

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



April 2016 - Issue #236

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

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Objects of the Club

To facilitate and promote the knowledge of natural history, and to encourage the preservation and protection of the Australian natural environment, especially that of the Murrumbidgee River Valley



**Male Glossy
Black Cockatoo
taken at a
dam in the
Brobenah Hills
by
Graham Russell**

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the May issue by

Wednesday 4 May

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

***Koala Count is on 17 April
at Narrandera Common***

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND THURSDAY EACH MONTH, EXCEPT JANUARY, AT THE Yellow Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street at 7.30 PM

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

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Opinions expressed by authors are their own and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

Observations

From Neil Palframan - Photos of a **kestrel family**, adult and two chicks hatched and raised in a house under construction, they will have to go elsewhere next year.



From Melanie Baulch - On Saturday 2 April Meredith Butler and I visited **Wattle Dam** and were delighted with the birds that came to drink from the dam.

The usual birds turned up including a number of wonderfully coloured Mulga Parrots and Turquoise Parrots.

However three very majestic Glossy Black Cockatoos flew in @ 8.30am landing in nearby trees. They hung about for an hour, chatting to each other most of the time.

It was only the female that drank from the dam whilst we were there.



Glossy Black Cockatoo Count - 12 March 2016

We'd had 40 ml of rain in February so all the dams were full and it had been stinking hot since then so there were no puddles for the GBC to drink from.

As I set off north on the day of the count I could see smoke, dust and some almighty dark clouds to the north. By the time I arrived at my destination there was thunder and lightning, a dust storm and it started to rain.

My initial thought was "I'm not going".

I'm not so easily beaten so I stopped on the corner of "Alabama" and the Barellan Road for a while. Amazingly the storm cleared up as fast as it had arrived. So I went back and proceeded to my dam with Liza the landholders daughter.

We had dam sitters in Binya, at Brobenah and in the Narrandera Hills.

11 birds were counted in the Brobenah Hills at two different dams, 2 at the base of Square Nob and one in Binya. We did not survey the Bogolong Hills this time. About 25 or 30 people were observing dams on the night.

My conclusions: The drought had a huge impact on the population and they are still recovering. (Or we don't know where they are.) We counted 35 birds in 2004. 25 birds were counted in 2005. 8 birds were counted in 2012. We don't know where they are drinking because they move across the landscape in response to food availability and drink and roost at the nearest dam.

The Brobenah and Narrandera Hills are hard to survey because there are a lot of farm dams and it is extremely rugged where the *Allocasuarina verticillata* grow which is the main food source for these birds. These birds will be limited by food resources and it explains why they are so highly endangered. The stronghold for these birds are Square Nob and the Brobenah Hills.

Common Bronzewing, Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Galahs, Peaceful Doves, Mallee Ringnecks, Red-rump Parrots, Apostlebirds, White-winged Choughs, Eastern Rosellas, Mulga Parrots, Turquoise Parrots, Magpie Larks, Spiny cheeked Honeyeaters, Striped Honeyeaters, Tree Martins as well as Kangaroos and Swamp Wallabies share the dams. Sometimes I have observed Echidnas and foxes.

Many thanks to all who participated and thanks to Dione and Graham who hosted a gathering afterwards.

Nella Smith

[Our thanks go to Nella for organising this – many phone calls to landholders as well as allocating dams to people. Ed]

Photos by Lorna Mee



Graham and Dione's Glossy Black Cockatoo count on 12 March at Peter Gleeson's property

We were at the two dams that are on the main drive through to the shearing shed and Peter went to a dam further along the valley.

Our Glossy count was two that drank at the dam we were sitting at. They flew in at 6:50 pm and were gone again at 7:05 pm heading back toward Middle Road and another 13 that drank at a very small dam closer back toward Collinroobie Road. We watched these fly off to the west over the quarry. Peter reported seeing three at the dam that he was on at around the same time as we saw the two that drank at our dam.

Other than the Glossies the most notable sighting was 5 Rainbow Bee-eaters that were hunting above the trees on the other side of the dam. Other sightings where:-

Peaceful Dove	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Little Raven
Kookaburra	Willie Wagtail	Magpie
Galah	Western Gerygone	Common Bronzewing
White-browed Babblers	Mallee Ringnecks	

The Glossies that were sighted on Braemah on the 12th March drinking at three different dams on the same property within around a couple of kilometres of each other show that to count Glossies we need to cover as many watering points that we can.

