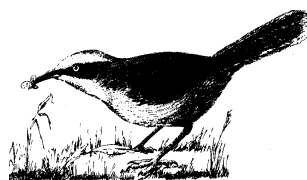


# The Babbler



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

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## Tasalong 08 -- In search of the 40 Spotted Pardalote by Anne Finlay

Retirement eighteen months ago meant a new freedom to pursue my love of bird observing. I had been bird watching, mainly with a very patient husband locally, as well on our travels around Australia, and on infrequent outings with the Murray Goulburn branch of BOCA. On one of their camps, Keith Stockwell mentioned that fellow camper and observer, Jon Hosford, was planning to lead a tagalong trip around Tasmania where he now lives. Warwick and I immediately registered our interest. Jon, who is a founding member of the Echuca & District Branch, had the skill and knowledge to lead the group of 18, and ensured we had an enjoyable time. Added bonus was the presence of past M.G President Kathy Costello.

Jon, and fellow local Devonport birders met us at the Ferry, and escorted us to Moreland Beach where Ranger John Bowden led us, his speciality is the little penguin colonies. He informed us the penguin chicks had left the nests and gone out to sea early as the pilchards were running. Moreland Beach had many waders, including Pacific Golden Plover, Double-banded Plover, Red-capped Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, and a Grey-tailed Tattler. Additional highlights were the many White-fronted Chat that kept popping onto the fence along the road.

Next stop Port Sorell (Gov. Sorell has many places named in his honour in Tasmania) where we saw our first endemics, Dusky Robin, Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Green Rosella, & Yellow Wattlebird. Additional sightings were Satin Flycatcher (Tasmania's only Flycatcher) and Grey Fantail, which, in the absence of Willy Wagtail are plentiful in

Tasmania, along with Masked Lapwing and Tasmanian Native hen.

First night we all enjoyed the hospitality of Jon and Margaret Hosford, not only did we camp in their garden, have full use of their facilities, but enjoyed beautiful salads, summer pudding and wine, all grown and produced by them on their property. A pleasant early Sunday morning walk failed to find the semi-resident Tawny Frogmouths. In fact we noted the non appearance of owls or frogmouths during our 15 days in Tasmania.

Cataract Gorge Launceston, produced an enjoyable walk, and then onto River and Rocks camping ground at Freycinet National park. Birding stops along the way produced the first sighting of the endemic Black-headed Honeyeater. Camp Site of River and Rocks, near by Moulting lagoon, and Douglas Apsley National had excellent birding.

Tuesday, we had the choice of a 4 hour walk to the beach at Wine Glass Bay, or 2 hour walk to the lookout. Murray Goulburn contingent chose the lookout walk, which was well worth it. Main sightings were Brown Thornbill, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, & Eastern Spinebill along the route.

Onto Triabunna, as nobody claimed expertise in the area of pelagic birds, we all wisely had to study three pelagic birds for our sea trip next day. A few were disappointed with this sea trip, as due to bad weather, lack of birding knowledge of the crew, the expected number of birds did not eventuate. There were other compensations, incredible views of the coastline of Maria Island with its painted Cliffs, and the arrival the next evening at our camp, of three huge Crayfish by one the crew for all to enjoy. Black-faced Cormorants, Australasian Gannet, and first for me, the Shy Albatross,

amongst other pelagic birds we observed. Hooded Plover were also seen on the Beach.

Thursday, saw us board the high speed ferry to Maria Island, where we were greeted by the Cape Barren Geese, amongst many historic buildings. A recommended 2 hour walk to the reservoir took over 4 hrs, as we had excellent birding, first sighting of the Beautiful Firetail, Pink Robin, Tasmanian Scrubwrens, and yes the Forty-spotted Pardalotes. Better viewing was had after lunch on the Painted Cliffs walk, where the white (Manna) gums, the trees they favour were not so tall.

That night several members enjoyed the huge crayfish, courtesy of the crewman of the previous day's boat trip, a meal Warwick and others will never forget.

On we go, Weilangatta Forest walk revealed two Olive Whistlers, I had seen them before at Wilsons Prom, but the heart still skipped a beat when I saw them, as I do with any of the whistlers. They and the robins are special to me.

Found our way through Hobart, then onto the ferry for Bruny Island. Camped at The Neck and saw my first flock of Pied Oyster catchers, I have seen them in pairs, even four, but never this many together. Up until this day, I was thinking we could have managed in a tent, but it was chilly and very wet on Bruny Island so we were glad of the van.

