

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



November 2017 - Issue #254

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

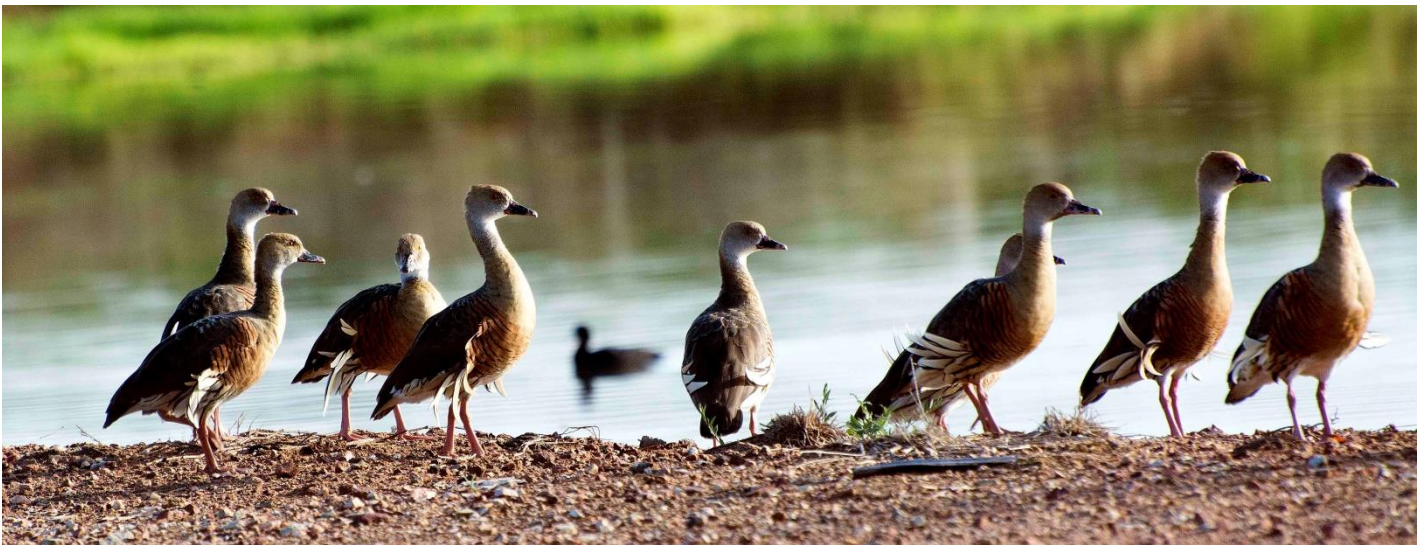
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Objectives

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



**A parade of Plumed Whistling-Ducks taken on the Twitchathon
by Phillip Williams**

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**For the December issue by
Wednesday 6 December**

To Rowena Whiting

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***AGM is on Thursday,
9 November, 7:30pm
at the Leeton Library
Outing to Barren Box Swamp
on Saturday 11 November***

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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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Welcome to November and another full issue – so much it has an extra couple of pages. Otherwise I would be holding more copy over! That’s not an excuse for not writing and submitting items!! I would like to mention that it is pleasing to have contributions from 4 of our newer members; Alan, Glenn, Margaret & Nick, my thanks to them and all the regulars. There wouldn’t be a newsletter without your contributions.

For those interested the Twitchathon teams have lists of the birds they saw and Max has done a bit of homework compiling a list of hits & misses so please contact him or the relevant teams, Max, Nella or Neil for their lists.

I would also like to draw your attention to a couple of calendars produced by BirdLife Australia and the National Parks Association; organisations that MFN is a member of. They can be found at <https://store.birdlife.org.au/> and <https://npansw.org> calendar respectively.

A couple of issues have been in the news this last week that we should keep an eye on: the privatisation of travelling stock routes by the NSW government and the push to revert the Murray Valley National Park to a State Forest in southern NSW by the newly-elected local member for Murray.

Happy reading, Rowena.

Death of a Pigeon

I heard a thump but it stayed in the back of my brain, almost instantly forgotten. Soon after I walked outside and alarmed a hawk which had a Crested Pigeon in its grasp. Maybe the pigeon hit the glass and made itself an instant meal, or maybe the hawk chased the pigeon to its walloping end. Either way, the hawk flew across the road carrying its meal and I left it in peace, and later went across to find a pile of feathers.

This might explain piles of feathers that I have seen in this spot at other times. I had previously assumed they were due to cat predation, but possibly the cats have been innocent in this case.

Was it a juvenile Goshawk or Sparrowhawk? My dodgy photos helped Max and Keith id it as a “second year immature male Brown Goshawk”.

Neil Palframan



Field Trip to Bogolong

A great Narrandera contingent, one interested member from Griffith and a pair of Leetonites came along to see local points of interest. I'm not sure where Andrew identifies with: maybe one foot in each camp.

First stop was a patch of Bimble Box-large trees some of which have died.... Why?

Further up the road we were able to find a few *Diuris tricolor* a threatened species. These are extinct in Victoria. Considering the extremely dry conditions I felt happy that at least a few came up this year in places that may have received a little moisture. Other flowering plants were the *Xerochrysum bracteanthum*, *Goodenia fascicularis* and a *Wahlenbergia sp.* The *Dwyers Mallee Gum* was also flowering.

Next stop was to see if another threatened species comes to a local dam to drink.