Graham & Dione Russell



Melanie Baulch also participated at a dam in **Binya State Forest** – says she was on her my own surrounded by Brush Bronzewings and a Swamp Wallaby came to drink. No Glossy Black Cockatoos to be seen or heard. She has since seen three there – see page 2 for picture and story.



Penny and Phillip Williams have written and captured images of their encounters:

Whilst we didn't see any Glossies, Phil was walking along the bank of the dam, and looked to one side to see a large snake, a Red-bellied Black, moving beside him. He was alerted by a "hiss" sound. He gave it plenty of space and it headed away from the dam and into the trees.

In a hollow of a dead tree close to the dam was a large Lace Monitor . Could we detect a satisfied smile on its face? What had it found in that hollow?

Our Visit to Robbie's Second Home

While some members had a weekend in the High Country, Rowena and I had a week in Portland, Victoria with the Victorian Nature Photography Group.

Portland is not far from the South Australian border and one day we took the opportunity to visit Piccaninnie Ponds a short distance into South Australia. It was to the Ponds that Robbie, the Bittern, flew to as a mere 4 month old. (It took us 10 hours of driving to get to Portland – Robbie flew non-stop!) Robbie has since flown back to the Coleambally area and back again. – I think he came back too early and found the rice had not grown tall enough for him. His location in January was in Long Swamp on the Victorian side of the border.

Piccaninnie Ponds are features in a karst landscape (limestone) with the main attraction a flooded sink hole called The Chasm. Scuba divers can with the required permits and qualifications go down to 40 feet and still have enough clarity in the water to have perfect vision. Below this is a system of limestone caves and caverns only the most skilled can enter. Water is constantly seeping out of the limestone creating a large wetland area of open pools and dense Cumbungi - just right for a Bittern.



There is also a kilometre long walk starting in the coastal sand dunes and ending in a raised boardwalk reaching into one of the ponds.

A bit further west along the Nelson – Mt Gambier Rd is another turnoff to Pick Swamp. This is a recent rehabilitation success having turned a drained, farmed area back into its swampy former self, attracting many waders and other waterbirds. It was actually Robbie's first point of call on his first flight south much to the gratification of the committee that undertook the rehabilitation work.



Any naturalist visiting Portland has to take in the

Gannet colony on the headland at Danger Point behind the aluminium smelter. This colony is an overflow from the one on Lawrence Rocks just off the headland; there were about 200 birds there this year. A wire fence cuts off the headland to protect the birds, but by arrangement the group arranged to be taken through the locked gate one evening.

This year Victoria has had very little rain and the dryness was very apparent. Compared with a previous visit the flowers apart from Coast Paperbark *Melaleuca squarrosa* and Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa* were poor this year. However a local member told us of a walking track north of Portland, part of the Great South West Walk, that had several Hyacinth Orchids; both the Spotted and Rosy *Dipodium pardalinum*, *Dipodium roseum*.

Our accommodation was at the Baptist Church Camp at Allerstree east of Portland. It is now privately owned but still run on the same lines. The advantages of staying there was that one could just walk across the road and down onto the beach. Great for photographing the numerous coloured seaweeds that get washed up. It is easy to reach three National Parks, Mt Richmond, Lower Glenelg, and Cobboboonee, with Mt Eccles not too far away for a change of scenery. As the excellent company of the VNPG, the interesting evening talks, not to mention the abundant photography tips freely discussed, we had a terrific week on the coast.



Photos Piccaninnie Ponds (top right), gannet colony (above left), Hyacinth Orchids (Spotted left, Rose right) above

