

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



December 2017 - Issue #255

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 mass of Pelicans at Barren Box Swamp by Graham Russell

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CONTRIBUTIONS

**For the February issue by
Wednesday 7 February**

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

***Christmas Break up is on
Saturday 16 December at
the Russells
(details on last page)***

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| President: | Graham Russell | 0419 350 673 | Editor: | Rowena Whiting | 6953 2612 |
| Vice President: | Alan Whitehead | | Committee: | | |
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| Secretary: | Nella Smith | 6959 1210 | Website Co-ordinator: | Kathy Tenison | 6953 4869 |
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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.

Membership enquiries:

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

Bank details for direct deposit: 062 564 account no. 10039396, a/c name: Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Include your own name and description of payment in the reference box.

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

Welcome to December and the end of another year

(or the beginning of a new MFN year). At the AGM last month there were some changes to the executive with Nella Smith taking on the Secretary's role and Ellené Schnell becoming our new Treasurer. Phil Tenison agreed to the new position of Assistant Treasurer. Alan Whitehead agreed to fill Nella's role as Vice President (Narrandera). Our sincere thanks go to our retiring Secretary, Penny Williams and Treasurer Phil Tenison. At the moment the committee positions need to be verified; Graham proposed and a motion was passed that they be filled with the Vice Presidents; however the Constitution may not approve - this still has to be confirmed.

I would like to say a big thank you to all of you who have contributed to the newsletter throughout the year with your many and varied articles, sightings, observations, photos and more to make it what it is.

Happy reading and enjoy your summer break, Rowena.

From the inbox

The Murrumbidgee Field Nats newsletter is sent to me by a friend and I was interested in your piece about the Hemiptera. You may have seen the web keys I developed when I was with the NSW DPI Scientific Collections Unit in Orange. These are pictorial keys to help people identify the Auchenorrhyncha of Australia and neighbouring areas. I have continued to maintain them in retirement and I know a number of people, including collection managers, quarantine staff and members of the public who are interested in insects have used them.

The keys start at <http://www1.dpi.nsw.gov.au/keys/index.html> where links are provided to a key to the four superfamilies of Auchenorrhyncha as well as keys to the families within the planthopper, leafhopper and spittlebug superfamilies (I don't deal with cicadas). At each end point, checklists of species are provided and, in many cases, subservient keys to tribes or even genera have been provided.

With best wishes, Murray Fletcher.

[Murray is the editor of the Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society]

*Wishing you all a very happy and safe time
at Christmas and for the New Year*

Presidents Report 2017

As I sit down to write this report it is hard to believe that it is nearly a year since I took on the Position of President. A lot has changed for me in the past twelve months. It started with me being in a period of trial retirement that only lasted a couple of weeks before I started at Freedom and returned to Shift work for the first time in 25 years. Due to working shift work I was only able to attend 2 of the first six meetings and I very much appreciated the help from the Vice presidents that chaired these meetings that I was unable to attend. Thankfully the shift work is behind me for now.

The year for the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists has been a busy one starting with summer camp in January. This was as usual an enjoyable weekend with around 27 of us staying in the caravan park in Tumut and venturing out from there. My personal highlight for the weekend was the flock of yellow tailed Black Cockatoos that we saw on the way back down from Yarrangobilly on the Saturday night

The next overnight outing was to the Rankin Springs Glossy Black Cockatoo count. Not all of us that attended actually got to see a Glossy but as usual it was a great couple of days out talking to like minded people and spending some time out and about in the out doors observing nature.

In May we added in an extra camp and went to Whroo near Rushworth Victoria. We didn't see any of the bird species that we were hoping to see, though we did have a great weekend in a different type of bush to what we are used to seeing closer to home. After this weekend I think that it has been decided that we should make this camping weekend a regular event on our calendar.

Winter was drier this year than the one before so our spring camp to Yathong in September didn't yield as many flowering plants as we had hoped but again a great weekend was had by all with good company and good food. With water in the dams the birds were plentiful with the Red-winged Parrot sighted.