Inala, we have all seen the advert in the *Bird Observer*, was very special, guided by Dr. Tonia Cochran, a delightful knowledgeable lady, but the weather was not in our favour, we enjoyed the visit, had a few sightings, and a delicious lunch was served next to a very cosy fire. I would recommend visiting Inala.

Pulled into historic Adventure Bay, any and all the explorers have called in here, and Warwick found his visit to the Bligh Museum very informative. Early morning walk at nearby Mavista Reserve found leeches, (should say they found us) Scrub Tits, (I saw 2 little brown birds flying away, but others had good sightings) and Bassian Thrush.

Kathy was very helpful to a young Czech man, who was on his third bird observing visit to Australia. She and Lyn managed to find him some Swift Parrots, which were high on his wish list.

Adventure Bay (appropriately named) produced an Ecoboat trip of a lifetime. The weather had been rough for a couple of days, today there was a large swell, but no chop,

perfect. The crew got us all dressed in long bright red/orange raincoats, and warned us about the splash. Off we went, high speed, out to see the beautiful rugged coastline of Bruny Island, and its numerous blowholes, out to The Southern Ocean, (next stop Antarctica), and viewed the seals sunbaking on the rocks. The crew were very knowledgeable, and went out of their way to help us see pelagic birds. Numerous Shearwaters, Aust. Gannet, Shy Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, *wonderful wonderful* sight how they glide using their huge wingspan. Suddenly one of the crew got very excited, he saw a Great Northern Petrel, a rare event, This caused great discussion at bird call, as everyone respected the experienced crews' bird identification knowledge, but as you all know, it is the Bill, (he didn't have binos) but it may have been the flight pattern, you can imagine the chat, but everyone was in total agreement it had been a magnificent boat trip.

Onto delightful Lake St. Clair, in the southern part of Cradle Mt. N.P. First sighting for me of Crescent Honeyeaters, and excellent sightings of Bassian Thrush on the footpaths.



Strahan, next stop via Franklin River walk, where some of the group spotted Scrub Tits, (they evaded me, again.) down the steep windy roads, (thank you Warwick, you did an excellent job towing the caravan) into Queenstown. Quick look at the steam train and the beautiful Blackwood staircase at the hotel, and onto Macquarie Heads camping ground. Passed Strahan airport, where we later heard but did not see the Ground Parrot.

Bird call that evening saw Dallas justifiably very excited, he had stopped along the way, and walking through heath, he had an excellent sighting as he accidentally flushed out the ground parrot.

The Gordon River Cruise a must do if you are in the area, took us out to Cape Sorell, at the head of Macquarie Harbour and then turned back and up the Gordon River.

Guided walk around Sarah Island (history warrants and has books written about it) found some of our group sighted a Lewin's Rail. A Queensland Birdo we had met earlier on the boat was grieved he had not seen it as he had been looking for it for 20yrs.

Onto Cradle Mt., took the transit bus to Ferguson Track and had a beautiful walk on a clear day, to Lake Dove, which sits beneath Cradle Mt. Not a lot of birds, but views I will never forget.

Good byes the next morning, a lovely group of people, naturally, they were Birdos, who all agreed we had had a wonderful holiday. Then on to meet the local Bird group at the very interesting Arboretum near Devonport. Then return trip on the Spirit of Tasmania, and home.

Interesting observations passed on by the group were,

- Even though Tasmania has huge areas of trees, reduced variations of Eucalypts mean lack of variety of honeyeaters, and in the absence of treecreepers the honeyeaters appear to take over their role.
- Further south we go, less overall variety of birds and less colourful, all commonsense, but I thought worth noting.
- Alan Fletcher, who successfully led us in Peter Murrels Reserve, where we had good sightings of the Forty-spotted Pardalote, has an excellent bird photography online site.

If I was granted a wish for one spot to go birding in Tasmania, I would choose Maria Island, with Lake St. Clair second. Hopefully we will go again, a lot more to see.

Gowrie Park was our destination for our last night, excellent birding at the camp ground. David Ong's photos online of the Dusky Robins were taken here. All enjoyed a meal at a local restaurant; Warwick and I had local smoked trout, mmmm.