Watching, waiting,
wandering - group
at the dam

*Goodenia
fascicularis*

Photos by Rowena
Whiting

Bogolong is like an

outlying ridge to the Narrandera Hills with a good covering of *Allocasuarina verticillata* on which the Glossies feed. There are a few differences, no *Eucalyptus viridis*, no *Eucalyptus sideroxlyn*, no *Leptospermum* and the presence of *Astroloma humifusum*, maybe at its most westerly location.

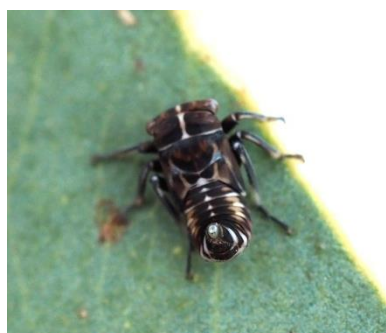
Alas today no Glossy Black Cockatoos. In fact nothing much came to drink at the dam. An echidna was sighted nearby. Two species of pigeons Peaceful Dove and Common Bronzewing obligatory drinkers due to their seed eating habits came to drink.

With an entomologist in our midst for the first time since Richard Faulder graced our field trips we realised that there were quite a few species of invertebrates other than mosquitos and flies. How good is that!!

Nella Smith

Galls and ants – their relationship

These are black gum-leaf hopper nymphs (Subfamily: Eurymelinae, Tribe: Eurymelini) and they exhibit an interesting mutual relationship with ants. The leaf hopper feeds by sucking the phloem from the plant and then excretes sugary honeydew. Ants feed on the honeydew excreted by the leaf hopper and in exchange provide protection from predators and parasitoids.



Galls (on right) can come in all different shapes and sizes, can occur on a wide range of plants and different parts of the plant. Galls are abnormal plant growths caused by various different organisms, including insects,

nematodes and fungi. We found two different types of galls next to the dam, both possibly caused by either a fly or a wasp.



Nick May

Bird List compiled by Nella Smith

Little Friarbird	Kookaburra	Peaceful Dove	Common Bronzewing
Weebill	White winged Chough	Rainbow Bee-eater	White plumed Honeyeater
Red-rumped Parrot	Woodswallow sp	Australian Raven	Eastern Rosella
Crested Pigeon	Western Gerygone	Grey Fantail	Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike Thrush	Striped Honeyeater	Black faced Cuckoo-shrike	
Other species:	Eastern Grey Kangaroo	Echidna	Jet Planes

BUS BIRDING AT RANKINS SPRINGS

"Bus birding?" I thought, as the 17-or-so of us assembled at 6am around the flash little commuter bus in the dark at Rankins Springs Hall on Saturday, October 7.

After climbing aboard we were soon on the road, to shortly drive into one of those flaming wide-sky sunrises in which Australia's inland seems to excel. From then onwards, I had absolutely no idea where we were. Occasionally I would ask in which direction Rankins Springs was (my only point of orientation), but as there were three or so pointing fingers indicating contradictory compass points, I gave up caring.

The first stop was at a small dam, which turned out fruitful indeed for bird sightings, of which I will cherry-pick only the ones that were special to me. Here was my very first viewing of Turquoise Parrots; a pair, leisurely feeding on grass seeds on the wall of the dam. Then a wonderful close encounter with a pair of Hooded Robins, the male a smart, sharply defined black and white. The top bird here, though, improbably spotted some distance along a track, was a pair of Barking Owls. One of these remained in a low Kurrajong tree regarding the awed assembly with a mixture of golden-eyed curiosity and indifference.

Throughout the day there were many such rewarding sojourns, in which I gradually became a convert to the idea of "bus birding", one in which someone else does the driving while I enjoy the scenery. There's also the pleasure of chatting away as we travel, often for quite some distances.

At one large wetland, we observed many and varied birds, such as Black-winged Stilts, Red-kneed Dotterels, Yellow-billed Spoonbills – even Red Kangaroos. But the best – and yet another first for me – was a very active flock of Black-tailed Native Hens.

At one spot there was a spectacular avian aerobatic display between an Australian Hobby and a smaller harasser, while at our feet a brown snake slowly vacated the very spot where we had just been milling around at morning tea! Ah, then later there was the majestic Spotted Harrier, soaring slowly right above me.

After a lovely lunch, we returned to base for a rest before taking off for a very special sighting indeed. The setting sun was ideal for viewing the enormous nest of a Wedge-tailed Eagle. This was built in a fairly small White Cypress Pine. Our luck was in, as we could sometimes see the single fledgling moving about within. However, just as we were about to leave, one of its adult parents mysteriously appeared standing on the edge of the nest, regarding us imperiously, till the light began to fade and we took our leave. To me, this is as good as it gets!

A final twilight stop at yet another dam, to be bid good-night by a pair of Glossy Black Cockatoos, a Black Swamp Wallaby, and an earth-moving Echidna; then back to the Hall for a grand barbeque dinner (yum).

The group went out again on the Sunday, but Susan and I had to get back.

Everything about the organization - especially the victuals, was superlative, a great credit to the Lachlan Fold community in general, and Helen and Mark in particular. Apparently the bird list for the two days exceeded 130 – impressive by any measure.

Bus birding? Count me in anytime!

Alan Whitehead

Baillons Crake photographed at Fivebough Wetlands by Phil Tenison



Recently thanks to help from Keith and Max I was able to complete the trifecta of Crakes at Fivebough Wetlands. In the August MFN newsletter there were pictures of the first two legs of the trifecta, the Spotted and Spotless Crakes.

Seeing and getting a photo of the **Baillons Crake** (photo accompanying) proved a bit more difficult as they are very elusive, smaller than the Spotted and Spotless and very quick at darting amongst the cumbungi and undergrowth.

