

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



September 2016 - Issue #241

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



**Falcon Falls, Cocoparra National Park
with Blanket Fern, Dwarf Greenhood, and
Mosses by Eric Whiting**

IN THIS ISSUE

Office Bearers and Subscriptions	2
Images of this month	2
Spring Hill, Falcon Falls Outing	3
Galore Hill Nature Reserve Outing.....	5
MFN host BIGnet meeting in Leeton	6
Bowra Sanctuary, Southern Queensland.....	7
Recording our Local Nature	8
Members' Sightings	9
Coming Events Calendar	10

CONTRIBUTIONS

For the October issue by
Wednesday 5 October

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

**Spring campout is at Rankins
Springs with a wildflower day
in the Cocoparra National Park**

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.

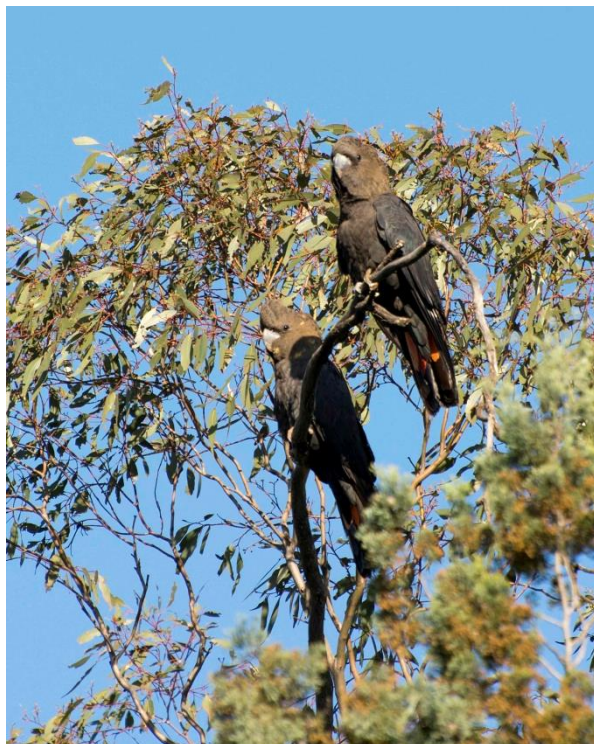
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Narrandera	Nella Smith	6959 1210	Coleambally	John Wilkinson	6954 4129

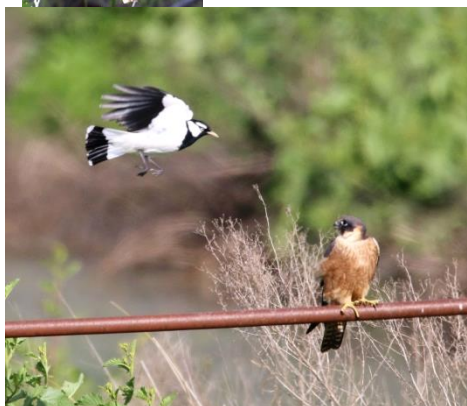
Annual Subscriptions: Family \$45.00 Adult/Single \$35.00 Journal only/Concession \$25.00

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

Images for this month



Mt Caley range through the trees with Western Golden Wattle *Acacia decora* in flower – Rowena Whiting
 Pair of Glossy Black cockatoos at Spring Hill picnic area – Penny Williams
 Blue Caladenia *Caladenia caerulea* – Eric Whiting
 Mat Rush *Lomandra filiformis* – Eric Whiting
 Peewee and Australian Hobby at Fivebough Wetlands by Phil Tenison
 Sundew *Drosera sp.* – Eric Whiting



Spring Hill – Falcon Falls Outing 14 August 2016



This wet winter has limited our options for venues for excursions this year. For our August outing it was decided to play safe and go to Falcon Falls knowing the road in from the east is a fairly good one and not so far off the seal. Unlike previous trips to this area meeting place was at the end of Erigolia Road, Binya. Fortunately this did not confuse members and 10 of us met there on a fine but cool morning.

