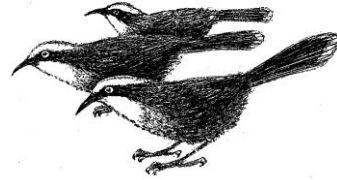


The Babbler



An occasional newsletter of the Murray Goulburn Branch of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia

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700 Australian birds - a personal quest

Dr Xenia Dennett from Melbourne decided in 2006 that she would like to see 700 birds before her 70th birthday. That gave her 18 months to add another 100 birds to her already impressive list of 600 birds. Xenia is our guest speaker at our annual meeting on Saturday 20 June 2009. She is a fine photographer and will illustrate her talk with some great photos of the special birds she saw on her quest.

Our AGM will be held at Barry and Roberta McLean's property near Violet Town, starting at 10am. Bring your lunch and a chair. We will also be able to enjoy some good birding around the McLean's beautiful garden and surrounding paddocks. It promises to be a lovely day. Hope you can come.

Some notes about some of 'our birds' at Violet Town in 2009

by Barry McLean

Robins: A good year; Eastern **Yellow Robins** have been recorded every week. Three brown juvenile **Red-capped** appeared late in 2008 and were seen most days of every week until June. They turned out to be a male and 2 female and we enjoyed watching their development into adult plumage. The first **Scarlets**, a pair, were seen on 19 April and 2 are still with us on 4 June. **Flames** arrived on 30 April and have been more numerous with 6-8 seen every day until 3 Jun.

Honeyeaters: These have been scarce and so have flowering trees but the last few days has produced some blossom. **White-**

plumed and **New Holland** are the only species here every day with **Red Wattlebirds** often here but in fewer numbers and much less often than previous years. They have been seen or heard on only 6 days between 15 Feb and 3 Jun – a big change from their usual daily visits. **White-naped** (6) made their first visit since 2 Oct 08 on 2 Jun; They are irregular visitors but this is a long break. **Yellow-faced**, our fourth most common honeyeater were last recorded on Jan 20! **Silvereyes** were recorded on only fifteen days this year. **Eastern Spinebill** has been with us for the last 2 weeks which is normal. **Noisy Friarbirds** were present for about 8 weeks, which is a little more than usual.

Pardalotes: Both Striated and Spotted have been numerous, good breeders and daily residents here since we arrived in 2001. The number of individuals (and nests) has been decreasing in the last few (dry) years. Since 14 Mar, **Spotted Pardalote** has been recorded on only 2 days and **Striated Pardalote** has not been seen or heard at all.

Weebill and Thornbills: Weebill were a very common bird and prolific breeder here until recently. I could always find more than five nests each year and I guess that each nest had 6 –12 attendant birds. In 2008 I have found 1 nest with 2 adults; I don't know if any young were produced. Seeing a Weebill is now a pleasant surprise. Only **Yellow-rumped** and (perhaps) **Striated Thornbill** seem to have maintained their numbers. **Brown Thornbill** are being recorded less often.

Superb Fairy-wrens remain prolific over the whole property.

White-browed Scrubwren nested in the fernery again – I have never seen more than one pair.

Seasonal Migrants: One **White-winged Triller** was recorded in Oct 08. Both White-throated and Western **Gerygone** numbers seem to be maintained. A **Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo** was recorded in July and Nov 08. One **Sacred Kingfisher** and a pair of **Leaden Flycatchers** were recorded in Oct 08. Masked and White-browed **Woodswallows** visited in small numbers during the last two weeks of October.

Rainbow Bee-eater: Good news; I think that there was an increase in the numbers returning to the north this year compared with 2007 and 2008.

Pigeons and Doves: A total of at least 3 Crested Pigeons were here for a total of 23 days between 6 Apr and 30 May. I did not find any evidence of nesting. Peaceful Doves have been here often but Bronzewing Pigeon was only seen once.

Southern Whiteface: At least 2 Whiteface visited in May – previous visit was in 2006.

BOCA Easter Camp at Murchison

BOCA (Bird Observation Conservation Australia) held a very successful camp on a private property on Willow Road Murchison at Easter. It was assisted by having perfect weather, and the preparation of the owner. A total of 146 birds were seen, 93 were seen locally within 5kms of camp in the first 24hrs, which amazed everyone as it looked so dry. The species are around, not the numbers.