Twitchathon Report – Silly Galahs Team – 29 October 2017

Penny and Phillip Williams and I set out at the crack of dawn on Sunday morning and drove to Yanco Weir Road where we began our twitch at 6.20am. First birds seen were both **Noisy** and **Little Friarbirds** and a **Superb Parrot** flew into the trees along the road. We stopped at Euroley Bridge on the way back to Leeton and heard and finally saw a **Dollarbird** fly across the river.

A short stop at the park in Yanco didn't yield a **Night Heron** so we headed for Fivebough via Almond Road where we picked up **Little Corella**. We drove into the wetlands via the back entrance to make the time spent there a minimum. At the back settling ponds we found a group of **Plumed Whistling-duck** as well as the usual ducks, grebes, cormorants and egrets. There wasn't much to add to our list from the Freckled Duck viewing platform/shelter so we walked down the path to the open water hoping for a few more ticks for the list. Apart from **Australian Shelduck** and **Black-winged Stilt** there wasn't much else – no sign of any waders so we decided to get back to the vehicle and head off around Fivebough Road to Hooey Lookout where we scoped lots of roosting **Red-necked Avocet**.

Next along Petersham Road we found a **Royal Spoonbill** in the irrigation channel but not much else so we decided to head towards Griffith around 10am as I had the key to Barren Box Swamp and we wanted to check that out.



Mistletoebird

On the way along Kidman Way just south of Hanwood, we stopped at a small pond beside Mirool Creek and managed a few good birds – **Buff-banded Rail**, **Baillon's Crake** and **White-fronted Chat** being the best birds there. Next we went to Gum Creek Road where Neil had told us he had seen some good birds the day before and we had excellent views of several **Painted** and **Black Honeyeaters** and **Mistletoebirds**. Neil had seen budgies but there was no sign of them on Sunday – pity.

We then headed to Barren Box Swamp via the ponds at the Griffith Saleyards hoping for **Pink-eared Ducks** but, unfortunately, none were there and we didn't find any elsewhere either.

Barren Box was good for a few new ticks – **Nankeen Night Heron**, **Caspian Tern**, **Glossy Ibis**, **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** and a lone female **Orange Chat**. Unfortunately, there were no **White-winged Wrens** nor **Emus** seen so we headed back to Wyangan and Campbell's Swamp where we ran into Nella's group who were just leaving.

Good birds at Campbells' were **Musk** and **Blue-billed Ducks** as well as a single **Magpie Goose**. On the walk back to the car park, a **Black Honeyeater** flew into a bush beside us. I am not sure if Nella's team saw it or not.

At Griffith airport we got **Blue Bonnet** but no **Pink Cockies**. At the golf course, we located the **Tawny Frogmouth** and then set out for Spring Hill and eventually Wattle Dam. Time was getting on but we still had a few hours to spare and the plan was to spend the last hour at Wattle Dam around 6 o'clock.

Spring Hill was quiet with only **Rainbow Bee-eater** and **Eastern Yellow**

Robin added. No treecreepers or woodswallows were seen and the resident **Crested Bellbirds** didn't indicate they were in residence.

Wattle Dam proved a fitting finale to our day with plenty of good birds added – **Turquoise** and **Mulga Parrots**, **White-winged Triller**, **Striped Honeyeater**, **Brown-headed Honeyeater**, **Jacky Winter**, **Diamond** and **Bar-shouldered Doves** to name a few. No **Speckled Warblers** nor **Splendid Wrens** were seen.

All up we ended up with 127 birds but missed quite a few 'common' species we expected but then that's birding for you!

We finally got back to the Williams' place around 8-ish to complete the list and have a late dinner. I finally got to bed about 10.30 so it was a long but very enjoyable day's birding.

Max O'Sullivan for the Silly Galahs team.

Addendum to the Twitchathon and fund raising for the event

A Twitchathon is never just about counting birds and it was true this year. It started on Friday with the ABC presenter Simon Wallace. He had heard about MFN's involvement in the Twitchathon. I was given a short couple of minutes of radio time on Friday morning to talk about it to listeners and the fact that we are raising money for the Bittern Project.



Then on the road on Sunday at Fivebough Wetlands we observed a group of kangaroos several with joeys, heads poking out of the top of their mothers' pouches. At Gum Creek Road we came across the farmer who explained to us that he had planted trees here with the purpose of attracting birds. It was here we saw the Painted Honeyeaters, Black Honeyeaters and Mistletoebirds. I suspect at this 'Significant Roadside Environment Area' (as it was sign posted) we only got a small proportion of the birds awaiting discovery. Time being of the essence we left here before discovering its full potential.

At Barren Box Swamp as we drove around the track spying birds we also saw two large turtles. Two large brown snakes slithered across in front

of us, giving a total of 4 snakes seen on the day. We shared the Barren Box shelter area with 2 blue tongue lizards and a nest of Willie Wagtails during our lunch break.

Wattle Dam was the perfect end to the day of birding. It made us wait awhile for the birds to come and settle in the trees just as the gold of the evening sun turned the scene.

That evening we did a final count on species and sent our numbers in to the NSW Twitchathon Coordinator. Our thanks go to Ashwin Rudder who worked to make things run smoothly. This year the event was a national event and the money raised through sponsorship of teams goes to a bird conservation initiative, different for each state. MFN teams are the Silly Galahs and the Bidgee Boobooks. You can sponsor these teams by donating on line at <https://www.birdlifetwitchathon.org.au/2017-teams> or sending your donation to the Treasurer of MFN to forward on.