Major Mitchell
Cockatoo

Interspersed between our four overnight adventures there has been twice monthly outings to many of our more local spots. These day adventures are no less interesting or informative than the over-nighters and are much easier to fit into our busy schedules.

As a Club we have also participated in other activities during the year including a display in the Library for endangered species day, being involved with the tree planting at Fivebough Wetland, Ingalba Vegetation Survey, Annual Koala Count at the Narrandera, had teams participate in the Twitchathon and we had a stand at the Riverina Field Days in Griffith.

During the year we have gained a number of new members and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome them and encourage them to attend as many of the outings as possible be it weekends away or one of the many day trips throughout the year. It is when we attend these that we are able to gain the most and contribute the most.

I would like to express my thanks to the executive that as always have helped to keep the club going. I would also like to thank all of those that have contributed in any way to the workings of the Club.

Whether I am president again next year or not I look forward to enjoying time spent in the great Australian outdoors with great company and a readily shared wealth of knowledge. From this shared knowledge we all become better advocates for our natural environment that is under ever-increasing pressure.

Graham Russell

Show and Tell - What was in Andrew's bucket?

At the last meeting Andrew brought in a bucket containing two things for a 'Show and Tell'

Most interest was taken in the small frog – an Eastern Toadlet.

The big white 'blob' baffled most. It was soft with an almost silky touch and was more likely to be put down as a congealed sediment of some sort. However it was a living animal – a freshwater sponge.

Eric Whiting [see Eric's article about sponges on page 7]

Barren Box Outing

11 November 2017

Fourteen members met at Griffith Information Centre at 3pm to pool cars and drive out to Barren Box Swamp. Just before the main gate, there were a number of rice fields in which 5 Emus were seen by the lead vehicle but by none of the others following – strange they all missed such big birds in such an unusual situation walking through water. I bet the rice farmer wouldn't be happy.

At Willow Dam 3 **Night Herons** were spotted in trees beside the water and a colony of **Fairy Martins** had a battery of nests built under the eaves of the pumping shed. A stop at the start of the main embankment failed to locate any

White-winged Wrens but a pair of **Zebra Finch** were seen on top of a distant bush whilst a water rat was sighted in the main canal running along the edge of the water.

We slowly drove in convoy along the embankment stopping regularly to check out the birds. Two **White-bellied Sea-eagles** were seen perched in distant dead trees in the water along with an estimated 60+ **Pelican** roosting on exposed islands along with numbers of spoonbill.



View of Barren Box Swamp, in the foreground is a Blue-green Algae filter Rowena Whiting



White-winged Wren – Graham Russell

Because of last year's heavy rain, the branch embankment was closed so we continued to the area where an **Orange Chat** was seen by the Silly Galahs Twitchathon team a few weeks before. But no luck this time. However, we were all delighted to find a family of **White-winged Wrens** along the edge that gave some of us a good view, albeit brief, with regards to the beautiful male.

By this time, it was getting on for 6 o'clock and most were hanging out for a

cuppa break so we stopped at the northern gate and settled down for some light refreshments and a chat – well most did but others of us were

more intent on trying to get some closer photos of the wrens that were flying about in the bushes close by. Both White-winged and Variegated were seen along with some distant views of some **White-winged Chats**. A very vocal **Reed Warbler** serenaded us from a clump of cumbungi near us but didn't show itself and numbers of **Cockatiel** were flying over to get a late afternoon drink before settling for the night.

Time was getting on so we exited via that gate and headed back to Griffith for people to pick-up their cars. In all we saw 43 species – see list below.

Thanks to Kathy Semmler for the key and for allowing the club to go to the swamp for the outing.

