



AUGUST 2011

Birdwatch

Newsletter of Fleurieu Birdwatchers Inc



Newsletter Contributions:
Please send all items for inclusion in future newsletters to :
fleurieubirds@gmail.com

- **Saturday 20th August. Scott CP**
Main car park on northern boundary off Deep Creek Road
35°24'01" S 138°43'45" E
- **Thursday 1st September. Hindmarsh River and Estuary**
Cnr Hindmarsh Road and Wattle Avenue, Victor Harbor
35°32'39" S 138°37'39" E
- **Friday 9th September. General Meeting - Members Night**
- **Sunday 11th September. Bullock Hill CP**
On side road by primary school, Ashbourne
35°17'17" S 138°45'58" E
- **Wednesday 28th September. Hardy's Scrub, McLaren Flat**
Gate 14, Chapel Hill Road, McLaren Flat
35°10'24" S 138°34'49" E
- **Friday 7th to Sunday 9th October. Campout Bendleby Ranges**
- **Saturday 15th October. Kyeema CP**
Cnr Meadows–Willunga Road (Brookman Road) and Woodgate Hill Road
35°15'48" S 138°39'25" E

Welcome to new members: Keith Jones of Goolwa and Gus Burston of Morphett Vale

Order of Australia to Ray Laird.

Past President of Fleurieu Birdwatchers Ray Laird and his wife Val who is a past secretary, now live at Sandstone Point on the Sunshine Coast of Qld.

Ray's tireless work in theological education and Christian ministry over the last 50 years or so has been recognised by the government and he has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honour List.

Ray was totally surprised by it all and can't understand why he would get such an honour but those close to him know he is a worthy recipient!

Members Meeting Friday 9th September

Short Sessions by:

- Peter Gower** - Ravens and Crows
Wendy Phillips - New Zealand - Birds of Stewart island
Judith Dyer - Binoculars
(Other topics welcome on the night)

Meetings: Anglican Church Hall, corner Crocker and Cadell Streets, Goolwa

7.30 pm 2nd Friday of odd months.

Outings: Meet 8.30 am. Bring lunch and a chair. See Events above

Contacts: Pat Uppill—8552 4288; Judith Dyer—8555 2736
fleurieubirds@gmail.com

Website: www.fleurieubirdwatchers.org

Newsletter: Contact fleurieubirds@gmail.com

OUTINGS

Cox Scrub, Coles Crossing 18th June 2011

10 members met early on Saturday morning at the Heifer Lane/Nangkita Road intersection to begin our outing. We were fortunate with the weather, experiencing a mixture of cloud, sun and light winds throughout the morning. With Denzel leading our group, we made our way to the western boundary of Cox's Scrub where we left our cars, then proceeded along the ridge track, past the partly harvested Kuitpo pine forest on one side and the conservation park on the other. Some of the native vegetation, including cup gums, banksias and red flowering heath were in flower, and the group also had a good silhouette view of several grey kangaroos at the top of the ridge. On this part of the walk, we enjoyed seeing Striated and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebills, Grey Shrike-thrush and Grey Currawongs. On moving down through the scrub, a flock of Crimson (Adelaide) Rosella sailed over our heads, having been flushed out by a Collared Sparrowhawk. Other notable birds included several Common Bronzewing, Spotted Pardalote, Little Wattlebird, Grey Fantail and a White-naped Honeyeater.

Arriving at Coles Crossing on the Finnis River, Brown Thornbills, Superb Fairy wrens and an Eurasian Coot caught our interest. At the end of the walk and during our lunch, we were entertained by a pair of Scarlet Robins, a male Golden Whistler, more wrens and Crescent Honeyeaters. As members noted, it's often easier to let the birds come to you, rather than go searching for them! In all, we recorded 36 species, with many members noting that although this number was relatively low for this time of the year, it was made up by quite large numbers within each species group. For example, it was generally agreed that our count of more than 100 Eastern Spinebills, was one of the highest counts by the Fleurieu Birdwatching Group for this species. Finally, we would like to thank Denzel for leading us on a most enjoyable outing.

Keith Jones

Coles Crossing Photo: Verle Wood



Eastern Spinebill Photo: Peter Gower

Aldinga CP 30th June 2011

Eight people enjoyed a very pleasant morning.

Nick was our leader for the day. He is very familiar with the area so we were in good hands. The weather was cool and overcast, but the light improved during the morning.

We especially welcome Cathy and Liz who were on their first birding outing and hopefully they will continue to come along and share their birding interests with us.

Whilst waiting to begin our walk, Pat noticed a female Mistletoebird in a tree which obliged us by giving us a good look. That was a great omen as we saw ten Mistletoebirds during the walk, they are very special.