NSW sponsorship money goes to Matt Herring's team for the Bitterns in Rice project this season. He is planning to use the money to buy a drone so that they can monitor the movement of bittern chicks in nests to see their behaviour without having to disturb them too much.

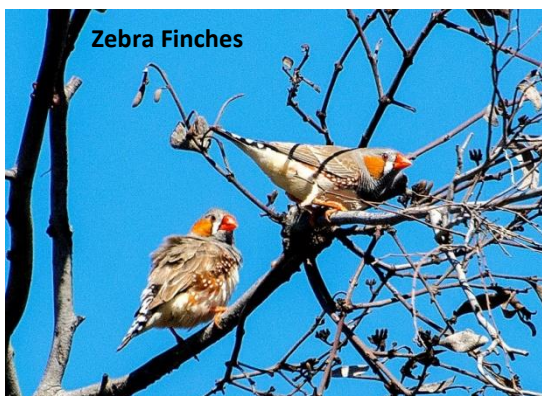
Penny Williams

Twitchathon Ramblings: 'Bidgee Boobooks

These twitchathons are great fun and a good way of seeing places and learning about birds and in my case a laugh a minute.

Although Alan had been birdwatching for a long time on the coast he had not done inland birding. Both Glenn and Ellené are beginner birdwatchers but keen.

It was the raptors that were visible this year. Although we didn't record some, the ones we did were easy to find and identify.



The Collared Sparrowhawk hanging around my place showed itself in a timely fashion. The Wedge-tailed Eagle was disappearing over the horizon at Lake Coolah and a Brown Goshawk at Wattle Dam and the Peregrine at Fivebough added to the list. The Brown Falcon and the Australasian Kestrel were found on the run but the Black shouldered Kite was not seen. As usual the Black Kites were hanging around the tip. Whistling Kites were adding to their mouse count. Of course the Black Falcon seen the previous week did not show and as usual the Swamp Harriers were harrying.



Red-capped
Robin

Highlights for Alan were the spectacular views of the Splendid Fairy-wren and the Zebra Finches at the same location. Mulga Parrots and Painted Honeyeaters rated high as well.

For Ellené it was the Tawny Frogmouth at the Golf Course of course. Is this bird glued to the tree? He's been there for years.

Glenn's heart stopper was the ruby of the landscape: the sociable Red-capped Robin: common it is, but always lovely to observe; and the Splendid Fairy wren. There were a lot of Shelducks at Fivebough this year and they are looking very dapper.

For me the Winery was great. Major Mitchell's Cockatoos, Splendid Fairy wrens and Painted Honeyeaters. What else do you want?

I think Fivebough is a beautiful wetland now that it is much better managed except for the Black Snakes that cause my heart to pound.

Campbell Swamp with its input of environmental water had most of the ducks: Blue-billed, Musk, Freckled (last week), Black and Grey Teal. No Pink Ears to be found. I am told they are on the coast in their millions. The Australasian Bittern greeted us and then flew off.

Nella Smith

Morning on Gum Creek Road

Our regular Sunday morning ride took us down Gum Creek Road – the wind influences our choice of route. The road is well lined with Myall in a mixed cropping area, and council has done a lot of work removing Boxthorn. It often shows good birds and today was no exception.

Lots of little birds flitting across the road and through the trees, a mass of woodswallows, a paddock of cows included a donkey, and toward the end was that wonderful seesaw call of the Painted Honeyeater. Unfortunately my bare eyes are not good for bird id, any count would probably end up double, and I don't carry my bins while out riding – wouldn't want the straps in the spokes.

So I returned several days later, and stopped near Millis Road where I had heard the Painted. The Harlequin Mistletoe in the Myall was flowering and was alive with honeyeaters – alive as in “where do I look first”? Most common was the Painted Honeyeater and Black Honeyeater, maybe a dozen of each, vocal and active, with a sprinkle of overwhelmed and unusually quiet Singing, White-plumed and Miners. As is normal with aggregations like this, they were boldly out in the open and easy to watch, even a Brown Falcon that stopped nearby did not disturb the activity.

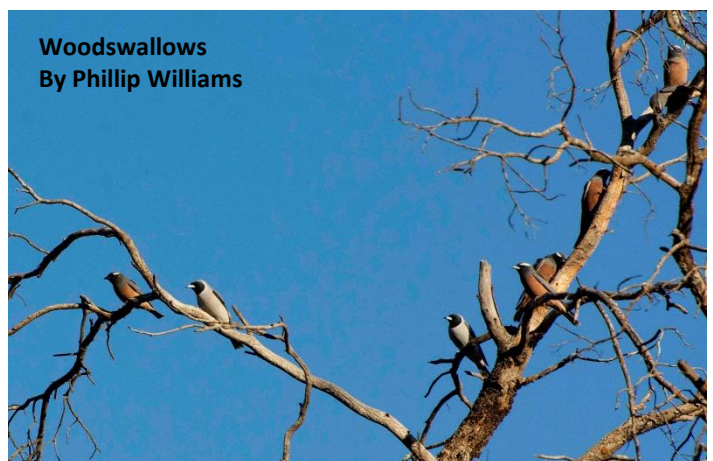
There were a hundred White-browed (and a few Masked) Woodswallows alternating between quiet and noisy, perching in the trees between bouts of sky flocking. And they were in the mistletoe. Doing what? Looking for insects? No shortage of insects at the moment, they wouldn't have to look too hard. No, they were eating nectar from the mistletoe flowers. Pizzey & Knight say “Woodswallows also have brush-like tongues for gleaning nectar from blossoms – although mostly they eat flying insects”.