Eric Whiting

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist

Lachlan Fold

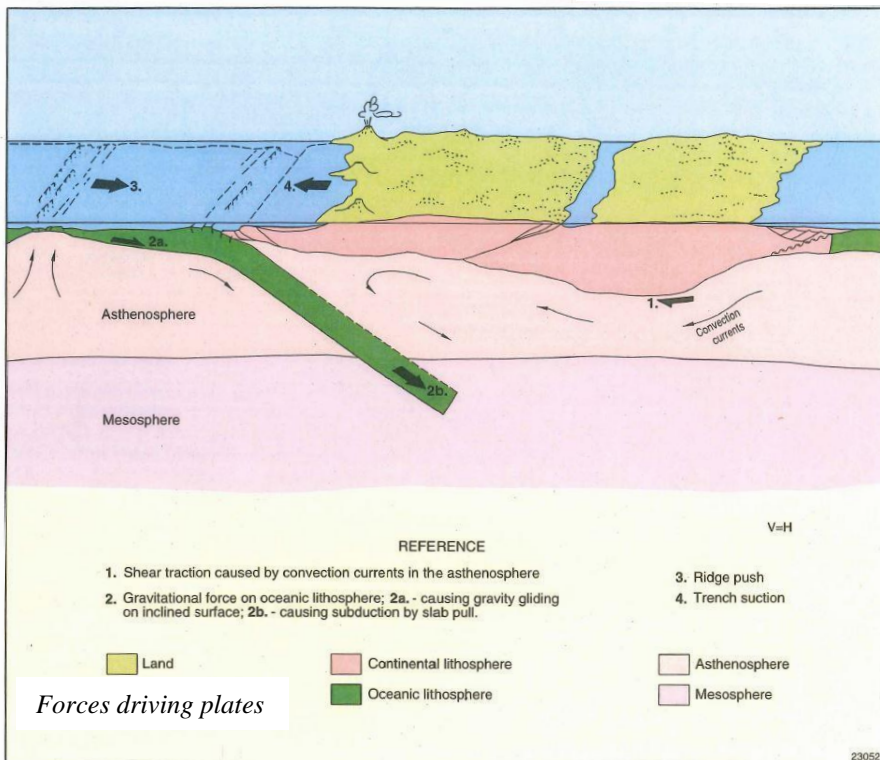
Some members contributed to the Rankins Springs Glossy Black Cockatoo count organised by the Lachlan Fold Belt Now Rankins Springs is not on the Lachlan, so how did the Group come up with the name Lachlan Fold Belt. What is the Lachlan Fold Belt?

400 million years ago only the western half of Australia existed and then as part of the super continent Gondwanaland.

What is now east of a line from the Lofty and Flinders Ranges up past Broken Hill and up to the Cape York Peninsula was a deep oceanic trench. That line, called the Tasman Line, was also just north of the equator with the rest of Gondwanaland to the south. Although Gondwanaland was moving southwards, another plate was approaching faster from the north and sliding underneath Gondwanaland (possibly the North American Plate which with Eurasia joined Gondwanaland to become Pangea. Part of Tasmania has much in common with North America.

The collision formed island arcs just like the islands to our north – Papua New Guinea, Indonesia. Like the latter the old island arcs were volcanically active. Behind the island arcs the continental edge was buckled into mountain building fold belts. The Lachlan Fold Belt is one of these and was active from around 350 – 300 million years ago. Material for the mountains came from a previous fold belt the Kanmantoo Fold Belt closer to the Tasman Line and also from the other plate either scraped off as it slid under or from deeper down as re-melted magma.

Mountain debris formed sedimentary rocks – sandstones and siltstones that now form the Cocoparra Ranges and others in that north-south line. To the east from Grong Grong up through Weethalle and Ungarie areas, molten magma pushed upwards but did not reach the surface of the time. Erosion over the millennia now exposes these rocks as granite rises.



activity. The latest was that minor earthquake felt at West Wyalong last month. And Australia is the most stable of the continents!

