



fleurieu birdwatch

October 2001

Meetings: Anglican Church Hall, cnr Crocker and Cadell Streets, Goolwa
7.30 pm 2nd Friday of alternate (odd) months

Outings: Meet 8.30 am. Bring lunch and a chair — see Diary

Contacts: Judith Dyer, phone 8555 2736 Ann Turner, phone 8554 2462
30 Woodrow Way, Goolwa 5214 9 Carnegie Street, Pt Elliot 5212

Web site: www.adelaide.net.au/~mhaywood/Fleurieu%20Birdwatchers.htm

FOR YOUR DIARY

❖ Saturday 6 October

Yankalilla Gorge

Meet at Garnett Kelly Park, 4 km south of Normanville.

❖ Wednesday 17 October

Hindmarsh Falls

Meet at the falls in the lower car park.

❖ Friday–Monday 26–29 October

Campout. Morgan area.

❖ Friday 9 November

Meeting

Speaker: Dianne Shearer

Topic

❖ Sunday 11 November

Tolderol

Meet by the railway carriage at Milang.

❖ Wednesday 21 November

Hardy's Scrub

Meet at Gate 14, Chapel Hill Road,
McLaren Vale



Christmas Get Together

**Come and join the happy throng
at the Lions Park, Currency Creek**

Saturday 1 December

**Gather at 4 pm for a birdwatch stroll
followed by a picnic tea**

**BYO food, drinks
and other creature comforts**

.....
Please forward newsletter material to
Verle Wood, 13 Marlin Terrace, Victor Harbor 5211
email: verlew@granite.net.au
.....

MEETING

Friday 14 September

Gaynor Jones presided over the meeting of 17 members and 4 visitors gathered in the Anglican Church Hall at Goolwa.

As we are now an incorporated body it was decided to present minutes of the previous meeting. These were read and confirmed.

Win Syson reported on the very successful mid year dinner at the Middleton Tavern which was attended by more than 30 members.

An invitation to Yookamurra Sanctuary for the weekend 13–14 October was tabled. Cost \$195 twin share.

Further information confirming arrangements for the Campout program was given. See details last newsletter.

Judith outlined the meeting she and Gaynor had with Alexandina Council Tourism Events Officer, Mark Przibilla, re an event to promote birdwatching at Goolwa in a tourism activity. At a later community meeting called to consider the idea, concerns were expressed about the organisational aspects and the ecological impact of such an event by a number of local environmental groups. It was decided not to hold the event in 2002.

The rest of the evening was devoted to a lively presentation by Win Syson and friend, Brian Walker who, with two other mates, call themselves the Rambling Babblers. Their Desert Cruise covered 3,400 km in 10 days through drought-stricken (at that time) northern SA and southwestern Queensland. Their adventures as they travelled by 4WD towing a trailer were recorded in a Ship's Log from which Brian read amusing excerpts as Win showed slides. They logged 116 species, mostly in 2 ha searches, with Willy Wagtail being conspicuously ubiquitous.

The meeting concluded with bird call which included local sightings of Buff-banded Rail and Black-tailed Native-hen and handing around of several specimens, including Painted Finch (from an aviary), Fluttering Shearwater, Penguin and Little Wattlebird before the usual socialising over a cuppa.

WELCOME

June and Warwick Hamilton,
Pt Elliot

Happy birdwatching!



OUTINGS

Currency Creek

Saturday 4 August

16 members assembled at the winery in windy and cool to cold conditions, which thankfully changed to bright sunny skies after about an hour into our walk, with the wind dying to light airs.

It was an interesting area of sandy soil and tussocky grass. There was plenty of bracken but also a good sprinkling of glorious flowering wattles and plenty of gums to give perches and shelter to the objects of our attention. A number of galahs had found hollows in the trees for nesting. As pointed out by Judith, who joined us later for birdcall, the approach of Spring is bringing forth greater numbers of birds. Today, our total count was 52.

Quite a few species were in significant numbers, including the Striated Pardalote, New Holland Honeyeater (fancy that!), Dusky Woodswallow and Mistletoebird but it was nice to see such a wide variety and a few birds not seen for some time.

It's a while since we saw so many raptors in one outing and Wedge-tailed Eagle, Little Eagle, Swamp Harrier and Nankeen Kestrel were all splendid sights. It was good, also, to see two cuckoos — Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo and Fantailed Cuckoo — and to be able to get so near to the latter.