After a bit of car pooling we proceeded to the Spring Hill Picnic Area and the bird photographers were soon into work. It was not long before a mysterious unidentified call enticed us towards the creek that

runs down from Falcon Falls. The callers turned out to be a pair of Glossy Black Cockatoos. What a start for the day. Without checking records I think this is the first time we have reported sighting Glossies in this area.

Buoyed up with this sighting we regained the main walk to the falls. Most times this starts with a quick march up through the young Cypress Pine thickets. Not this time. Every few yards there seemed to be something to look at. It must have been the slowest time ever to do that short walk.



Falcon Falls was named from the presence of Peregrine Falcons frequenting the area, a fact we were able to verify again with the sighting of one flying not far from the falls.

Despite heavy rain earlier in the season, there was not a lot of water coming over the falls – Spring Creek does not have much of a catchment to produce a steady flow. What had come down though was part of the cliff face. Large fresh faced boulders were on either side of the informal route up the falls. Some trees had obviously been caught in the way of the boulders and were snapped off at their trunks.

Another feature of the falls is the presence of two types of ferns of limited occurrence in the Cocoparras. I am pleased to say this season has allowed them to flourish. I hope they continue to do so.

The track to the falls is a simple there and back route, so we were back at the picnic ground in time for an early



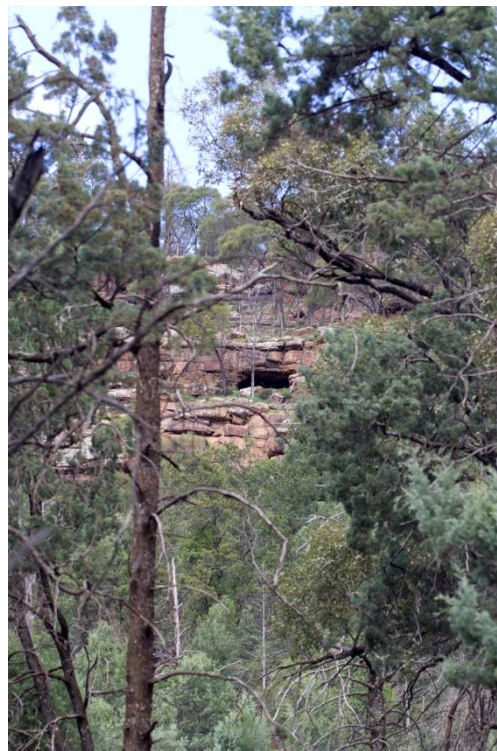
Various shades of green along the track,
Twining Glycine *Glycine clandestine*,
Dwarf Greenhoods *Pterostylis nana*,
Bat's Wing Fern *Histiopteris incisa*
by Eric Whiting



lunch. Afterwards we set off across the road towards Mt Caley, winding our way up a shallow valley. Although still very much in winter there was a fair sprinkling of flowers out, notably quite a number of Blue Caladenias, *Caladenia caerulea*.

The objective of this walk was a cave high up the side of Mt Caley, but due to the lack of time – there was too much to see and examine to do anything more than a slow pace – we only viewed the cave from below. It would have been a steep climb to reach it. So we retraced our steps, well sort of, back to our cars to wind up a very enjoyable day.

Eric Whiting



View of the cave on Mt Caley through the trees
by Eric Whiting
Turquoise Parrots by Phil Tenison

Spring Hill/Falcon Falls Bird List 14/08/16

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Australian Wood Duck | Peregrine Falcon | Peaceful Dove |
| Bar-shouldered Dove | Galah | Glossy Black Cockatoo |
| Mulga Parrot | Turquoise Parrot | Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo |
| Black-eared Cuckoo | Laughing Kookaburra | Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike |
| Eastern Yellow Robin | Jacky Winter | Grey Shrike-Thrush |
| Crested Bellbird (H) | Restless Flycatcher | Willie Wagtail |
| Grey-crowned Babbler | White-browed Babbler | Western Gerygone (H) |
| Yellow Thornbill | Chestnut-rumped Thornbill | Weebill |
| Brown Treecreeper | Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater | Striped Honeyeater |
| White-plumed Honeyeater | Brown-headed Honeyeater | Pee-Wee |
| White-winged Chough | Dusky Woodswallow | Grey Butcherbird |
| Australian Magpie | | |

Help map feral animal activity in your area - National Feral Cat Control Survey

This survey is being conducted by the RMIT University, and has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee. This research project is funded by the Australian Government.