Outings were arranged around the district, including Cussen Park in Tatura, and the sewage ponds in Shepparton, where 61 species were observed. An outing to a Baillieston property was very interesting, very dry, as expected. It has numerous Grass trees. Several members saw a pair of Gilbert's Whistlers.

The broilgas put on a staged performance at Murchison; they had been seen on the Thursday, but nowhere to be seen on the Friday. All the bird watchers arrive at the Murchison sewage ponds gate in the afternoon, and there they are posing at the edge of the pond. Stayed around long enough for everyone to get a good view, then elegantly flew away. After which everyone enjoyed a walk around Doctors Swamp.

Anne Finlay

(Editor's note: The success of the camp was due in no small part to Anne's great efforts, organising access to birding spots, portaloos for the camp, and even some local entertainers at the pub meal we enjoyed one night.)

Interesting Sightings

During the BOCA Easter camp at Murchison, local members Don, Gary & Peter joined the campers on their outing to the Shepparton sewage ponds, followed by lunch at Reedy Swamp. Small numbers of Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Double-banded Plover and White-fronted Chat were found at the sewage works in a pond with little water, plenty of mudflats and tussocks to hide behind. And a pair of White-breasted Sea-eagles was seen on the ground in a paddock at the sewage works.

Two campers located a flock of White-backed Swallows at Reedy Swamp, and showed them to Gary and Don. There were 17 birds in the group, an amazing number for a species that is rarely seen in our area these days.

Gary recently had good views of two Black Falcons on a fence near Numurkah.

MGBOCA website

Graham Boast has continued to develop our branch website. He has set up an easier address www.mgboca.org.au, although the previous address still works. Graham is keen to receive bird photos, interesting bird sightings or any other information you think our members would like to know about. Please email him at solution@shepparton.net.au.

Otways getaway

For those who would enjoy a quiet few days exploring the Otway Ranges, Benalla members Christine and Peter Holmes have a little cottage (Banleuca Cottage) at Kawarren, 15 km south of Colac. Many lovely birds can be seen from the lounge-room window, as the cottage is located on a three acre bush block.

A 10% discount is available to MGBOCA members. All the details can be viewed at www.otwaysaccommodation.com.au, click Gellibrand, click Banleuca Cottage. Or you can ring Christine or Peter on 5768 2379 for further information.

Reports of outings

Our president Barry McLean is continuing to load reports and bird lists for branch outings on the Eremaea website at www.ereamaea.com. Click on Murray Goulburn BOCA Branch in the lower left of the screen to access the different locations visited and to see a complete bird list for each outing. Before you can get a list of the places we have visited in Victoria, you will need to change the state from New South Wales (where we have one entry – Cocoparra NP) to Victoria (where Barry has so far entered about 20 locations). You can also access the Eremaea website from a link on our branch website www.mgboca.org.au

Reedy Swamp, Shepparton Sat 7 January 2009

This date will forever be etched in the minds of Victorians. Black Saturday was the worst bushfire day ever recorded in the state, with over 170 people dead. Because our outing was cancelled, a few members and friends gathered the following Tuesday at Reedy Swamp for an informal visit. We were joined by visitors from England, Bill and Jackie Morecraft.

There were extensive areas of water at the swamp, as the environmental water continued to flow in gently through a channel. We disturbed a covey of Brown Quail in the long grass near the inlet, but only had fleeting glimpses as they flew. A number of duck species was present, although numbers were small – Pink-eared Duck, Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, and Australasian Shoveler. A pair of Sea Eagles perched in a dead tree in the middle of the Swamp. Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen and a few Black-tailed Native Hen foraged around the edges, and in the shallows were both Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbill, Great Egret, Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterel and a few Black-winged Stilt.

Bush birds included Yellow Rosella, Musk Lorikeet, Red-rumped Parrot, Brown-headed and White-plumed Honeyeater, Peaceful Dove, Crested Shrike-tit and Restless Flycatcher. A few White-breasted Woodswallows hawked insects high overhead.

Total species recorded: 58

Kathy Costello

Mullum Wetlands and Rifle Butts Reserve, Mansfield Sun 1 March 2009

On this branch outing, Bob Tait introduced us to the birds of the Mansfield district. In the morning we walked along a track on the outskirts of the town next to the impressive information centre. The area has been extensively landscaped by the council with wetlands, indigenous tree and shrub plantings, and grassy areas mixed in amongst some massive red gums.