We can't close the story without reference to the two Black Swan and their brood of five fluffy grey cygnets, and also the Grey Kangaroos, which Verle rated as a B. We completed our journey and lunch just as the stormy skies closed in. Yet another great outing!

Keith Gilbert

Meyer's Scrub, Ashbourne

25 August 2001

A wild wet and windy start. Nine members left the meeting place for the corner of the Golf Course where the rain stopped and the sun came out. The birds loved it. Brown-headed, White-plumed, White-naped and New Holland Honeyeaters, White-browed Babbler, Superb Fairy-wren and both Brown and White-throated Treecreeper all put on a show to make up a count of 33 species.

On to Meyer's Scrub. The weather deteriorated but it was still be kind to birdwatchers day. A Purple-crowned Lorikeet sitting with its head poking out of a hole and a Fantailed Cuckoo on a branch just two metres away making its call were the highlights of the morning. A count of 28 species before the rain set in again.

Paula Rawson

Many thanks to Paula and Allan for welcome shelter at Old Bridge Cottage for lunch. J

Parawa

Sunday 16 September

Commencing the outing in bright sunshine — a change for Parawa — we drove to Nigel and Rosemarie Brand's house to pick up the gate key, then on to where we walk looking for birds. On arrival at the gate we were welcomed by six cows so members left their cars on the road outside.

A Scarlet Robin was on the fence by the gate and as we moved down the hill we heard and, eventually, saw Superb Fairy-wren, Grey Fantail and Crescent Honeyeater.

As we approached the dam we saw Eastern Spinebill, Dusky Moorhen, Purple Swamphen and Pacific Black Duck. A very busy brown bird kept us intrigued for quite a time as we tried to identify it while it flew in and out of the reeds, obviously nesting. Too big for Little Grassbird, wrong beak and colour for Clamorous Reed-warbler and it not calling didn't help either. After moving quite close to the reeds we eventually decided it was a Crescent Honeyeater.

One other query for the morning was a raptor, quite a distance away, which finally came closer. After much book searching and studying shape and length of tail we settled on Brown Goshawk. Both birds proved good learning experiences.

29 species were seen during a beautiful morning.

On returning to the gate entrance we found to our horror that it was open and the cows gone. After some searching they were located further up the road and were herded safely home, not before giving Judith and me a big fright as we both felt responsible. Thankfully it ended well and the Brands were very understanding over the error which certainly gave us a different ending to our usual bird walks.

Ann Turner

A lovely sequel to the above story: in the week following this outing Judith received a delightful computer crafted 2002 calendar illustrated with photographs Rosemarie had taken of bird visitors to her garden with a note saying that there is still a warm welcome for us at their property.

Milang-Clayton

Wednesday 26 September

On this overcast but bright day 18 of us met at Milang for Stage 1 of the morning's birdwatching. The first to arrive were the lucky ones as they flushed out a group of Latham's Snipe (see notes) and some Black-tailed Native-hen which then proved most elusive and were not seen by the rest of us. However, in the samphire, jetty and carpark areas we sighted 32 species.

Stage 2 was the road area between Milang and Clayton.

Our convoy stopped several times to observe, mainly waterbirds in their perfect habitat, that is, plenty of water! There was a spectacularly large flock of Black-winged Stilt at one spot and several groups of Cape Barren Geese. I had my first good look at a magnificent Royal Spoonbill with breeding plumage. Although we all got a bit spread out along this stretch — our car was guilty of stopping at a patch of lignum where we found a pair of Golden-headed Cisticola — there were 32 species sighted and all of us ended up at ...

Stage 3, Clayton. The wetland areas here were well populated, many species in breeding plumage. Everyone enjoyed perfect viewing of Fairy Martin crowding around a mud puddle — they were quite exquisite! Yet another highlight was a Pallid Cuckoo which, after exhibiting himself on a tree, flew down on to the bitumen road not ten metres away and claimed a large caterpillar which he proceeded to consume in full view of us as he perched on the power lines. This site netted another 34 sightings.

The bird call at lunchtime was fairly chaotic — trying to remember the three different areas — but I reckon we got it pretty right, apart from maybe the numbers. Whoever could possibly count all those stilts and pelicans? At a guess the total collective species for the morning would be about 45.