A brown wren looked suspiciously “not Variegated” and sure enough, one quick pish had a full coloured Superb pop out, far less common in this area than the Variegated. In fact I don't remember seeing them anywhere around Griffith apart from Binya / Cocoparra.

Also flitting around were Zebra Finches, Mistletoebirds, Crested Pigeons, a Stubble Quail was heard, and just as I called an end to the show, two Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoos stopped on some fallen timber in front of me, though I hadn't heard any calls.

Missing were any Superb Parrots or Cockatiels that are regulars along this road.

Neil Palframan



Woodswallows
By Phillip Williams

Fivebough Happenings

Work for the Dole is already underway for round two of enhancement projects at Fivebough, scheduled to run from October to March 2018. The crew will be maintaining the fabulous picnic lawn area and flower gardens as well as creating a brand new section of walking track to link Glossy Ibis Shelter extension with the Wiradjuri Walk. There will also be some new sheltered seating built and installed around the Wetlands Walk to provide some shady respite for visitors in the hot summer weather ahead. Be sure to say g-day to the crew if you visit Fivebough on a Wednesday or Thursday and let them know the hard work they've been putting into the site is well appreciated as Joe and the team have been doing an amazing job!



Completion of the Budyaan Baamirra Picnic Area works

The Local Land Services National Landcare Grant project will continue with the preparation of the native grassland area opposite the Budyaan Baamirra Picnic Area (to be established in Autumn 2018) and ongoing weed control across both Fivebough & Tuckerbil. The new Fivebough Brochure has hit the stands, providing visitors with a professional guide to the wetlands site. There are copies available in the Information Centres of the district and in the Visitors Book at the Budyaan Baamirra Picnic Area. Hopefully, with an opening or two in the work schedule the bird, wildlife and vegetation identification signage can be finalised, printed and installed by the end of the year.

Also, Fivebough was fortunate enough to receive a visit from the Travel Map duo, who crafted up a beautiful film showcasing the wetlands at their best (full of water and birdlife) so make sure to check out the film on the Facebook link and share with as many friends as you can!

<https://www.facebook.com/travelmap.world/videos/1762240144068756/>

Bec Bryne Natural Resource Management



Wildlife nesting boxes created and installed by Work for the Dole

Sounds of Ingalba Nature Reserve

[A few MFN members spent 3 days from 18 to the 20 October carrying out vegetation surveys to allow the monitoring by the Friends of Ingalba group to continue. Ed]

On the walk to and from the survey sites and during breaks, I noted the birds calling and the variation between species as we moved to different habitats within the reserve. In many areas, the canopy of Mugga Ironbark is too high to easily see birds, especially that our task was to survey the plants at ground level. Most of my observations were from calls, far carrying when we were elevated and at other times faintly discernible in the dense under storey.

The wonderfully rich tones of Rufous Whistlers were heard at the majority of sites across the three days. In the southern section of the reserve during the first two days, we frequently heard White-throated Treecreepers, Striated Pardalotes, Western Gerygone, Buff-rumped Thornbills and Peaceful Doves. At some sites we also heard White-winged Choughs, Brown-headed Honeyeater, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Red-capped Robins, Striped Honeyeater, Weebills and Inland Thornbills. Less frequent were Crested Pigeons, Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Fantails, Yellow Robins and Striped Honeyeater. Only one Fan-tailed Cuckoo was heard, as with Horsfields Bronze-Cuckoo, Spotted Pardalote, Jacky Winter, Pied Butcherbird and a Willy Wagtail.

The third day was spent on the northern side in a nearby section called Big Bush, following heavy overnight rain. The birds were very vocal and we heard a Black-chinned Honeyeater, Mistletoebird, Brown Treecreeper, Kookaburra, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Red Capped Robin, Western Gerygone, Yellow Robin, Striped Honeyeater, Weebills, Buff-rumped and Inland Thornbills.

Hearing bird song throughout each day added a relaxing and interesting dimension to the plant observations, reflecting the seasonal changes since our visit in autumn with sounds and sights.

Margaret Strong

There's 'bugs' and True Bugs

To many any invertebrate that is not readily identified as say a beetle, butterfly or a bee is referred to as a 'bug'. For a zoologist however a bug is a member of a distinct Order of insects, the Hemiptera, just as the beetles are in the Order Coleoptera. The term True Bug is often used to make this refinement clear.

The name Hemiptera relates to the fact that many of the members have half of the forewings hardened as protective structures and the other half membranous for flying (hemi = half, pteryra = wing). However this does not apply to all members as the forewings in some groups are completely hardened, completely membranous in others, or the insects are even wingless.

The main distinguishing feature of Hemiptera is in their mouth parts being modified into needle like structures for injecting saliva into prey and/or sucking out the fluids. There are no chewing parts, This is an advantage as the insect does not have to waste energy in digesting chitin, cellulose or xylose depending on whether the food is other insects or plants. Those materials are hard to digest and moreover have little nutritional value.

There is one disadvantage though. Fluid food means an excess of water which has to be excreted. Many hemipteras have developed a system of filtering out this excess water by having the hind gut folded over the foregut and the two enclosed in a membrane. The excess water is filtered from the foregut into the hindgut to be quickly excreted leaving a more concentrated food to be digested in the mid-gut. Unfortunately this system is not perfect and a lot of sugars are excreted especially from plant sap suckers. How many times have you parked under a tree only to find it splattered in sticky sugary drops.