The aim of this project is to determine the extent to which feral cat control is occurring across Australia, and to estimate the number of feral cats that are removed from the environment each year. This project also seeks to understand how efforts to control feral cats are changing over time.

The survey itself is made up of a number of short questions about feral cats and what, if any, measures you take to manage feral cats. Participants are asked to answer the questions to the best of their knowledge. There are no right or wrong answers. Visit www.feralscan.org.au to complete the survey; it only takes a few minutes to complete.

Other events: (carried over from back page)

Paddock Walks with Martin Driver

15 September, Thursday At a preserved sandhill community at Zara Homestead, Wanganella.

Meet at Royal Mail Hotel at Booorooban.

19 September, Monday – Sandhills paddock walk at Coleambally Site 11.

More details from Nella Smith 6959 1210 or Rowena Whiting 6953 2612.

Galore Hill Outing - 28 August 2016

Spring was definitely in the air when 7 members met at Narrandera to travel to Galore Hill. The weather was beautifully clear and warm so all was well for a lovely day out.

The first stop was at the eremophila planting in the reserve where we inspected the various flowering plants and were surprised to find no honeyeaters present. A couple of **Grey-crowned Babblers** flew in to check us out and on a walk up the hill; we found numbers of **Brown Treecreepers** and a pair of **Diamond Firetails**.

We decide to drive up to the picnic area for morning tea and Nella and Virginia were soon off along the hill slopes in search of ground orchids. The rest of us walked back along the road looking for **Speckled Warbler** which Meredith was keen to see. However, no luck despite it being their territory on all previous visits. Nor was the **Crested Shrike-tit** sighted although Nella did see one when she went back to get the car.

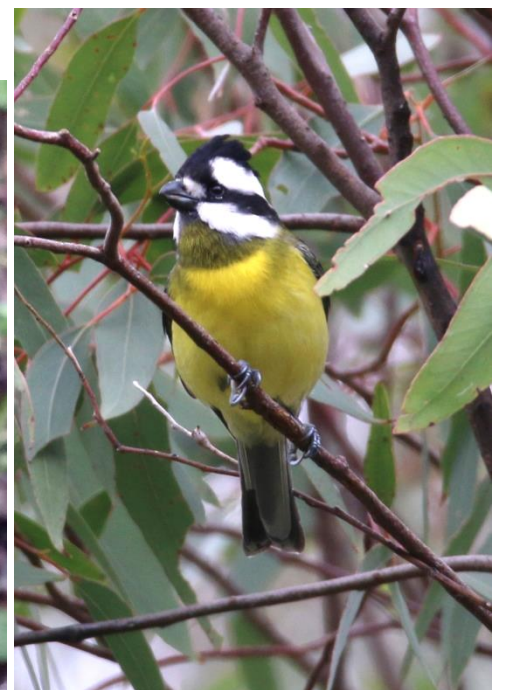
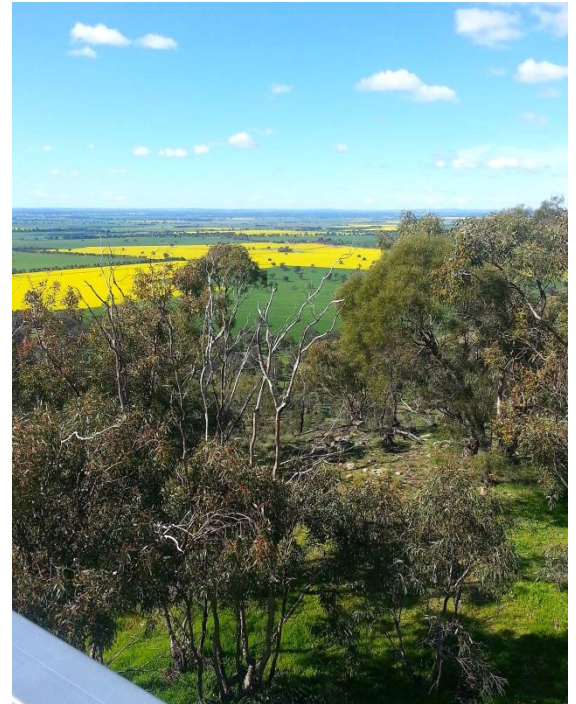
We drove up to the summit of Galore Hill and again divided into two groups - orchid chasers and the rest! With such a beautiful day there were several other picnickers enjoying the day and the spectacular scenery below the hill with a patchwork of yellow canola as far as the eye could see. We were also intrigued by a blimp flying in the distance above the river line towards Narrandera.