### Tasalong Bird List February 08

Black Faced Cormorant  
Great Cormorant  
Little Pied Cormorant  
Little Black Cormorant  
White-faced Heron  
Chestnut Teal  
Australasian Shoveler  
Pacific Black  
Musk Duck  
Cape Barren Goose  
Australian Wood Duck  
Black Swan  
Australian Shelduck  
Swamp Harrier  
White-breasted Sea Eagle

Wedge-tailed Eagle  
Brown Falcon  
Brown Quail  
Eurasian Coot  
\* *Tasmanian native hen*  
Pied Oystercatcher  
Sooty Oystercatcher  
Double-banded Plover  
Hooded Plover  
Red-capped Plover  
Pacific Golden Plover  
Masked Lapwing  
Ruddy Turnstone  
Grey-tailed Tattler  
Caspian Tern  
Kelp Gull  
Silver Gull  
Pacific Gull  
Crested Tern  
Common Bronzewing  
Brush Bronzewing  
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (1only)  
Galah (1only)  
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo  
Musk Lorikeet  
Swift Parrot  
Ground Parrot (1only)  
\* *Green rosella*  
Eastern Rosella  
Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo  
Pallid Cuckoo  
Fan-tailed Cuckoo  
Tawny Frogmouth (1 only heard)  
Tree Martin  
Welcome Swallow  
Richards Pipit  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
\* *Dusky robin*  
Satin Flycatcher  
Olive Whistler  
Golden Whistler  
Pink Robin  
Flame Robin  
Scarlet Robin  
Grey Fantail  
Bassian Thrush  
Superb Fairy-wren  
Yellow-rumped Thornbill  
Brown Thornbill  
\* *Tasmanian Thornbill*  
\* *Tasmanian Scrubwren*  
\* *Scrubtit*  
Eastern Spinebill  
Brush (Little) Wattlebird  
\* *Yellow Wattlebird*  
\* *Yellow-throated Honeyeater*  
Noisy Miner  
\* *Black-headed Honeyeater*  
\* *Strong billed Honeyeater*  
New Holland Honeyeater  
Crescent Honeyeater  
White-fronted Chat  
Spotted Pardalote  
\* *Forty-spotted Pardalote*  
Striated Pardalote  
Silvereye  
Beautiful Firetail  
Dusky Woodswallow  
Grey Butcherbird  
Australian magpie  
Black Currawong  
Grey Currawong  
Forest Raven  
Pelican  
Little Penguin  
Laughing Kookaburra  
Mallard  
Indian Peafowl  
Blackbird

European Goldfinch  
 House Sparrow  
 Common Starling  
 Shy Albatross  
 Grey-headed Albatross  
 Northern Giant Petrel ??  
 Australasian Gannet  
 Short-tailed Shearwater  
 Lewin's Rail

\* *endemics*

## Dotterel dramas

On Dec 31, when we got home from Xmas at Agnes Water we noticed a Black-fronted Plover on the edge of Balmattum Rd waving its wings at the car whenever we went or came home from Violet Town. We soon found that it was sitting on a nest with 3 eggs, very close (less than 10cm) to the bitumen surface. Our neighbours told us that they first noticed it about Xmas Day and they were all amazed to see it there, and that it always stayed sitting when cars went past or even stopped to look. It did fly off if I walked too close! The nearest dam was/is about 100m from the nest site. I checked it every time I went to town and back and even put a couple of strategically placed rocks to discourage drivers from wandering of the road surface in that area. The nest was on the outside of the right hand curve quite close to Harrys Creek Rd and was right in the light from headlights at night.



(3 eggs on edge of bitumen, near centre of pic)

On the morning of Mon 14th I saw that she had chicks in the nest and that night, on the way home from Carpet Bowls the chicks and mother 'exploded' off the nest and went in all directions as I went past. I did find an adult at the dam on Tues morning and subsequently on a few occasions, but never sighted the chicks again.

Barry McLean

## Ulladulla Pelagic

2008 is the year I decided I had to see an albatross. After 25 years of birdwatching, it was time I plucked up courage to go on my first pelagic boat trip. So when a friend told me about a 2 day trip out of Ulladulla in a large

boat, I made a booking. Ulladulla is a tiny port of the south coast of NSW. On 5 April at 9.30pm, 14 birdos set off to sea on a trip organised by Southern Ocean Seabird Study Association (SOSSA), based at Wollongong.

Overnight, as we slept in our comfortable bunks, the MV Banks headed 80 nautical miles out into the Tasman Sea. The keen birdos were up before daylight ready with binoc's for the first birds to show. That's how I missed the only Tahiti Petrel seen in the 2 days at sea. I was on deck soon after sunrise watching a succession of Gould's Petrels flying past. These very rare seabirds were plentiful only because we were in the middle of their core territory.