It is probably the development of the piercing-sucking mouthparts that is responsible for early dominance of hemiptera soon after they evolved in the early Permian (c280 million years ago). They were not the first with such piercing parts but seemed to have refined them advantageously. This development seems to have helped them through the great end of Permian extinction relatively unscathed to flourish again.

Once divided into two suborders Homoptera and Heteroptera the former is now divided into two with awkward names of Auchenorrhynha (cicadas, treehoppers, leaf hoppers, frog hoppers and spittle bugs all with forewings hardened and hardened bodies) and Sternorrhyncha (aphids, psyllids, scale insects and mealy bugs all with fully membranous wings where present and soft bodies).

All members of the now split homopteran order are plant feeders and, except the Cicadas, are generally small. Also their mouthparts appear to arise from under the rear of the head.

The suborder Heteroptera first appeared as semi-aquatic beach-combing predators of other invertebrates and today the suborder still has many semi-aquatic representatives as water striders (the first to master walking on the surface of water), water scorpions, water bugs, water boatmen, and back swimmers. This group have the only insects that have migrated back to marine environments.

Further radiation of the heteroptera has given rise to the successful and prolific forms of Assassin bugs (predatory) and stink bugs (plant suckers) as well as the ant – and wasp – mimicking bugs, the wingless nuisance to man – the Bed bug (similar types occur on birds and bats), Shield bugs, Jewel bugs (the Horehound bug *Agonoscelis rutila* is an often seen species).

So when in reply to the question 'What is it?' I am not being flippant by saying 'It is a bug'. I am referring to it being a True Bug, but unfortunately I do not know or have the information to precisely put a name on the majority of hundreds and hundreds Hemiptera species that have been named and described.

Eric Whiting

Lerps (right), Horehound bug often found on Horehound leaves (below), bug id unknown



Go Volunteering to See Places

Five years ago I had spare time on my hands during my annual leave from work so googled "volunteering opportunities" and came across a website for Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA). I booked a project then spent a week tree planting, aiding the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Project in the Capertee Valley north of Lithgow. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and have been volunteering regularly ever since.

Most of the projects I've been on have occurred during winter and have usually involved tree planting (including shrubs and grasses). Some I remember specifically include a koala habitat project in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, another was for dune stabilisation near Streaky Bay on the Eyre Peninsular, and another for the Red-Tailed Black Cockatoo Stringybark Habitat Project near Naracoorte S.A. So I get to visit some pretty nice areas.

A lot of the other projects have been in south-western Victoria. These weeks are often part of the Habitat 141 project which is a very long term plan aiming to restore and reconnect various vegetation communities/National Parks/bio-diversity hotspots along the 141st longitude (the Vic/ NSW -S.A. border). It's a huge collaborative endeavour involving partners such as Greening Australia, CVA, various CMA's and state governments. Other tree planting projects have been part of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GER) which aims to create a 3,600km national wildlife corridor from far north Queensland to the Grampians in western Victoria.



A lot of these tree planting projects involve conservation minded land owners who appreciate the bio-diversity goals, set aside some land then gain wind breaks, shade, shelter, erosion and insect control, lower water tables etc.

Other types of projects I've been on have included weed removal or control (commonly lantana, camphor laurel, bitou bush or privet). Sometimes we do jobs for State Forests like track maintenance and construction, or picnic area rejuvenation. One

**A tree-planting project near Glenthompson, S.W. Victoria 2015
50m drift fence with pitfall traps
Newly constructed MalleeFowl mound.**

interesting day project this year was tracking koalas which have been fitted with radio collars. Once we found them we recorded their location, what type of tree they were in, what they were doing. The information collected will be key to informed local council planning of habitat protection zones to safeguard these koala populations into the future

My last volunteering week this year was down in the Little Desert area of Western Victoria in early October. CVA owns two 120 hectare predator-proof fenced properties on the edge of the Little Desert National Park. In partnership with the FAUNA Research Alliance, they are involved in a "rewilding" initiative.



Rewilding is the process where lost or missing ecosystem functions are returned to an area by returning the animals that provide the required functions naturally. If the digging mammals 'soil engineers', like bilbies or bettongs, have become locally extinct then the service they provide to the ecosystem (soil nutrient turnover) will not occur resulting in impoverished soils. Poor soils impact on all other inhabitants in the ecosystem including the animals and plants. If a native predator like the western quoll is missing from the ecosystem, this can result in an over-abundance of small mammals, reptiles and invertebrates that are causing the decline of key plant species. In short, rewilding is the process of getting an ecosystem back into its former ecological shape.

(<https://faunaresearchalliance.com/2016/10/little-desert-rewilding-start/>)

My week of volunteering down there was doing a fauna survey to get an idea of the present ecology of the area before they reintroduce bettongs, bandicoots, bilbies, quolls etc . Each morning and afternoon we would check pitfall, funnel and cage traps over six sites and record what we captured. Silky Desert Mice, house mice, various skinks and frogs were the most common.

When we weren't checking the traps we would set up new trapping sites, collect and view the images from the motion activated cameras, prepare new baits. On the last day we went searching for a new malleefowl mound in the CVA sanctuary. An existing one didn't seem to be being used this spring and the managers were wondering if something had happened to the breeding pair. We spread out and walked a transect through very thick broom-brush and did find a new mound being constructed. Due to a lack of leaf litter it was comprised of mostly sticks and twigs.