Max O'Sullivan

Emu (outside the main gate)
Pied Cormorant
Pelican
White-faced Heron
Royal Spoonbill
Black Swan
Grey Teal
Whistling Kite
Silver Gull
Cockatiel
Rufous Songlark (H)
Australian Reed Warbler (H)
Yellow-throated Miner
House Sparrow
White-breasted Woodswallow

Little Pied Cormorant
Great Cormorant
Little Egret
White-necked Heron
Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Wood Duck
Swamp/Spotted Harrier*
Black-shouldered Kite
Whiskered Tern
Fairy Martin
Willie Wagtail
White-winged Wren
White-fronted Chat
Common Starling

Little Black Cormorant
Darter
Great Egret
Nankeen Night Heron
White Ibis
Black Duck
White-breasted Sea-Eagle
Kestrel
Caspian Tern
Welcome Swallow
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Variegated Wren
Zebra Finch
Pee-wee

* A harrier flew low past the vehicles and Graham got a few photos: Graham and Keith Hutton were sure it was a young **Spotted Harrier** and Allan Richards and I opted for an old male **Swamp Harrier!**

Insects at Barren Box

The first picture (left) is of a Jewel Beetle (Family: Buprestidae) on an Austral Hollyhock *Lavatera plebela* flower. But this group of beetle have large eyes, are usually colourful, sometimes metallic and most larvae of this family are wood borers.

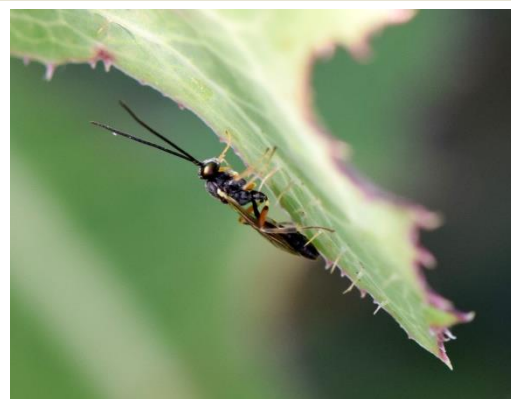
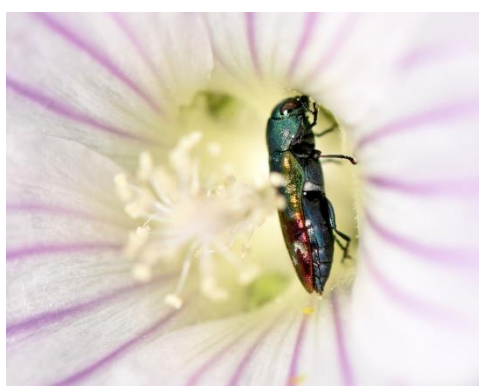
The next photo (centre) is of the Two spotted Lady bird, *Adalia bipunctata* (Family: Coccinellidae). This lady bird was introduced from Europe to control exotic aphids. The form can vary a bit. Some are primarily black with red spots, others mainly red with black spots like this one. The number of spots can also vary.



The last one (right) is a bit tricky. It's a type of wasp so Hymenoptera: Apocrita. Hard to tell the family, but I could guess as either Braconidae or Ichneumonidae. I can't narrow it down from the photo. But a major difference between those two families is wing venation. Ichneumonid wasps have an extra vein and Braconids don't. But there's always exceptions to the rule in nature! And both are major parasitoid families.

Nick May

Austral Hollyhock – Dione Russell
Insects from left: Jewel Beetle, two spotted lady bird and the wasp – Nick May



FROGS of South West NSW - a new digital resource

Available from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage website, this new resource is free to download and use. The guide gives background information about wetland types before detailing each of the thirty three frogs, their distribution within the region, their breeding season and call description. Eight of the frogs listed are endangered species and each is given additional information as to the current threats to their survival.

One of the special features of this guide is the recorded calls for each species. However, the calls are available on the website only and are not included in the download. If a hard copy was available for purchase, a CD of calls would be included but it, as with the majority of the resources on this website, is now only available as a digital resource. Anyone who is disappointed by this could try phoning 131555 or (02)99955000 to ask if any printed copies can still be mailed out.

Following the recent heavy rain is a good time to hear frogs that may not be heard at other times, so now is an excellent time to put this wonderful new resource to use in identifying local frogs.