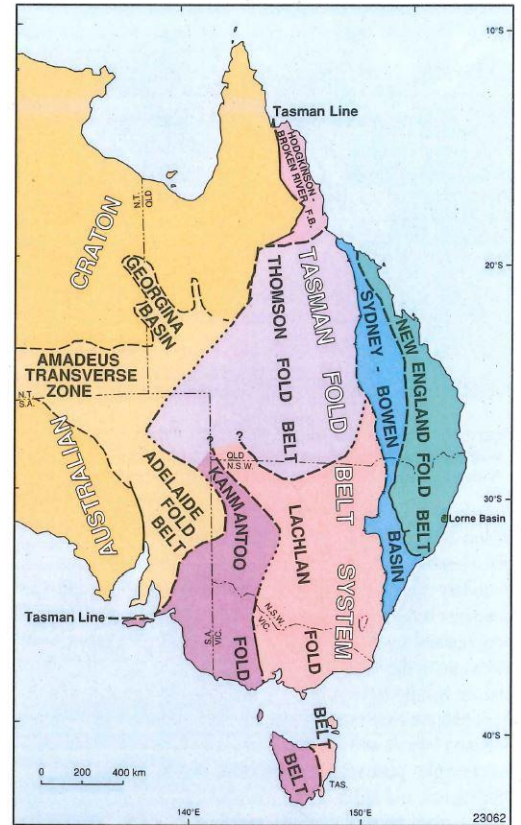


Figure 13. Main structural entities in the basement of eastern Australia

After the Devonian Period fresh fold belts formed further from the Tasman Line, now showing as the western slopes of the Dividing Range (Cowra, Young, Tumut line) building up the rest of eastern Australia, before this period of mountain building ceased. (After 50 million years of existence Pangea broke up again leaving Gondwanaland and Laurasia to part company.) Later Gondwanaland began to break apart with the final stage of Australia breaking away from Antarctica.

All this breaking and colliding of plates does not only just affect the plate boundaries. Pressures developed or released causes ripples running back thousands of kilometres. So although the hills around here were formed some 300 million years ago there is still some geological

Unusual sightings in the Riverina

The **Eastern Koel** is a migratory cuckoo that returns to the Australian mainland in early spring to breed. It is generally confined to the coastal regions and extends to the mid-south coast of NSW.

However, in recent years Koels have been reported in Victoria indicating an extension of their range further south. They are now frequently reported in the Melbourne area.

It seems that they are extending their range further west in NSW as well with regular reports from the New England area and my brother in Tamworth has reported them breeding there in recent years. For our area, there are few recent records. I had one report from Dave Egan a few years ago of a bird calling in Yenda but there have been no confirmed sightings until this year when birds were heard in both Leeton, by Keith

Hutton and Phil Tenison, and in Narrandera by Nella Smith and Neville James.



Phil pursued the Leeton bird one Saturday morning in the park opposite his place but didn't actually get a confirmed sighting until the bird led him on a merry chase as far as the Leeton Swimming Pool where he finally had a clear view of it.

Unfortunately his camera played up and he missed getting a photo of the bird. After that the bird wasn't heard again.

In Narrandera, Warrick Bradney finally tracked their bird to confirm a definite sighting there.

Despite there being no reports of the bird in the Griffith area, Sue Chittick-Dalton sent me a photo taken on the lawn of the home of Tori Horder in

the Yoogali area. The bird is a juvenile Eastern Koel and would be the first breeding record for the Riverina that I am aware of – see photo taken by Tori and sent to Sue who passed it onto me to record.

The birds usually parasitise the nests of Red Wattlebirds or Pee-wees or orioles – birds that build cup-shaped nests. I remember reading a study over 10 years ago about the Red Wattlebirds and Koels. It found that the Red Wattlebirds seem to have a symbiotic relationship with the Koels in that the wattlebirds were observed to go to nest in early spring well before the Koels arrived in order to have a clutch of their own. Once their young fledged, the wattlebirds would go to nest again just when the koels had arrived in numbers, thus risking their second nest to be parasitised by the cuckoos. At least they managed to have a clutch of their own before the young cuckoo hatched and pushed out the eggs of the wattlebird's second nest.

Also of note was a report in November of a **Regent Honeyeater** at the Lake Talbot Caravan Park in Narrandera. It was seen drinking from a spray that was watering the lawn at the park – see photo.

Nella and I went looking for it the next day without success and the bird wasn't reported after that one sighting. It also represents a first for Narrandera. The bird was possibly on its way to Chiltern or somewhere where they are more usually found in Spring.

Finally, a visiting Sydney couple, Clinton and Jenny Wood, staying at the Oasis Caravan Park in Leeton in March reported and photographed a **Turquoise Parrot** in the grounds of the park. It could be an escaped bird from a local aviary but we'll never know as it wasn't seen again apart from that one sighting.



Photos: Juvenile Eastern Koel (top)
by Tori Horder
Regent Honeyeater (above)
by Heather Bingham

Max O'Sullivan

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

These sightings are from members' observations. Please check with the relevant person before quoting any record.