I have not been to this area of the Aldinga Scrub before and I was very impressed. With all the new housing in the area, these wetlands have been created with water run off from the new roads etc. The planners were very thoughtful as they have provided seats about the place for some of us who enjoy looking through the binocs whilst in a comfortable position! A few of us were sitting on a large old log and watching two Australian Spotted Crakes move in and out of the reeds: life can't get much better than that!

Highlights for me were the Hooded Robin (only the second one that I have seen) Mistletoebirds, Australian Spotted Crakes, Golden-headed Cisticola, Varied Sittella and one Australian Pipit. A total of 46 species were sighted, a very enjoyable day.

Elaine O'Shaughnessy



Australian Spotted Crake
Photo: Peter Gower



Golden-headed Cisticola Photo: Peter Gower

Nurragi Reserve 10th July 2011

Nurragi Reserve near Milang is an important area for conservation of native plants and animals. It covers 30ha of land along the old railway line. It was an off-shoot of the Adelaide to Victor Harbor railway line and used from 1884-1970. It is managed by members of the local community who saw the value of protecting the remnant vegetation as only about 2% of Mallee remains in the area.

It is known as an important bird corridor and often a good place to view some of the lesser known birds.

12 brave people arrived at the old railway line to walk along the track on a very cold wintery morning. The birds were in hiding and it took us a while to find them.

Nick was lucky to see a Diamond Firetail amongst the honey eaters and wrens. A few birds of prey were about too. Denzel did a quick bird count as we finished early due to the cold conditions and we were surprised to reach a total of 28 species. A drive to Milang to check out the Nankeen Night Herons in the huge pine trees revealed nothing. On a better day the area is well worth a visit as it is much improved with the return of the water in Lake Alexandrina. The corridor along the railway line should be more interesting in a month or two when more vegetation is flowering.

Wendy Phillips

Hindmarsh Island 28 July 2011

Our group of 9 members and 1 visitor met at Ferryman's Reserve, Hindmarsh Island on a cold morning, which turned into a fine, sunny day with a light breeze. The plan was to drive along Denver Road to Wyndgate Farm, then to Mundoo Channel and on to the Murray Mouth Lookout of Coorong National Park before returning to Ferryman's Reserve.

Early sightings included White-fronted Chats, Singing Honeyeaters, Australasian Pipits, Australasian Grebe as well as Superb Fairy-wrens hopping among the samphire while we heard, but could not find, a Little Grassbird. After Wyndgate we stopped to find several Banded Lapwing that provided a 'tick' for three of our group. Overhead were Black-shouldered Kite, Nankeen Kestrel, Whistling Kite, Brown Falcon and of course, Pelicans.

The Murray Mouth Lookout on such a sunny morning provided picture-perfect views with a group of Crested Tern estimated to be about 2,000 strong holding centre stage. Along with them were Sooty and Pied Oystercatchers, Grey Teal, Pacific Gulls, Caspian Terns and another large group of Pelicans.

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and Elegant Parrots were seen on the return drive to Ferryman's Reserve for lunch and birdcall. An enjoyable morning's birding with 43 species seen and 1 heard.

Margaret Dreyer



Awesome Nature ... This pure white Willie Wagtail was discovered in some light scrubland west of Crystal Brook in early June and is usually in the presence of two black and white Willie Wagtails.

Photo by Jane Sargent via Elaine O'Shaughnessy

MEETINGS

General Meeting 8th July—Items of Interest

Goolwa Effluent Ponds

The Alexandrina Council is anxious to obtain records of bird sightings at the redeveloped site on Kessell Road, Goolwa. We are appealing to any member who visits the wetland to submit records of sightings so that we may collate them and pass them on. It will take some time to build up a comprehensive list and this will grow as the wetland develops over the next few years.

We will establish a new data site for these surveys in our recording programme so that over time we can make a comparison with the records kept before redevelopment and assess changes.

We would welcome your help in compiling this information.

Just type up a list in an email or attach a Word or Text document and email to fleurieubirds@gmail.com

General Meeting 8th July—Birdcall:

Win reported that Bool Lagoon was full with many water-birds including Magpie Geese. He also saw a Flame Robin in the South East. Buff-banded Rail have been seen behind the Alexandrina Council buildings and also in a water course at Encounter Bay. White-bellied Sea Eagles may be showing signs of breeding in their usual cliff site at Waitpinga. Spotless Crake have been seen at Goolwa and Black-chinned Honeyeater at Victor Harbor. Verle brought a photo of 9 Hooded Plover at the Inman mouth and also a dead Barn Owl found at Evanston. Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters and White-browed Babblers have both been seen at Goolwa.