Margaret Strong

Australia's first national frog count underway

Australian frogs face serious risk of becoming extinct – but a new app hopes to shed new light on how we can save them. The Australian Museum launched **FrogID**, (<https://www.frogid.net.au>) the nation's first attempt to count and identify frogs. It involves a free app that allows people to record frog sounds and calls, and [learn about frogs](#). The FrogID app identifies frog species by the special sounds they make — from croaks and chirps, to whistles, ribbits, peeps, barks and grunts. The app has been designed for Australians to record frog calls in their backyard and at nearby parks, creeks, dams, streams and wetlands. Recording and uploading these unique calls via the app will help identify different frog species across the country, and map where they are most at risk from habitat loss, disease, climate change and urbanisation.

Bioblitz weekend at Wombeyan Caves

Nella and myself attended a Bioblitz weekend at Wombeyan Caves on the 4th and 5th November. The event was organised by the National Parks Association and Upper Lachlan Landcare. It was a Citizen Science / Bio-diversity Community Engagement day which had a good turnout of young and older people from the region as well as Canberra, Sydney and The Blue Mountains.

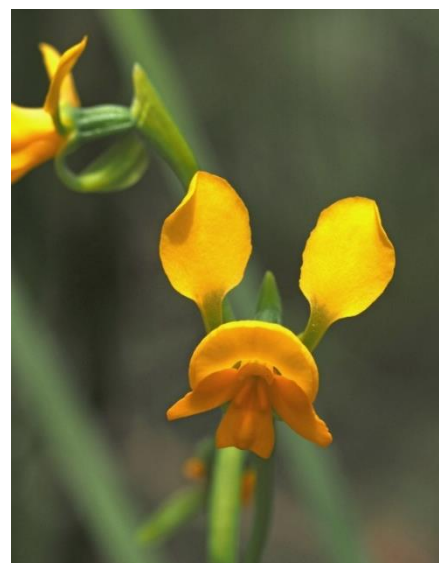


This is a rear facing nest box. The entrance is on the tree side protecting the occupant from goannas. Photo Glenn Currie

Participants had the opportunity to go along with ecologists and assist in mammal, reptile, bird, frog, insect and vegetation surveys. A local school had previously helped install various designs of nesting boxes and I joined a team using a specialized camera on a pole that let us look into the boxes to check for any signs of activity. We found one nesting box with a Greater Glider in it which apparently is highly unusual.

One of the "engaging community" activities was to search for the threatened *Diuris aequalis*. Nella and her group spread across the

track and walked a transect through the bush. *Diuris sulphurea*, *Caladenia fuscata* and another species of finger orchid



Diuris aequalis Photo Nella Smith

were found as well as a few of the endangered *Diuris aequalis*. These species are much later flowering than ours. Nella also learnt how to catch, mount and identify insects. While she found that very interesting she said that she wouldn't be in a rush to do more of it.

We both enjoyed the spotlighting surveys where Brush Tail Possums, Greater Gliders, Sugar Gliders and Tawny Frog Mouths were seen. The area has an abundance of night wildlife worth seeking out.

When not out doing surveys there was an area with displays and bio-educational activities run by organizations like Taronga Zoo, The Australian Museum, National Parks Association of NSW and Gundungurra Nation. Camera trap images could be viewed and skull, scats and signs learnt about.

We both had an enjoyable and informative weekend and found the community interest in this type of event very encouraging. Some feedback I received after returning home was an email saying that on some of the 22000 camera images they had recorded a Spotted-tailed Quoll.

Glenn Currie

Pacific Golden Plover

Last month I reported in the Sightings Report of a **Pacific Golden Plover** at Fivebough Wetlands. The photo shows the bird with a couple of **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers**. I can't recall having seen this bird since I moved here over 11 years ago so I asked Keith Hutton about any sightings of this bird in the past. He said that it is quite a rare visitor and has been seen about 6 of the 36 years of his records. He said the last time was at the northern side (Gibbs Road) of the wetlands. That was 3 or 4 years ago.

So it is a regular but infrequent visitor and usually only a single bird is seen whereas in Cairns there has been a recent report of over 50 birds being recorded from the boardwalk at the Cairns Airport.

The photo was taken by Geoff Ball a visiting bird watcher from Sydney on 10 October 2017.