Glenn Currie



No news of our Bittern, Bidgee

Unfortunately, we lost contact with Bidgee about three months ago and it remains a mystery. We're not sure if the harness and transmitter fell off prematurely and he dispersed for winter or if he stayed local around the Mirrool Creek. The fixes we got suggested the transmitter wasn't working reliably. He may have died for reasons unknown but we've had another bird (Coly-Lion) with similar issues and he was relocated by birdwatchers on the Mornington Peninsula thanks to his colour band. COLY-Lion's transmitter was still in place but not functioning. Bidgee has a red leg band that people can keep a look out for (see picture), especially if they're able to get photographs of bitterns on flight.

Matt Herring

See page 6 for donating to the Bitterns in Rice Project.

More news of the project can be found at <https://www.bitternsinrice.com.au>

Why environmental water matters

Contributed by Nella Smith with information from the OEH website.



Covering an area of 81,527 square kilometres, the Murrumbidgee catchment includes 26 storage or diversion structures, along with a 1690-kilometre stretch of the river, and surrounding wetlands.

Environmental watering is undertaken over a broad area including fringing lagoons on the Murrumbidgee River, swamps and creeks; the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) wetlands, including Ramsar-listed Fivebough and Tuckerbil swamps; and the lower Murrumbidgee floodplain, which includes the Nimmie Caira and Redbank systems and incorporates Yanga National Park.

In the Murrumbidgee valley, environmental water supports a range of wetland communities, providing habitat and breeding

opportunities for flora and fauna, as well as refuge during times of natural flow-variation. Threatened species, including broilgas, the Australasian bittern, the Southern bell frog and the fishing bat, benefit from flows.

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Gull-billed Tern [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	03/10/17	Keith Hutton
White-fronted Chat [20+]	Round Hill Rd via Leeton	05/10/17	Allan Richards
Plumed Whistling-duck [15+]	Round Hill Rd via Leeton	05/10/17	Allan Richards
Painted Honeyeater [H]	Apostle Yard Rd via Leeton	05/10/17	Allan Richards
First local report for the season.			
Rainbow Lorikeet [4]	Corbie Hill Rd Leeton	05/10/17	Allan Richards
White-breasted Woodswallow	Brady Way Leeton	05/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
First sighting for the season.			
Glossy Black Cockatoo [3 or 5]	'Yarrabimbi' Colinroobie Rd via Leeton	05/10/17	Allan Richards
Two were seen feeding in trees and later 3 came down to drink at the dam.			
Glossy Ibis [2]	'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton	06/10/17	Andrew Thompson
First record of this Ibis at Andrew's place.			
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [nest]	'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton	06/10/17	Andrew Thompson
Marsh Sandpiper [6]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/10/17	Keith Hutton
Curlew Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	06/10/17	Keith Hutton
Barking Owl	Rankins Springs Bird Fair	07/10/17	Susan Whitehead
Wedge-tailed Eagle [on nest]	Rankins Springs Bird Fair	07/10/17	Susan Whitehead
Sacred Kingfisher [1]	Petersham Rd, Leeton	07/10/17	Phillip Williams
The bird was on the clothesline and Phillip got a good photo. It is again the first report for the season.			
Black Swan [2]	Lake Talbot, Narrandera	08/10/17	Warrick Bradney
Sacred Kingfisher [1]	Pendula St, Leeton on the clothesline!	08/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Black-tailed Native-hen [14]	Rankins Springs Bird Fair	08/10/17	Alan Whitehead
Spotted Harrier	Rankins Springs Bird Fair	08/10/17	Alan Whitehead
Hooded Robin [2]	Rankins Springs Bird Fair	08/10/17	Alan Whitehead
Caspian Tern [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/10/17	Keith Hutton
Red-necked Stint [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/10/17	Keith Hutton
Curlew Sandpiper [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/10/17	Keith Hutton
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [350]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/10/17	Keith Hutton
Pelican [8]	Narrandera Wetlands	10/10/17	Warrick Bradney
Pacific Golden Plover [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	10/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Sacred Kingfisher [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	11/10/17	Keith Hutton
Grey Fantail [2]	Narrandera Wetlands	11/10/17	Warrick Bradney
Hooded Robin [pr]	Evans Smyles Rd via Leeton	11/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [pr]	Evans Smyles Rd via Leeton	11/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Black Honeyeater [4]	Apostle Yard Rd via Leeton	11/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Painted Honeyeater [4]	Apostle Yard Rd via Leeton	11/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Australian Bustard	Yanga National Park, Balranald	12/10/17	James Dwyer
Square-tailed Kite	Yanga National Park	12/10/17	Nella Smith
Magpie Goose [10+]	Campbell's Swamp, Griffith	14/10/17	Neil Palframan
Glossy Ibis [12+]	Campbell's Swamp	14/10/17	Neil Palframan
Blue-billed Duck [3]	Campbell's Swamp	14/10/17	Neil Palframan
Freckled Duck [10]	Campbell's Swamp	14/10/17	Neil Palframan
Baillon's Crake [3+]	Campbell's Swamp	14/10/17	Neil Palframan
The swamp was alive with croaking frogs – possibly 3 if not 4 separate species.			
Glossy Ibis [30+]	Nericon Swamp, Griffith	14/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Painted Honeyeater [H]	McCann Rd Lake Wyangan	14/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
White-winged Triller [pr]	McCann Rd Lake Wyangan	14/10/17	Max O'Sullivan