Tarni Warra Sanctuary - Hindmarsh Island a reprieve of sorts

We purchased Tarni Warra in early 1998 but didn't begin to live there permanently until late in that year, after my retirement. Between 1998 and September 2010 we had become used to a certain standard of environmental health which we thought was "normal" even though we knew we were going through quite extreme conditions for this little bit of the old remnant estuary of the River Murray. Throughout this period we continued to plant species that we knew were part of Tarni Warra's natural ecosystems, swamp paperbark (*Melaleuca halmaturorum*), boobialla (*Myoporum insulare*), shrubby glasswort (*Sclerostegia arbuscula*), native pine (*Callitris gracilis*), and many other species. The terrestrial part of Tarni Warra is developing well now and changing from a grassland dominated by *Austrostipa* species to an open boobialla shrubland dominated by *Pimelea* species, in particular *Pimelea serpyllifolia*.

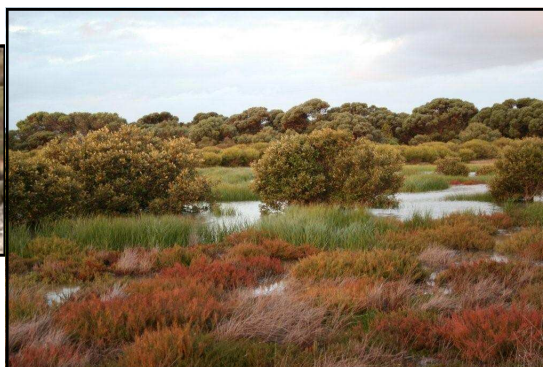
2002 was the last year we had freshwater reeds (*Bolboschoenus caldwellii*) through summer here. Our two neighbouring islands, Reedy and Rushy, we could see were both declining from providing nesting habitat for swan breeding in spring to no spring freshwater growth. Sea rushes (*Juncus kraussii*) all appeared to die and many of their root systems were washed into our wetlands.

Over time multiple boobiallas fringing our wetlands died, presumably from the constant seawater that was now a feature of the old estuary. *Lignum* (*Muehlenbeckia florulenta*) suffered a huge setback all around as the constant diet of sea water took its toll. Only one *lignum* survived here although they appear to be reasserting themselves on Rushy Island. *Samphire* species, particularly *Austral seablite* (*Suaeda australis*) spread across the bare mud that had once been covered by the reedbeds. There were large areas of bare mud in the little lake area.

The river between the Murray Mouth and the Goolwa Barrage became hypersaline, caused by the lack of freshwater flows through the barrages. The barrages opened in September 2010 and the old estuary has been fresh since then and Tarni Warra has come alive to an extent we have never seen before. Freshwater reedbeds which we thought could never recover have returned, not yet to the extent of coverage pre-2002 but enough to establish confidence that they will recover completely if the freshwater is allowed to continue to flow. The reedbeds have now gone through their life cycle and are yellowing off and we are looking forward to next season's coverage. Frogs have returned, at least 3 species having been identified here, myriads of freshwater fish and the big water birds in numbers, swans, pelicans, egrets, both ibises, spoonbills, white-faced herons, ducks, even Cape Barren geese keen to eat the tender new shoots on the samphire plants. . . . and the sacred kingfisher has returned for the fourth year in a row. . . and the other day we saw our first black-tailed native hens for several years.

This is surely what healthy ecosystems ought to look like most of the time, but whether this continues appears to depend on the self-interest, one might say ignorant selfishness of the irrigators upstream. It is time we spoke far more about the health and beauty of our natural systems and less about maintaining jobs we cannot sustain in a way over-committed and over-stressed Murray Darling Basin. How long does it take us to learn?

Richard Owen



Photos: *Richard Owen*

News from 'Birds Australia'

MERGER:

After consulting members and sending out voting cards, Birds Australia and Bird Observation & Conservation Australia (BOCA) are merging as one organisation and will now be known as '**BirdLife Australia**'

While this will not affect our little group on the Fleurieu, you need to be aware the merger will take effect over the next six months and will mean a change of logo, website and publications. Wingspan magazine will continue and keep us informed. If you are not a member of Birds Australia I can recommend joining as the articles, photos etc. are top quality and very informative.

RED-TAILED BLACK COCKATOO:

A survey was conducted in the South East SA and South West Victoria on May 7th this year and 160 volunteers took part including many farmers observing the birds on their own property. Total count was 827 for 2011, which was a considerable down turn on 2008 when 1404 were noted.

Education on conservation is getting out to many people and school children are learning valuable lessons on preserving these beautiful birds.

HOODED PLOVER:

Emma Stephans (project manager) reported on the beach nesting sites along the Southern Adelaide and Fleurieu Peninsula: 9 chicks fledged and there were 3 new sites found e.g. Southport, Moana South and Lands End (Cape Jervis). Cameras were installed at 2 sites, Tunkalilla and Shelly Beach.

