wetland cruise on a 6km billabong which was formerly part of the Goulburn River. The billabong is 60 metres wide and about 3 metres deep. The water is used to irrigate some of the vineyards, and some is also released into the Goulburn River, in a co-operative arrangement with Goulburn Valley Water.

We had a great response from members, and filled the boat for our morning cruise. Many species of waterbirds were seen from the boat – Great, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Great Egret, Darter, plus swamphens, moorhens and coots and a good number of Black Swans. Some of us glimpsed an Azure Kingfisher perched at the waters edge, and a Latham's Snipe was flushed from the bank.

Most of us enjoyed a quality lunch in the café which overlooks the water. It has proved a popular eating place for visitors. As the afternoon warmed up, some of our group set off on a walk along the billabong, while others headed for home. Highlights of the walk were close views of several Darters, one White-breasted Woodswallow perched on a dead tree in the water, and Brown Quail in the long grass. Mike, Ann, Gary and Lisa spotted a Tawny Frogmouth from the window of the café, as they enjoyed a late afternoon cappuccino.

Total species recorded 58

Kanyapella & Wyuna – joint outing with Echuca Branch 18 March 2007

After a crazy week at school I took the opportunity and took off to get my sanity back with some 'bird soothing' as I like to call it. I met up with the local Echuca branch that had combined their outing with the Murray–Goulburn branch and Dallas Wyatt lead us on a fantastic trip to Kanyapella Basin and surrounds. Being a new comer to attending branch outings it is fantastic to unwind with a little banter and a lot of gazing through 'bins' at birds. We visited six sites throughout the day with a very successful 73 species count considering it is so very dry around Echuca.

Kanyapella Basin had few birds at this site but excellent views of male and female Red capped robin, Diamond firetail and a pair of Jacky Winter. It was fantastic that everybody had a chance to have a really thorough inspection of the birds at this spot as well as other sites over the day.

At O'Dea Road on both sides of the road where there had been planting of mallee species we had great views of Singing Honeyeater.

Along the Murray River at the entrance to the Echuca Regional park we had great views of both the female and male Crested Shrike Tit. They took little notice of us while they foraged fastidiously.

A dam on private property viewed from the road had good numbers of waterfowl including four species of duck and black fronted dotterel. At this site we debated the identity of a goshawk that was harassing a large number of starling around a barn when it dived down and plucked a starling that was foraging on the ground and disappeared into a willow. We decided that it was a Collared Sparrowhawk that had put on this very spectacular aerial show. As we drove to the Allan Corry Roadside reserve to check out the Echuca BOCA tree planting we stopped to admire an Australian Hobby surveying the surrounding farmland from a high perch. For a beginner it was a great opportunity to look at its features that distinguish it from other kestrels.

It was a great day of birding, chatting and amazing that at every site we found new birds that weren't seen at other sites that day. For a young beginner it was fantastic to be made feel so welcome by both the Echuca branch and Murray–Goulburn branch of BOCA and to have such a relaxing and enjoyable day birding. Thanks to the Echuca branch for their local knowledge and to those that allowed people into their cars for carpooling.

Karen Collard
The Basin

Yea & Molesworth 14 April 2007

Bob Tate was our leader on a warm, sunny April day. We spent the morning at Yea Wetland, with its large red gums and tall silver wattles. Although the wetland was dry, there was water in Yea Creek.

The Bell Miners at the entrance had chased away most other birds, but once we left the miner colony behind, we started to see some good birds along the walk. A pair of Crested Shrike-tits were feeding low in the canopy, giving great views from the path. Other birds seen were Brown and Striated Thornbills, Golden Whistler, Red-browed Finch, Spotted Pardalote, White-browed Scrubwren and plenty of Superb Fairy-wrens. We then enjoyed lunch by the creek.

A lot of effort has gone into making this a pleasant place to visit. The walk has excellent signage, a mix of gravel paths and a lengthy new boardwalk, and is very quiet and peaceful.

A short drive took us to Molesworth for what turned out to be a lovely afternoon walk along the Goulburn River. An Olive-backed Oriole was seen foraging above our heads. Crimson Rosellas were seen throughout the walk. As we came to a cleared area, we came across both Flame and Scarlet Robins. We puzzled at length over one red robin, deciding in the end it had to be a Scarlet Robin, because of the large white spot above the bill. But the orange breast colour and greyish back had us checking our various field guides.

White-eared Honeyeater, Grey Fantail, Dusky Woodswallow, Grey Shrike-thrush, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and White-throated Treecreeper were among the 46 species recorded for the day.

Chesneyvale Hills 6 May 2007

Fourteen members were privileged to be given access to a wonderful property in the Chesneyvale Hills. Our only previous visit was seven years ago. We stopped briefly at Lake Mokoan en route to Chesneyvale. Purple-crowned Lorikeets were feeding noisily in a flowering eucalypt, and White-browed Babblers called in the distance.

When we arrived at the property, it was obvious that the extended dry conditions have taken a toll on the trees and understorey vegetation. However, the fringe myrtle (*Calytrix*) on the granite ridges seemed surprisingly healthy, and the extensive areas of woodland provide significant habitat for an impressive number of bird species.

Probably the highlight for most members was seeing small flocks of Diamond Firetails feeding in tussock grass at the base of the granite, or flying across a laneway to feed in a grazed paddock. An adult was observed perched with three immatures, so there has been some successful breeding in our driest season

on record. We estimated total numbers at 20 – 30 birds.

We enjoyed extended, close views of a pair of Hooded Robins feeding at the edge of the woodland, and a pair of Speckled Warblers was seen in a wooded part of a paddock with fallen timber. Small numbers of Southern Whiteface were feeding on the ground with the Diamond Firetails, together with a number of Flame Robins. It was also great to see six groups of White-browed Babblers in various parts of the property. These birds have been declining in the region.

Other species of particular interest were Peaceful Dove, Brown and White-throated Treecreeper, Scarlet and Eastern Yellow Robin, Crested Shrike-tit, Rufous and Golden Whistler, plus Yellow-tufted and Brown-headed Honeyeater.

Chesneyvale is a beautiful area, with rolling hills, and a feeling of peace and solitude. A tinge of green now covers the district. Colin, the property owner, reported that a spring in the granite outcrop has just started running for the first time in 18 months. Here's hoping there are good follow-up rains.

Total species recorded 53

Interesting sightings

Following soaking rains in March this year, Don Roberts noticed two pairs of Welcome Swallows around his house refurbishing last year's nests, and a third pair constructing a new nest. The rain was then followed by several weeks of hot, dry weather, and nesting activity ceased.

Gillian Steward reported a Brown Goshawk flying fast through her carport in hot pursuit of a small bird.