After lunch Nella led us on a merry chase via back roads looking for Buckingham State Forest, near Boree Creek which we eventually found despite the directions given by her car GPS lady! Some ground orchids were found but Nella thought it was still too early for them in the area just yet.

Max O'Sullivan

Virginia's story of the blimp

The Blimp we eventually photographed, we had seen while sitting at the top of Galore Hill having lunch watching this blob in the distance. Not a plane, not a bird, so with our bins we worked out to be an airship, the Blimp. Going to the reserve we found that it was travelling westward and so the guessing kept going as to where its destination could be. Arriving in Narrandera, we were able to view it clearly as it meandered around. Had a couple of advertisements, one was 'appliancesonline.com'. Passing Narrandera Airport, we could see the service vehicles. Still wondering exactly why!! Tour of the region by air viewing the wonders of the landscape!



View of the adjoining farmland from the reserve, group enjoying lunch in the sun, Greencomb Spider Orchid *Pterostylis tentaculata sens.lat.* (taken at Buckingham) by Virginia Tarr
Crested Shrike-Tit by Phil Tenison

Bird List Galore Hill Reserve:

White-necked Heron
Crested Pigeon
Laughing Kookaburra
Red-capped Robin
Rufous Whistler
Willie Wagtail
Western Gerygone
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Red Wattlebird
Diamond Firetail
White-winged Chough

Wedge-tailed Eagle
Galah
Jacky Winter
Eastern Yellow Robin
Grey Shrike-Thrush
Grey Fantail
Weebill
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill
Noisy Miner
Olive-backed Oriole (H)
Apostlebird

Goshawk (sp)
Red-rumped Parrot
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Crested Shrike-Tit (Nella only)
Restless Flycatcher
Grey-crowned Babbler
Buff-rumped Thornbill
Brown Treecreeper
White-plumed Honeyeater
Peewee
Dusky Woodswallow

MFN hosts the BIGnet (Bird Interest Group network) Meeting in Leeton

On the weekend of the 3-4th September 2016, MFN hosted the BIGnet meeting in Leeton. BIGnet is a network of birding groups in NSW and the ACT. BIGnet members were welcomed by Mayor of Leeton Shire Council, Paul Maytom

MFN members were invited to join the meeting, on Saturday afternoon to hear David Parker of NPWS talk on his Plains Wanderer Studies, Matt Herring about the Bitterns in Rice Project 2012-2016 and David Egan of NPWS speak about his Surveys of the Red-lored Whistler.

On Sunday morning members joined in with the BIGnet members in a walk at Fivebough led by Keith Hutton. The day was an overcast and cold morning and Fivebough had a lot of water in it from local heavy rains. There were some birds to be seen, a blue billed duck was there and several black swans some of which had been nesting. Everyone then headed back to Mountford Park for a BBQ breakfast provided by Rotary.



Tom Karplus, President, Birding NSW addressing the meeting.