Australian Shelduck [62]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/03/16	Keith Hutton
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [10]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/03/16	Keith Hutton
Masked lapwing [50+]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/03/16	Keith Hutton
Black Falcon [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/03/16	Keith Hutton
Glossy Black Cockatoo [pr]	Back of Mountain Dam property	05/03/16	Graham Russell
Yellow-throated Miner [6]	Mountain Dam property	05/03/16	Graham Russell
Little Friarbird [15]	Mountain Dam property	05/03/16	Graham Russell

Birds returned at the same time last year.

Blue-tongue Lizard	Audley St, Narrandera	06/03/16	Roy Wade
Brown Goshawk [imm]	Cutler Ave, Griffith	07/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Red Wattlebird [2]	Cutler Ave, Griffith	07/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Variegated Wren [family]	Cutler Ave, Griffith	07/03/16	Virginia Tarr
*Spotted Nightjar	Koonadan via Leeton	07/03/16	Peter Draper
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [5]	Mountain Dam property	07/03/16	Dionee Russell
Rainbow Bee-eater [6]	Old Hillston Rd Dam	07/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Turquoise Parrot [2]	Old Hillston Rd Dam	07/03/16	Virginia Tarr
*Spotted Nightjar	Old Hillston Rd Dam	07/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Blue-faced Honeyeater	Melbourne St Narrandera	08/03/16	Betty Bradney

Birds have returned to Betty's garden to feed on her flowering protea.

Grey-crowned Babbler [12]	McNabb Cres., Griffith	10/03/16	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	McNabb Cres., Griffith	Daily	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Blue-faced Honeyeater	McNabb Cres., Griffith	10/03/16	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Superb Wren [5]	Galah Dam, Binya State Forest	10/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Turquoise Parrot [2]	Galah Dam, Binya State Forest	10/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Mulga Parrot [10+]	Galah Dam, Binya State Forest	10/03/16	Virginia Tarr
White-browed Woodswallow [12]	Mallee Dam, Binya State Forest	10/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Masked Woodswallow [6+]	Mallee Dam Binya State Forest	10/03/16	Virginia Tarr
*Pied Honeyeater [1]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	12/03/16	Neil Palframan
Magpie Goose [20+]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	12/03/16	Neil Palframan
Plumed Whistling-duck [150+]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	12/03/16	Neil Palframan
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	12/03/16	Neil Palframan
Freckled Duck [8+]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	12/03/16	Neil Palframan
*Turquoise Parrot [male]	Oasis Caravan Park, Leeton	12/03/16	Clinton Wood

Clinton took a photo of the Turquoise Parrot – unexpected siting and possibly an escaped aviary bird.

Superb Parrot [8+]	Oasis Caravan Park Leeton	12/03/16	Clinton Wood
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Photo taken just after the severe storm passed through – birds were photographed flying through the park.

Blue-billed Duck [pr]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	13/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Great Crested Grebe [2]	North Lake Wyangan	13/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Musk Duck [6+]	Griffith settling ponds	13/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
*Eastern Koel [juv]	House garden of Tori Horder Griffith	early March	Tori Horder

See article and photo elsewhere in the newsletter.

Glossy Ibis [20+]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	14/03/16	Nella Smith
Pallid Cuckoo [imm]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	14/03/16	Nella Smith

Plus all the ducks Neil reported above on 12/03/16.

*Painted Button-quail [pr]	Barry Scenic Drive Binya State Forest	17/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
*Little Bittern	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	17/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
White-winged Wren [12]	Tuckerbil/Koonadan Leeton	19/03/16	Max O'Sullivan

Only one partially coloured male was seen.

White-faced Heron [50+]	The Basin Dam, Koonadan	19/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Brolga [6]	Fivebough Wetlands flying in.	20/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Chestnut Teal with 7 ducklings	Fivebough Wetlands settling pond	24/03/16	Keith Hutton

This is the first breeding record for this species for Fivebough according to Keith's records.

Intermediate Egret [5]	Fivebough Wetlands	24/03/16	Keith Hutton
Little Egret [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	24/03/16	Keith Hutton
Wood Sandpiper [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	24/03/16	Keith Hutton
Chestnut Teal [60]	Fivebough Wetlands settling ponds	24/03/16	Keith Hutton
Black Falcon [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	24/03/16	Keith Hutton
Australian Spotted Crake [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Spotless Crake [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Buff-banded Rail [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/16	Max O'Sullivan

The above species were seen together in one of the drying ponds.