Max O'Sullivan



Sponges – Animal, Vegetable or Mineral

The answer was not known until the advent of the compound microscope revealed their true nature. However sponges are unique in the animal world. All others are either single-celled or the cells are organised into defined tissues. Sponges consist of a few types of cells loosely associated with each other. Moreover the form of each cell depends on where it is in the complex. In other multi-cellular animals each cell's function is largely determined at the embryo stage and never changes that function (except for stem cells).

In its simplest form a sponge is a hollow vase-shaped structure. The outside surface consists of simple plate-like cells in one layer but with each cell capable of changing its shape, or even migrating elsewhere. The inside of the vase is coated with pear-shaped cells each with a single whip-like flagellum surrounded by a clear collar (choanocytes). These cells are separated by smaller cells. In between these two layers is a jelly in which free moving amoeboid cells and special spicule-secreting cells occur. At intervals tubular cells connect the outside with the inside of the vase.

The beating of the flagellae of the choanocytes create a current of water drawn in through the tubular cells and out of the larger top

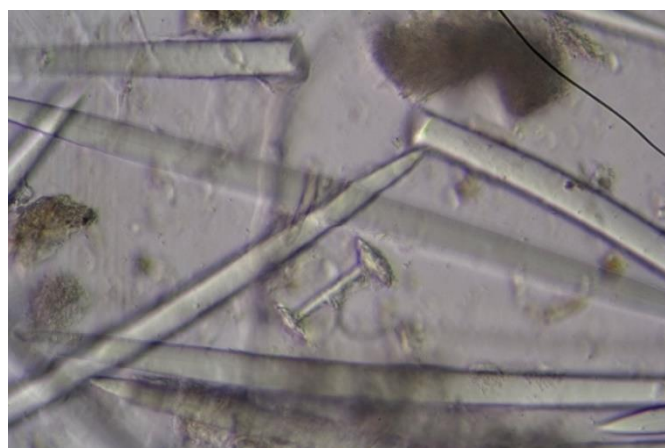
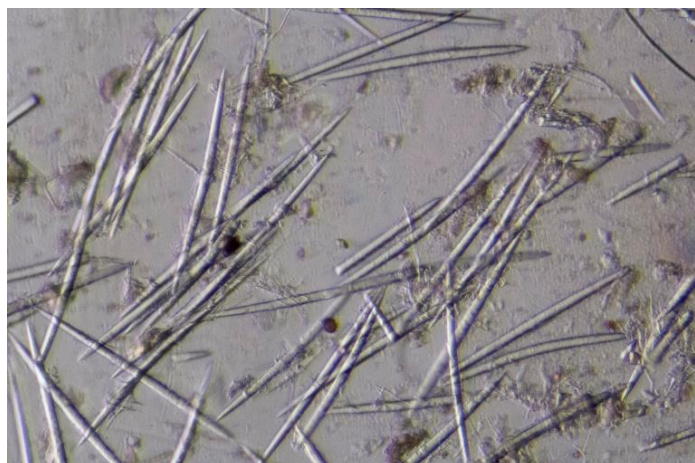
opening. They also separate out food particles to somehow be ingested outside the collar. Interestingly the flagellae beat independently, not in unison yet still manage a uniform flow. The choanocytes are the only feeding cells; nutrients are passed on to the amoeboid cells and then to the external layer cells.

This simple form only exists as a fleeting stage in some sponges. Convolutions of the wall of the primary chamber form into secondary chambers and so on to form the complex mass of chambers and canals of the modern sponge.

In most sponges the spicule generating cells secrete silicon but in some the spicules are calcareous or of an elastic keratin substance. The purpose of the spicules is to give a bit of rigidity to the sponge to stop the canals from collapsing.



Freshwater sponge on pipe at Andrew's dam



Silicon spicules –(left) simple needle (<1mm long)
- (right) Dumb-bell spicule

The silicon spicules can be simple needles, or with three, four or six axes. Freshwater sponges (by far the minority of species) only have the simple needle-like spicules. Freshwater sponges also have dumb-bell shaped spicules. These are only formed at the onset of adverse conditions when groups of cells gather together into balls and secrete a resistant chitinous coat. The dumb-bell spicules strengthens this outer coat. These balls of cells – gemmules – can survive the adverse conditions (winter in the northern hemisphere, summer drying in Australia) to 'germinate' by bursting out to form new sponges in better times.