Group at Fivebough Wetlands on a dull morning by Penny Williams

Australian Hobby by Phil Tenison



Big thanks to Max and Nella for the work they put in to organise the weekend. Also thanks to Leeton Shire Council and The Heritage Motor Inn for contributing to the success of the weekend.

Penny Williams



Bowra Sanctuary Southern Queensland

Bowra Sanctuary is about 14,000 hectares that was a sheep and/or cattle station for about 140 years just out of Cunnamulla in south-west Queensland. When in private hands, it was well known in birding circles as a haven for birdwatchers which was encouraged by the original owners.

When the property was put up for sale 4 or 5 years ago, Birdlife Australia was keen to have it remain as a site for the preservation of the variety of flora and fauna it supported and encouraged Australian Wildlife Conservancy to purchase the property and keep it as a sanctuary.

The reserve is managed by volunteers from the Birds Queensland group in Brisbane and offers accommodation in a cottage, shearers' quarters and camping. It is a wonderful place to spend several days exploring the area and checking out the many bird species found in the reserve.

Allan Richards and I drove from Sydney with an overnight stay at Nyngan – it is too far to go in the one day. The second day was much shorter with a leisurely drive through Bourke to Cunnamulla (about 500km). I had been there previously and drove from Leeton but again I made it as far as Bourke on the first day.

The area had had some good rain in the previous week before our arrival and the Warrego River through the town was quite high. We knew rain was predicted but still decided to make the trip and managed two full days birding before the roads in the reserve were closed and only birding on foot was permitted.

The striking thing was the variety of wildflowers with a beautiful dark blue *eremophila* everywhere – I hadn't seen that colour before.

The major attraction of the reserve is the bird species it supports – **Hall's Babbler**, **Bourke's Parrot**, **Red-browed Pardalote**, **White-browed Treecreeper** and **Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush** were of particular interest to us. We managed to see all but the Quail-thrush as the rain prevented us getting to the area where it is usually seen – rocky slopes. Birds were not easy and you had to work hard to locate them in such a vast area of habitat.

A friend, Paul Johnstone, had been to Bowra a few weeks before us in much better weather as you can see from his photographs. He has kindly allowed us to use them in this article for our club newsletter.

The photos:



Australian Bustard: This was seen on the road near the Warrego Weir on the drive to Bowra. We came across a male in the middle of the road displaying and when he eventually moved off into the grass we proceeded just a little along the road and found a female bustard with two very young chicks.

Hall's Babbler: This is the rarest of the 4 babbler species and is only found in south-western Queensland and north-western NSW. It is distinct in that it has a very broad white eyebrow



compared with our locally common **White-browed** birds. They also have a distinct white bib and the rest of the body is a much darker brown than other babblers. The reserve has recorded all 4 species but the White-browed is quite rare there.



White-browed Treecreeper: This bird was sometimes reported in Binya State Forest and I did see one there in 2002 but none have been seen since to my knowledge. The bird is similar to the **Brown Treecreeper** but is smaller and has very dark black and white striping on the body compared with the Brown. Gluepot Reserve in South Australia is also a good place to see this species.

Bourke's Parrot: This is a beautiful bird of pastel pink and blue. It is about the size of a **Turquoise Parrot** but is more robust looking. We only saw one bird feeding on the ground in the rain!



Bowra 'road': (above) The roads in the reserve are reasonably good in dry weather but the lower sections soon become very slippery after a little rain – this photo was taken in the drier period before our trip there.



Other good birds we saw in Bowra or close by were **Crested Bellbird** (many), **White-winged Triller** (common), **Emu** (hundreds), **Black-faced Woodswallow**, **Black-breasted Buzzard** (pair in flight) and **Banded Lapwing**.

Max O'Sullivan

Recording our Local Nature

In response to my article on recording our local nature last month, Geoff Robertson of Friends of Grasslands, Canberra contacted me to alert me to a project established in the Canberra area in the last couple of years.