Undoubted highlight for the day was a single Baillon's Crake feeding in shallow water in front of a reed bed. The bird was on view for at least 5 minutes, while we checked it against our field guides. We were also fortunate to obtain good views of a Little Grassbird.



Baillon's Crake, Mansfield (Anne Finlay)

Other waterbirds included Latham's Snipe, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, White-faced and White-necked Heron and Little Pied Cormorant.

Some of the other birds seen on the walk were Yellow-rumped and Striated Thornbill, Weebill, Red-rumped Parrot, King Parrot, Crimson Rosella and Striated Pardalote.

Total species recorded: 34

We then drove to a Rifle Butts Reserve on a wooded hillside overlooking Mansfield, where we enjoyed a leisurely lunch in the shade of the large Yellow Box trees.

The day was warming up, and birds were fairly quiet. At the top of the hill we had magnificent

views of the surrounding area. Buff-rumped Thornbill, Australian Hobby, White-throated Treecreeper, Pied Currawong and Spotted Pardalote were among the 11 species recorded here.

The afternoon highlight was afternoon tea in Mansfield, where 11 birders enjoyed cakes and coffee in the shaded outdoor garden at the back of a café. We enjoyed it so much, we may have to do it again.

Kathy Costello

Seymour River Walk and Light Horse Reserve Sat 4 April 2009

The Goulburn River at Seymour has proved a worthwhile spot for birding in recent years. This outing was no exception. The river provides a lovely setting, with huge red gums, a fine understorey of silver wattle and smaller shrubs. It was apparent that efforts were being made to control weeds and creepers along the river.

We walked to the historic bridge on what was the old Hume Highway, and back on the same track. In the bushland areas, we had good views of White-browed Scrubwren, Golden Whistler, Red-browed Finch, White-browed and Brown Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-wren, Yellow and Striated Thornbill, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and a brown Flame Robin. And the nearby vineyard attracted a steady stream of Silvereyes and Red Wattlebirds.

On the river was a pair of Darters, providing a chance to compare the different plumages of the male and female birds. Dusky Moorhen, Pacific Black Duck and Little Pied Cormorant were also present.

Total species recorded: 43

Because of the continuing dry conditions, our local members advised that the **Seymour Bushland Park** would be a better venue for the afternoon walk than the more open, hilly habitat of the Light Horse Reserve. The two reserves are almost opposite each other, so after lunch at the Light Horse Reserve, we did a circuit walk at Seymour Bushland Park. Christine took the longer walk back to the vehicles and was the only one to see a large flock of Varied Sittellas. The Park borders the golf course, and the watered greens no doubt provide useful feeding opportunities for birds in the area. Some of the large Stringybark trees in the Bushland Park have died, and many

more are struggling to survive. Brown-headed Honeyeater, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Spotted Pardalote, Grey Fantail and Superb Fairy-wren were among the few species seen here.

Kathy Costello

Earlston Woodland Sun 3 May 2009

Earlston Woodland is a 146 hectare property located in a strategic area north of Violet Town, providing a link between significant areas of remnant vegetation. Dr Doug Robinson was our leader on this pleasant autumn day. For five of us this was our second visit within six months, the first being last November, when Doug divided us into six teams, **one** person per team, to survey the property for birds, particularly White-browed Babblers, Hooded Robins and Jacky Winters. Doug explained that you pick a species (or three in this case), so you can monitor and compare the state of the birds and environment over a period of time.

So we set off in six teams again with the same transects as in November, but this time there were 21 observers so we had three or four in each team. As with the November survey, I was amazed at how many birds and species were recorded.

Besides the three target species, we recorded Red-capped Robin, Brown Treecreeper, Crested Shrike-tit, Southern Whiteface, Diamond Firetail, Zebra Finch and Flame Robin. Some of us also had great views of a pair of Yellow-footed Antechinus bouncing around on a large log on the ground.

After lunch we did our own thing, birding that is. Some people enjoyed parts of the property that weren't in their transect. Many of our members have taken part in surveys before eg. Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater, Superb Parrot, Grey-crowned Babbler, but to the best of my knowledge this was the first as an organised branch outing.

Thanks to Doug, we had a great day, and provided some interesting data.

Total species recorded: 32

Don Roberts