Once thought of as a stepping stone in evolution between single-celled and the more complex multi-cellular animals, it is now believed sponges are a completely separate branch. Their origin is still a mystery. There is a group of the single-celled protozoa that have a single flagellum surrounded by a collar like the choanocytes

that could indicate the origin, but there are doubts.

Regardless of origin, sponges have a long history. The earliest known fossils have been dated at around 600 million years ago. At that time the planet was recovering from the era known as Snowball Earth when glaciation occurred from poles to equator. Other multicellular animals also evolved at about this time. Also all life was marine – the land was still too hostile.

The first fossils of freshwater sponges date from the Jurassic period about 160 million years ago, long after terrestrial habitats became inhabited. But such is the nature of fossilisation, sponges could have lived in freshwater much earlier.

So little is known about this unique group of animals.



Surface of the Sponge

Eric Whiting

WHITE-BROWED WOODSWALLOW *Artamus superciliosus*

Gosh! What an amazing Latin name! I was hoping Cayley mentioned this bird in his book as he gives the meaning, however, I was very disappointed that he didn't even give this bird a mention. I am glad Graham has taken this photo as it is interesting to read that these flock birds fly very often with Masked Wood swallows and may share communal nesting on rare occasions. There has been evidence of interbreeding, but it is rare. Even so, although the two species don't look alike, their offspring are extremely similar speckled until moulting.

The birds are nomadic and follow favourable conditions mainly staying in the more arid parts of Australia and can follow a swarm of locusts for many kilometres. During drought they have been seen in coastal areas as they are extremely opportunistic which is proven with their nesting habits. They can build their nest in a couple of days and abandon them as soon as conditions change. Their nest is made of twigs, grass and rootlets and is built fairly close to the ground in a shrub, tree stump or fence post. Their two or three, eggs are white with purple-brown and grey blotches.

Usually you hear them before they are spied as their contact calls during flight are very loud despite the height they may fly.

Other names: Blue martin, skimmer, summer-bird and white-eyebrowed woodswallow.

Male: 190mm Head and neck black with broad white eyebrows, back and wings dark grey, tail has white tip, chest and belly rich chestnut.

Female: head and upper parts grey, less defined eyebrow and paler chest and belly.

Sue Chittick-Dalton



White-browed Woodswallow
Female above by Graham Russell
Male below by Phillip Williams



The Field Guide **Wildflowers of the Narrandera and Cocoparra Ranges** would make an ideal Christmas gift. Written by Eric Whiting and produced by MFN it covers most of the native wildflowers commonly seen in these Ranges, and which also occur in the other ranges and hills from Narrandera to the Lachlan River.

225 species are described with 136 colour photographs, a simplified key aids the identification of the plants,

Price is \$25 (inc. GST) or \$20 to MFN members, copies are available at club meetings or Eric Whiting phone (02) 6953 2612 or Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

Narrandera and Leeton Tourist Information Centres also have copies.

Broken Hill/Mildura Round Trip November 2017

A great friend of mine, Jan Marie, turned 70 in September and to mark the occasion she and friends celebrated it in Venice – Italy, that is! Not to be outdone, another friend, Tony, organised for a good old Ozzie turn by inviting us to Broken Hill and Mildura in order to enjoy the occasion. The purpose of the trip was to show JM the real outback as she had never been past Dubbo before and to have the festive dinner at Stefano's Restaurant in Mildura on Thursday evening.

So I drove from home and the others caught the train from Sydney to Broken Hill as I was to meet them and drive them to our accommodation for a 3 night stay in The Silver City. Because of some rain in western NSW the few days before, I decided to leave Leeton on Sunday and go as far as Cobar that day and try to go all the way on sealed roads. I'm glad I did as a slight deviation through Round Hill to Mount Hope proved a very slippery drive on that stretch of dirt.

Out of Rankins Springs, about 10kms north, there is a paddock where you always see **emus** and I was quite amazed to count well over 30 together in one large flock right beside the road.