Canberra Nature Map is a reporting/information program accessible online including from smart phones where anybody can post a photo of a rare or unusual sighting with details of location. Program moderators control entries to keep the information reliable (and sensible) and identify if they can and add information. Once included further information can be added as comments by other users. In this way a distribution map of the various species is steadily being built.

The website www.canberranaturemap.org.au is easy to view and use. The home page gives a general introduction and has tabs for accessing maps, species (which has a drop down box to select categories – birds, reptiles, plants, etc), identifying sightings, as well as the usual 'about us' and contact tabs. The latter is for logging in to the program to enter sightings and photos.

Both the species and the unidentified sightings pages display thumbnails of the photos conveniently arranged into categories. Clicking on any one takes you to a page giving details of the sighting and the comments on it given by other users. [Localities of threatened species, etc are moderated to public users to give due protection.]

According to the founder Aaron Clausen, a mountain bike rider who had an epiphanic moment awakening him to the beauty and diversity of the bush he was riding through, there are three objectives of the program:

- To accurately map every rare plant and endangered animal in the ACT and maintain records for future generations.
- To improve public education and awareness of the diversity and significance of native flora and fauna.
- To influence development decisions and protect Canberra natural treasures.

Geoff Robertson told me that the program cost \$40,000 to \$60,000 to develop but only \$1000 or so each year to support. Originally the coverage was up to 300km from Canberra, but with a sister program being set up for the South-east coast has been adjusted to avoid overlap. The developer and the writer of the software are quite willing to have other Nature Maps established. He thought one for our area would be a great idea – how about it?

Eric Whiting

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Buff-banded Rail [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/08/16	Kathy & Phil Tenison
Spotless Crake [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/08/16	Kathy & Phil Tenison
Diamond Firetail [2]	Koonadan Historic site	06/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Spotless Crake [10+]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/08/16	Keith Hutton
Buff-banded Rail [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/08/16	Keith Hutton
Australasian Bittern [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/08/16	Keith Hutton
Blue-billed Duck [male]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/08/16	Keith Hutton
Musk Duck [pr]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/08/16	Keith Hutton
Black Swan [with 4 cygnets]	Fivebough from Hooley Lookout	07/08/16	Max O'Sullivan

This is the first successful hatching of the 70 plus nests that Keith reported in the July newsletter.

There are at least 4 other family groups varying from 2 to 6 cygnets.

Many nests have been abandoned possibly because of fox, sea-eagle and other predators helping themselves to the readily available food source.

Little Eagle [pursued by ravens]	Pendula St Leeton [overhead]	08/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Black-faced Woodswallow [6]	Barren Box Swamp via Griffith	10/08/16	Neil Palframan
White-bellied Sea-Eagle [on nest]	Barren Box Swamp	10/08/16	Neil Palframan
Black Swans [with cygnets]	Barren Box Swamp	10/08/16	Neil Palframan
White-winged Wren [4 families]	Barren Box Swamp	10/08/16	Neil Palframan
Fairy Martin [40+]	Barren Box Swamp	10/08/16	Neil Palframan

This is the first record of these birds this Spring.

White-winged Triller [male]	Road out of Barren Box	10/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
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Again the first sighting of this species for the season.

Horsfield's Bushlark [2]	Carathool Rd via Griffith	10/08/16	Neil Palframan
Peregrine Falcon [2]	Spring Hill/ Falcon Falls	14/08/16	MFN outing
Glossy Black Cockatoo [pr]	Spring Hill Picnic area	14/08/16	MFN outing
Turquoise Parrot [pr mating]	Spring Hill area	14/08/16	MFN outing
Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo [2]	Spring Hill area	14/08/16	MFN outing
Black-eared Cuckoo [2]	Spring Hill area	14/08/16	MFN outing
Crested Bellbird [H]	Spring Hill area	14/08/16	MFN outing
Western Gerygone [H]	Spring Hill area	14/08/16	MFN outing
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [20]	Smeech Rd, Nericon	16/08/16	Neil Palframan
Marsh Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	16/08/16	Nella Smith

This is the first return of a migratory wader for the Spring.