What a day! Sorry for the ones that were not there.

Phyll Whellams



Latham's Snipe

from the Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (1977) which refers to this bird as Japanese Snipe.

Details of the route taken by Japanese Snipe on their long migration to Australia are not known. After breeding, the birds gather in considerable numbers on the shores of lakes in Japan and set out on their journey, mainly in August and September. They have been seen on all Japanese islands, in Taiwan and New Guinea but have not been recorded from anywhere else.

Flights of large flocks of up to 100 reach northern Australia at Cape York, the first birds in mid-August. They arrive in Tasmania by mid-September. The bulk of the populations spend the summer in south-east NSW, Victoria and Tasmania and the extreme south-east of South Australia. A few birds — apparently vagrants — wander inland as far west as Darwin and the Kimberleys in WA.

Once in Australia, the Japanese Snipe disperse, in good

habitat, into loose assemblages of single birds. They are extremely wary, and can flush a long time before an observer gets close to them. Sometimes they squat and then burst from underfoot with a loud cry. Their swift, erratic flight, with a peculiar weaving movement, has made them a favourite game bird in some districts. They are usually found on the ground in the thick growth near the edge of freshwater swamps, in wet meadows and on the edges of streams. At the southern end of their range, they are rare but can be found in estuaries and on mudflats.

It is widely believed the number of Japanese Snipe visiting Australia has declined in the last 30 years, because expensive swamp drainage and flood mitigation programmes have destroyed much of the birds' former summer habitat. Oddly, in overpopulated Japan, they are in a more secure position — destruction of some habitat there is compensated by clearing of highland wet forests for open plantations suitable for the birds.

In Japan the snipe often perch on posts or in trees; in display, they fly high in the sky singing. There they live and breed in rough pastures, rice stubble and in larch and fir forests on mountainsides far from water. They locate their nest — depressions lined with grass or a little moss — in moderately dense herbage in grasslands, peat bogs and paddocks, or sometimes on hillsides among young trees.

What makes a bird the ultimate flying machine?

A bird's skeleton is very flexible and strong, and has air-filled hollows. The beak, skull, feet and all other bones of a 7 kg pelican weigh only 650 g. Air sacs throughout a bird's body are connected to and function with the lungs. Circulation of air within the bird acts as a cooling system. A bird's heart beats many times per second and it breathes very rapidly to maintain the intense effort of locomotion and a high temperature: heron 41°C, duck 42.8°C, swift 44°C.

Energy requirements for flying, especially for taking off (usually against the wind), are great. The bird's crop stores food which is injected into the stomach and intestines at a prodigious rate. Young crows have been known to eat more than their own weight in food per day and a young robin is said to have eaten more than four metres of earthworms on its first day out of the nest.

The heaviest muscles are the chest muscles which control the flying — underneath the bird so that it is not top heavy. A downward wing thrust drives the bird upward and a lesser pull lifts up the wing. Half a pigeon's weight may be in its pectoral muscles. The neck is supremely flexible enabling the bird to reach any part

of its body with ease and help it to balance in flight.

Feathers, with a quill, and barbs meshed with barbicels which hold them together like a zipper, combine extraordinary lightness and strength. As soon as a feather is fully grown it is sealed and as it becomes detached, another grows in its place.

The action of the wings, rather than flapping up and down, is more like a rowing movement while the feathers are swivelled apart to let the air slip by.

Tail and wing feathers fanned out act as brakes and tails are used mainly for steering. Web-footed birds usually steer and brake with their feet as well, using their long necks to aid steering and balancing.

The form of the wing varies greatly among species and has been adapted to specific needs — narrow, pointed wings for the fast and strong flyers: falcons, swallows; short, rounded wings for woodland darters: sparrows, finches, quail. Gulls and albatross also have narrow pointed wings specially suitable for long-range gliding over the open ocean while some of the slow soarers have broad, fingered wings.

There are many theories about the purpose of the flock formation adopted by birds in flight.

A V formation may be the simplest way to follow a leader in the sky while keeping out of his wash and retaining good vision. The tight manoeuvring in unison of thousands of small birds wheeling on high is another mystery.

One thing is for certain. Of all flying machines, birds are still the closest to perfection.

Extracted from a Reader's Digest article