Mistletoebird [4+]	McCann Rd Lake Wyangan	14/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Painted Honeyeater [10]	Gum Creek Rd via Hanwood	17/10/17	Neil Palframan
Black Honeyeater [10]	Gum Creek Rd via Hanwood	17/10/17	Neil Palframan
Superb Fairy-wren [3]	Gum Creek Rd via Griffith	17/10/17	Neil Palframan
Neil felt this is an unusual site for the Superbs as he very rarely sees them in the Griffith area. Bird also seen and photographed (at a distance) by Phillip Williams on the Twitchathon on Sunday 29/10/17.			
Dollarbird [2]	Euroly Bridge Yanco	19/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
First sighting for the season. Always a reliable spot at the bridge.			
Superb Parrot [6+]	Yanco Weir Rd via Leeton	19/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Noisy Friarbird [6+]	Yanco Weir Rd.	19/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Painted Honeyeater [10+]	Gum Creek Rd via Griffith	20/10/17	Neil Palframan
Black Honeyeater [10+]	Gum Creek Rd via Griffith	20/10/17	Neil Palframan
Freckled Duck [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	20/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Horsfields Bronze Cuckoo [2]	Gum Creek Rd Via Griffith	20/10/17	Neil Palframan
Magpie Goose [1]	The Basin Dam, Koonadan	21/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Pallid Cuckoo [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	21/10/17	Keith Hutton
Black Swan + 2 cygnets	Fivebough settling ponds	21/10/17	Keith Hutton
Rainbow Bee-eater [1 only]	Evans Smyles Road via Leeton	21/10/17	Keith Hutton
European Goldfinch [6]	Stanbridge Farm	22/10/17	Peter Draper
Black Honeyeater [6]	Campbell's Swamp Griffith	24/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Australasian Bittern [1]	Campbell's Swamp	25/10/17	Neil Palframan
White-fronted Chat [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/10/17	Barry Allen
Plumed Whistling-duck [13]	Fivebough settling ponds	25/10/17	Max O'Sullivan
Turquoise Parrot [3-10]	Wattle Dam feeding near the dam	26/10/17	Neil Palframan
Inland Thornbill [3]	Whitton Stock Route, Binya State Forest	26/10/17	Neil Palframan
Splendid Wren [2]	Whitton Stock Route, Binya State Forest	26/10/17	Neil Palframan
Black-winged Stilt [60]	Nericon Swamp Griffith	26/10/17	Neil Palframan
Glossy Ibis [50]	Nericon Swamp	26/10/17	Neil Palframan
White-winged Wren [4]	Nericon Swamp	26/10/17	Neil Palframan
Greenshank [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	26/10/17	Keith Hutton
Budgerigar [8]	Gum Creek Rd via Griffith	27/10/17	Neil Palframan
Dollarbird [1]	Gum Creek Rd	27/10/17	Neil Palframan
Magpie Goose [8]	Campbell's Swamp	28/10/17	Neil Palframan
Orange Chat [fem]	Barren Box Swamp	29/10/17	Silly Galahs team
Australasian Bittern [1]	Campbell's Swamp	29/10/17	'Bidgee Boobooks team
Budgerigar [2]	Nericon at neighbours aviary	02/11/17	Neil Palframan

Some interesting numbers from Keith's quarterly count at Fivebough on 26/10/17.

Australian Shelduck [67]	Grey Teal [1600]	Hardhead [86]
Glossy Ibis [692]	Black-winged Stilt [1100]	Black-tailed Native-hen [25]
Red-necked Avocet [290]	Red-capped Plover [60]	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [85]
Whiskered Tern [2300]	Australian Reed-Warbler [45]	Little Grassbird [12]

Tuckerbil is completely dry and has been for some time so Keith only recorded the usual birds on The Basin Dam with nothing out of the ordinary.

Painted and Black Honeyeater invasion.

When scouting the area for the Twitchathon both Neil and I have come across many areas where we have found these two honeyeaters. Here in Leeton they are along Apostle Yard Road, at the Winery site at Binya, McCann Rd at Wyangan and Gum Creek Road at Hanwood where they are in numbers. Black Honeyeaters were even at Campbell's Swamp. Associated with them is the beautiful little **Mistletoebird**.

Reports on Monday and Tuesday on eBird has also reported many sightings by a couple of Twitchathon teams.

Compiled by Max O'Sullivan

**** COMING EVENTS ****

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions please email or phone if you intend to come.

- 9 November Thursday** **Annual General Meeting and Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: Myall Park Botanic Gardens by Graham Russell
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 11 November Saturday** **Outing to Barren Box Swamp**
Meet: at the Aeroplane by the Griffith Tourist Information Centre at 3pm.
Bring: afternoon tea, plenty of water, sun screen and insect repellent
Leader: Max O'Sullivan
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 12 – 19 November** **Wild Pollinator Count**
A national citizen science project that encourages people to record local pollinators by watching a flower for 10 minutes during the count week and recording what insects land on the flower during that time.
<https://wildpollinatorcount.com/>
- 25 November Saturday** **Outing to the Murrumbidgee Valley is proposed .**
Details to be discussed at meeting.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 6 December Wednesday** **Copy for the December newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 14 December Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: not yet confirmed.
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 16 December Saturday** **Christmas / end of year break up**
Will be held at Graham & Dione Russell's place on the Collinroobie Road (opposite the walnut farm).
Meet: at 6pm for a leisurely walk around 6:45pm to try and find some Major Mitchell Cockatoos.
Bring: \$5 towards the cost of the meat for BBQ, your own drinks and a salad or desert to share.
Contact: Dione on 0428 536 290 or
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 25 – 28 January 2018** **Summer Camp**
Thursday to Sunday It is proposed to revisit the northern Kosciusko area
(Australia Day w/e) Graham & Dione are investigating suitable accommodation.
Expressions of interest to Dione on 0428 536 290 or email
murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.