Speckled Warbler	Quarry Rd, via Nericon	21/08/16	Neil Palframan
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [1]	Pendula St/Whitton Rd corner	25/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Dollarbird [25]	Pine Hill Rd, Narrandera flying south	26/08/16	Nella Smith
Magpie Goose [1]	The Basin Dam, Koonadan	26/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Magpie Goose [4]	Campbell's Swamp Griffith	27/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Great Crested Grebe [1]	Lake Wyangan (north lake)	27/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Cockatiel [4]	Fivebough Wetlands flyover	27/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Gull-billed Tern [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/08/16	Keith Hutton
Australasian Bittern [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/08/16	Keith Hutton
Western Gerygone	Galore Hill Reserve	28/08/16	MFN Outing
Buff-rumped Thornbill	Galore Hill Reserve	28/08/16	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Crested Shrike-tit	Galore Hill Reserve	28/08/16	Nella Smith
Superb Parrot [8]	Boronia Rd Leeton feeding on olives	29/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Little Corella [200+]	Brobenah Rd Leeton	31/08/16	Max O'Sullivan
Chestnut Teal [3 tiny ducklings]	Settling Ponds Fivebough	01/09/16	Max O'Sullivan
White-fronted Chat [male]	Fivebough Wetlands	01/09/16	Max O'Sullivan
Superb Parrot	Mountford Park, Leeton	04/09/16	Max O'Sullivan

**** COMING EVENTS ****

Note: The recent wet weather conditions may affect access to outing locations and these may have to be changed. Please contact the organiser to confirm.

- 8 September Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: "Mungo National Park; its natural history" Eric and Rowena Whiting
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 11 September Sunday** **Activity: "Hollows as Homes"**
at Cocoparra National Park to celebrate National Tree Day and World Ranger Day
Organised by Irrigation Area Landcare Collective and NSW National Parks & wildlife.
Time: 11 am-followed by a sausage sizzle (free)
Meeting Place: Woolshed Flat Camping Area, BBQ Shelter.
Please reply by 10 September for catering to Kerri Keely - kkeely@mli.org.au or 0428 396 826.
- 16 – 18 September** **Spring Camp at Rankins Springs**
Looking at mallee and wattle in the area.
Camping weekend – both the Rankins Springs hotel and motel are now closed.
There is a B&B nearby that can accommodate a few people who don't wish to camp – contact Graham and Dione Russell on 0428536290 so bookings can be made.
It is intended to join the plant id day on the Sunday – see below.
Contact: Graham and Dione Russell on **0428536290**
- 18 September Sunday** **WILDFLOWER AND PLANT ID DAY**-Martin Driver will be presenting a plant identification workshop followed by a walk and talk at Cocoparra National Park.
Meet at the Store Creek parking area at 11am.
Please reply by 17 September for catering to Kerri Keely - kkeely@mli.org.au or 0428 396 826.
- 25 September Sunday** **Outing Narrandera/Ardlethan areas**
Main focus will be the Spring wildflowers.
Meet: Narrandera Tourist Information Centre at 8:30am.
Bring: Morning tea and lunch.
Please contact: Eric or Rowena on 6953 2612 if intending to come.
- 5 October Wednesday** **Copy for the October newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 13 October Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: "The Kimberley" Joanne Tarbitt
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- Other events**
- 20 September Tuesday** **Community Tree Planting at Fivebough Wetlands**
Meet at the wetlands at 10:00, Contact Kelly Tyson at Leeton Shire
RSVP by 5 September. Bush tucker will be provided.
- 26 September onwards** **Yathong - a plant search of the nearby Merrimerrriwa Range**
This will take place over a few days. Accommodation is in the shearers quarters, doing own catering. **Contact:** Nella Smith 69591210
- 7-9 October** **Birds of the Bush Festival at Rankins Springs**
Guest Speaker: Tim Low. A biologist, environmental consultant and writer of numerous books: "The New Nature" "Feral Future" and "Where Song Began".