What a difference it makes to have experts identifying unfamiliar birds. Having been on 3 wonderful boat trips on the Tasalong but with no seabird experts on any of them (see Anne Finlay's story on page 1), I really appreciated having our leader Peter explaining the difference between the Great-winged Petrels and Providence Petrels as they flew around the boat.

In 2 days I saw 12 new species. And yes, I did see an albatross – four in fact. What a thrill to see an adult Wandering Albatross gliding gracefully low over the ocean towards our boat, dwarfing all the other birds in the vicinity. We had one Yellow-nosed Albatross do a quick flypast on the first day, and a Black-browed Albatross which stayed for some time near the boat on the second day. The dainty Wilson's Storm Petrels were a delight to watch as they danced on the water delicately picking food off the surface.

On our way back to Ulladulla, we were surrounded by seabirds attracted to the berley thrown overboard. Amongst the squabbling petrels and shearwaters were three Shy Albatross barging to the front of the queue. Meanwhile SOSSA members were busy netting then banding Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Great-winged Petrels. The whole procedure took only 15 seconds per bird.

I'd recommend the trip to anyone who wants to see pelagic birds in comfort, although at a considerable cost. The cook produced lovely meals, we were high and dry above the water with plenty of seats and viewing areas, the beds were comfortable, the expert advice was invaluable and I was only sick once. More information is available from the SOSSA website <http://www.sossa-international.org>

Kathy Costello

## Next Outing – AGM at Mooroopna Sat 7 June

Following the success of last year's AGM at Warwick and Anne's place, we will again meet at the home of one of our members. This year's AGM is at Don and Anita's place at 20 Gemmill Crescent, Mooroopna at 10am on Saturday 7 June. After the AGM, we will have lunch then walk around Gemmill's Swamp in the afternoon. Please bring your own lunch and a chair.

## MGBOCA bird lists now on Eremaea website

Barry McLean has loaded details of recent branch outings onto Eremaea, so those of you with internet access can check at any time what birds our branch has recorded at each location visited.

To quote a recent email from Barry, "if you go to [www.eremaea.com](http://www.eremaea.com) now you will find on the welcome page that there is now a link to our branch.

The link is on the lower left of the screen and clicking "Murray Goulburn Bird Observers Club" will give you a description of our branch and a list of all the survey reports that have been entered so far. This makes it a bit easier than sorting through latest sightings and makes it easy for anyone to view our reports.

I hope that over time we may be able to enter all the surveys recorded in our 21+ years."

## *Reports of outings*

### Lake Benalla Sat 9 February 2008

Twenty people attended our first outing for the year. We met in the rose gardens at Benalla on a surprisingly mild day for February with a top temperature of only 24 degrees. It was a lovely day to walk around the bushland end of the lake with its massive red gums.

The undoubted highlight of the day (and possibly the year) was an adult Little Bittern, spotted in reeds on the edge of the water. It was visible from a park bench on the north edge of the lake near the Council buildings for about an hour around noon, firstly on the reeds on the south edge of the lake about 150m east

of the bridge, where Barry's telescope gave most people an excellent view of the bird across the water. Joan, watching through the scope, saw it catch and swallow a fish. The bird then took off and we could see the pale wing patches as it flew in bright sunshine to our side of the lake, where a small group had good close views after it landed in the reeds.

Five of our members had originally seen what we thought was an immature bittern with a brown streaked appearance, but by the time the main group joined us, only an adult bird was visible.

Later in the day, several Benalla members returned to the lake and had excellent views of an adult male Little Bittern feeding in the reeds at the water's edge in the late afternoon sun, his black crown and chestnut neck showing beautifully.

Also while walking on the walking track swifts were seen well above tree height on 2 occasions. At least 3 White-throated Needletails in one area and a single Fork-tailed Swift at another area a few minutes later. Other birds included Brown Goshawk, Sacred Kingfisher, Brown and White-throated Treecreepers, Grey Fantail, Olive-backed Oriole, Blue-faced Honeyeater and King Parrot. A single juvenile Dollarbird was also seen. A total of 43 spp were recorded but only small numbers of individuals in a very quiet forest!

After lunch a few members then headed to nearby Reef Hills State Park, adding Common Bronzewing, White-browed Babbler, Jacky Winter and a few honeyeaters to the day's tally which eventually reached 52.

(Ed. note; Don advises the Little Bittern is the first ever recorded in 23 years of Murray-Goulburn outings. It was a new bird for many of our members.)