Glossy Ibis [3]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [15+]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Red-capped Plover [male]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/16	Max O'Sullivan

This is the first time this plover has been seen for a few months.

Little Eagle [juv]	Gogeldrie Weir via Leeton	27/03/16	Virginia Tarr
Red-capped Plover [6]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/03/16	Keith Hutton
Marsh Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/03/16	Keith Hutton
Black-fronted Dotterel [7]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/03/16	Keith Hutton
Wood Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/03/16	Keith Hutton
Pectoral Sandpiper [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Little Eagle [2]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	29/03/16	Lorna Mee
*Blue-billed Duck +3 ducklings	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	29/03/16	Lorna Mee
Baillon's Crake [1]	Campbells Swamp, Griffith	29/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
White-bellied Sea-Eagle [pr]	Lake Wyangan (South lake)	29/03/16	Lorna Mee
Emu [6]	Irrigation Way in a ploughed paddock	31/03/16	Max O'Sullivan
Glossy Black Cockatoo [3]	Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest	02/04/16	Melanie Baulch
Restless Flycatcher	Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest	04/04/16	Max O'Sullivan

* indicates 'very unexpected sightings'.

Report from the Stakeholder Information Session #2 of the Lake Wyangan & Catchment Management Strategy Project on 16 March at Lake Wyangan school.

The two speakers from Water Technology, Melbourne based, had been gathering monitored information of this area, landforms, water inlets, water quality, rainfall, farm run-off, etc. Also input from the first rowdy meeting they held earlier to compile an optional strategy in dealing with better water quality and the Algal Bloom problem of Lake Wyangan, north and south.

The speaker, Christine stated that our lake algae was only moderate. The Murry River was dangerously high. Murrumbidgee River is high in areas.

The main problems are:

- The high phosphate levels and other minerals in the water.
- The carp and water turbulence stirring up the sediments releasing the phosphate.
- The high sediment, pollutants and debris draining into the lake.
- Being a low lying depression, there is not any drainage out. Therefore it has a high mineral content due to evaporation.
- Bordering farmers are not pumping out due to cost which is greater than channelled water.
- Old septic systems on nearby dwellings.

There were good discussions of combating the above problems that included Griffith council, Murrumbidgee Irrigation, Landcare, bordering farmers, water sports users and Anna Pistillo of Wetland Consultants.

A draft of the best options will be drawn up and presented at the Griffith Library in June 2016.

Anyone who is out at the lake is requested to take photos of other run-off, pollutants, rainfall stats, etc and send them to Water Technology. May need to ring Griffith City Council, Neil Southam, for the email address.

They also spoke about funding which is required to fulfil certain strategic ideas such as aerating, constructing holding wetlands to filter the water before reaching the lake, Planting vegetation, removing carp, etc. The council will provide (I guess, a grant) towards the improvements. Murrumbidgee Irrigation will monitor water allocation in and out to improve flows.

Virginia Tarr.

**** COMING EVENTS ****

- 14 April Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: Members' short presentations.
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 15 April - 22 April** **Biodiversity survey Nombinnie Nature Reserve – northern part**
It will be bush camping with no facilities; you must be totally self-sufficient including water.
Contact Nella Smith on 6959 1210 or email nella.smith0@gmail.com if interested in attending for any or all of the above dates.
- 17 April Sunday** **Narrandera Annual Koala Count**
10:00 to 12 noon at the Narrandera Common.
Note: it will be held the following Sunday if weather is bad.
Contact: Betty Bradney 6959 2901
- 10 to 17 April -** **Wild Pollinator Count is over the week of the 10 to 17 April**
An opportunity to participate in your local environment. Just spend 10 minutes watching any flowering plant and note the insects which land on it. Specific names are not required just general like ant, moth, hover, fly etc, Submit your observations. See last December' newsletter for an article by Eric Whiting. Details can be found at <http://wildpollinatorcount.com/count-pollinators/>
- 1 May Sunday** **Outing: Walk around Campbells Swamp:**
Meet at the car park at 8am. Bring morning tea and lunch if planning to look at other areas like Lake Wyangan.
Contact Max on 6953 4726 if intending to come.
- 4 May Wednesday** **Copy for the May newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 12 May Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: TBA
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- Other events**
- 1 – 10 October** **Australian Naturalists Network** Get-together for 2016 will be held in at Woodman Point Recreation Camp, Western Australia. Details from Penny Williams murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