They conducted Dog Breakfast Workshops over the summer months to educate Dog Owners to leash their dogs near breeding sites and erected 12 Hooded Plover signs warning people to avoid going close to their habitat. Even with all the attention these little birds are now getting they still have a very hard time raising their chicks against nature's fury and natural predators as well as foxes, dogs and humans. The good news is some areas around Australian coasts have reported great success with bird numbers increasing since these measures have been adopted. New volunteers have commenced watch over the breeding areas in the Summer months as more people become interested in Hooded Plover survival.

GLUEPOT RESERVE:

News is out that with the great season the Mallee Country has experienced this last 12 months and excellent re-growth of vegetation there have been good sightings of Red-capped Robins, Red-lored Whistlers, Crested Bellbirds and Shy Heathwrens, birds we do not see often, so well worth a visit if you are up the Riverland. Check out their courses and other information and email: gluepot@riverland.net.au

"The Fall of the Sparrow"

Taken from an article by John Peter - Wingspan Vol 21, 2001

Q. How Are YOUR Sparrows?

After reading this article maybe we should all be a bit more observant of the common House Sparrow. Normally this bird is known as a pest and there were many attempts to eradicate them in the early 1900's with little success.

John reported that there is a world wide decline in the number of Sparrows in suburbs and cities. He personally witnessed the total disappearance of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow in Bennettswood (a suburb of Melbourne) in 1990. In 2001 he noticed a dramatic decline in the numbers of House Sparrows in his area and 4 years later found one lone female and then nothing since.

While the decline in numbers has been occurring in Australia cities e.g. Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide it has also been noticed in the UK, Europe, North America and even India.

Britain has observed a 92% reduction over the last 20-30 years. For example there were over 2000 birds in Kew Gardens in 1925 and in the year 2000 only 12 remained. Now they are all gone.

This phenomenon is very patchy with some areas still recording good numbers.

What has happened to them?

The jury is still out. Suggestions are:

- Competition from other birds for feed and nesting sites.
- Lack of insects to feed their young.
- Demise of the backyard chook house.
- Electro magnetic radiation emitted from mobile phone towers.
- Unleaded petrol fumes.

The last two are purely co-incidental as the drop in numbers has been during the time we have changed our lifestyles to include mobiles and ULP

In Goolwa we still see plenty!!

Wendy Phillips

STOP PRESS

Over the years the FBW have enjoyed visiting Jarnu, the property of the late Dr Craig Jarrett and Mrs Jarrett, on Shipway Road at Currency Creek.

We have recently had word from Mrs Jarrett to say that the property has now been sold. We have sent her an updated bird list (some 74 species) and thanks from us all for open and unrestricted access to Jarnu over the past 10 years.

We have made contact with the new owners and they have plans for a family 'Eco' park

This quote from their reply - "At this stage we have no issues with people entering the property under the current arrangement for the purpose of bird watching if they are from your organisation."

If you visit, please wear your name badge or have it handy to verify your identity.

Judith Dyer

Glossy Black Cockatoo Exhibition—Promoting Environmental Conservation

**At the National Wine Centre corner North Tce. & Hackney Rd. Adelaide
26th July to 28th August—Art works from 25 KI artists featuring the Glossy Black Cockatoo.**

Paintings, Sculpture and Jewellery - part of SALA Festival



Birding "Up North"

A recent trip to the Northern Flinders gave a small group a chance to see some different species not sighted in our own area of the Southern Fleurieu... We stayed at the Mt. Freeling Station for 8 days in accommodation that was rustic but comfortable.. After great rainfalls up north the country is smiling.. Big waterholes, water in the creeks, plants springing into life and the bird life is quite prolific...the mice plague had not hit the area in force but they were definitely checking us out... Those who were the keen birdo's were rewarded with a bird count of around 60 species. These included Crimson & Orange chats, Red Backed Kingfisher, Stubble Quail, Crested Bellbird, Chirruping Wedgebill, Cinnamon Quail-thrush, Brown Quail . Best for me a flock of Painted Firetail who gathered around a tank in the early morning...What a beautiful little firetail !!! Zebra Finches were every where where there was a place to drink as were budgerigar flocks.

Alas on the wish list was the Plains Wanderer but it was a no show...Grass Wren were heard but also no luck at identifying the one who made a quick show and disappeared.

Any one interested in some wonderful 4 x 4 driving, walking and birding .. now is a great time to go!!!

Article by Jill McPherson

Mt Freeling Station Homestead



Zebra Finches



Photo: *Geoffrey Dabb (Canberra Ornithologists Group)*