### Lima East Sun 16 March 2008

Our outing was to private property at Lima East, about 30 kilometres south of Benalla. A total of 12 observers including 3 from Ovens & Murray Branch attended from 10am until 2pm in spite of the predicted and actual heat - approx 36C. We are very grateful to Christine and Peter for allowing us to visit, especially as they were in the throes of moving into the farmhouse.

The property lies at the edge of a wide valley bordered by the Strathbogie Ranges. We walked through a mix of habitats – from open

paddocks, to rocky outcrops with massive box trees and cherry ballart, to well-established revegetation plantings, then to a very welcome shady creek backing on to a forested hillside. The creek was a perfect spot for lunch on such a hot day.

Christine noted that a number of large trees, particularly in open areas, have either died or are showing signs of drought stress over recent years. Some rocky outcrops that were heavily wooded then they bought the property have changed dramatically with the loss of vegetation.

Jacky Winter, White-winged Chough, Red-rumped Parrot, Masked Lapwing, Galah and Eastern Rosella were recorded in the paddocks. We heard White-throated Gerygone in the forest; maybe someone got a look at it. Brown and Striated Thornbills, White-browed Scrubwren, Red-browed Finch and Grey Fantail were found near the creek, along with Eastern Spinebill, Eastern Yellow and Scarlet Robin. Then there were the whistlers, pardalotes and honeyeaters, including White-eared and White-naped. The birds enjoyed the shade just as much as we did.

Total species recorded 46

### **Doctors Swamp, Murchison & Rushworth Forest 5 April 2008**

On our outing on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> of April we travelled to the Rushworth Forest via Doctors Swamp in Murchison. This is unalienated Crown land and following the 150mm of rain in December /January the swamp for the first time in years had been filled. Unfortunately for our visit all that was left were large puddles, but the gnarled red gums made an impressive sight. Ibis, Shell Duck, Teal, White-faced Heron, and Tree Martins were seen. The western end of the swamp is Grey Box, normally the home of Grey Crowned Babblers, but they were not to be seen.

The same downpour that filled the swamp, made parts of the forest's hard floor appear to be washed clean. A stop along Wild Paddock road on route to Percy's Dam produced a cacophony of sounds of Friar Birds, Red Wattle birds, Fuscous and Yellow Tufted Honey Eaters. Nearby on an unformed track which had many old trees, Don and Paul observed a Gilbert's Whistler.

Percy's Dam was unusually quiet, so following lunch and Bird call we motored along Buffalo Diggings road to the Hillgrove property. A stop

along the way saw Red-capped Robin, male and female, and discussion which Gerygone was heard. Western was agreed upon. The drought has definitely affected bird numbers, and the normally excellent bird haven produced only a few sightings for some of us. Gary and Lisa ventured far into the property and were rewarded with Speckled Warbler, Gilbert's Whistler, a family of Red-capped Robins and Don was delighted to find Chestnut-rumped Thornbills; these used to be abundant in the adjacent Rushworth Forest. Final bird call amazingly produced 68 species.

Anne Finlay

### **Mangalore Flora Reserve Sun 4 May 2008**

Our club has visited Mangalore three times in recent years, and enjoyed the surprising bird diversity each visit. First time we found Speckled Warbler and Gilbert's Whistler, second visit Gilbert's Whistler, but this time neither species. Nor did we see the Hooded Robin, recorded in 2003.

However, the Mangalore Reserve is still well worth a visit. Sixteen observers enjoyed a very pleasant sunny day. The reserve was in good condition after showers in previous week. Not a great number of birds although the total is respectable.

The best birding turned out to be at the public rest area on the Goulburn Valley highway bordering the western edge of the reserve. We were really visiting the public toilets there, but found Yellow-rumped and Yellow Thornbills, Weebill, New Holland, Yellow-faced and Brown-headed Honeyeaters and a female Rufous Whistler which kept just ahead of us along the path. A male Golden Whistler perched overhead.

Back in the reserve were White-browed Babblers, Musk and Little Lorikeets, Crested Shrike-tit, Restless Flycatcher, Eastern Yellow Robin, White-naped Honeyeaters and three raptors overhead – Wedge-tailed Eagle, Little Eagle and Whistling Kite. Peaceful Dove and Black-chinned Honeyeater were both calling. Bob looked hard for the Red-capped Robin he'd seen here recently, but without success.

Total species recorded 54 (incl. several at Mangalore township, and a dam en route)