Now Cobar must be **the feral goat capital of the world** – they are everywhere and the roadside is full of them feeding happily in the table drains beside the road. Only scary part was if you came across a nanny on one side of the highway and her kids on the other. That resulted in a few heavy braking experiences – thank goodness for seat belts! And no passengers!!

In Cobar, I booked into a cabin in the caravan park and did some birding in the late afternoon. Not much different from home except for numbers of **Red-winged Parrots** flying in for the night to roost in the trees in the park.

Next morning, I headed west to Wilcannia again avoiding the goats along the highway. They obviously don't feed during the night as there were only dead roos and the odd wild pig but no goat carcasses on the road – smart move to not feed at night, hence the explosion of their population.

Wilcannia is such a depressing place – the Darling was hardly flowing - too much water being stolen further north perhaps! - and the beautiful sandstone buildings serve as a reminder of times long since past.

My main hope for a bird in Broken Hill was for the **Redthroat**, a small brown bird with a red bib on the male – very ordinary. I drove into Stephen's Creek Reservoir 20kms to the east of the city, heard the birds calling in the low saltbush but couldn't get onto one which was very frustrating! At the reservoir, the water level was very low but there were a number of water birds to be seen – **Blue-billed** and **Musk Duck**, **Australian Shelduck** and **Great Crested Grebe**.

In Broken Hill itself, I located the railway station where I had to meet the Sydney mob and the house that had been booked for our 3 day stay there. Once the train arrived, on time, we started on the full tourist trip having a quick overview of the highlights of the place before going to our accommodation

Miner's Memorial - Kerry Thomas



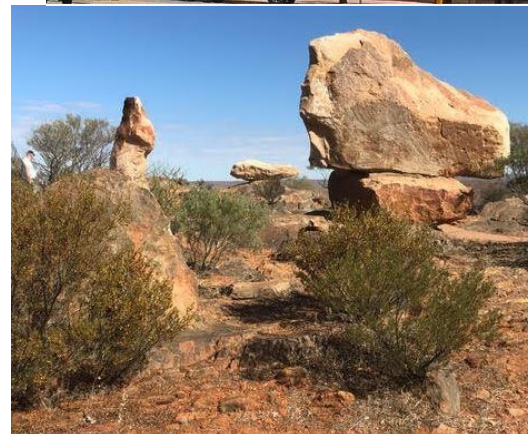
Next days, Tuesday and Wednesday, it was a full-on tour of the outback – visiting galleries (Pro Hart – that's the third time I'd been there and I don't want to see another one of his paintings again!!). Trouble is, the local present-day struggling artists see how Pro Hart cashed in on his style of depicting the outback so just copy the same style – many galleries having work that, to me, is just a variation on the same tired old theme – lots of orange sand dunes and sunsets! But tourists must buy it otherwise there wouldn't be so much of it about.

On Tuesday, we visited the Miners' Memorial on top of the gigantic mullock heap that dominates the whole place – it was a shock to see so many young men had

died from lead poisoning and mine accidents – some as young as 10! Mining has had a resurgence recently

and there are many new mines operating in the area which has been a great economic boost to the place after years of inactivity. When I went there in the early 2000s, houses were available for less than the first home buyers loan of \$20,000. Things have changed since then as real estate is on par with Leeton where, in both places you can still pick-up a place for around the \$100,000 mark! So Broken Hill has gone ahead whereas Leeton has stagnated! New houses, of course, are still high like here but if you want a cheap place – a renovator's delight – they are still available, here and there!

The highlight of Wednesday's touring was to visit the Sculptures in the Desert just out of town. They are all standing on top of a rocky hill overlooking the countryside and the city. On the way up the hill, I ordered a stop for a flock of babblers beside the road which turned out to be **Chestnut-crowned Babblers** -nice! The walk down the hill to a nature reserve was good with more goats and many kangaroos – Western Greys I presumed. Whilst there, 2 **White-backed Swallows** flew over us but that was all the birds I was able to get excited about.



Photos by Kerry Thomas – from top: Civic Buildings, Broken Hill; 'Sculptures in the Desert', Silverton.



Next we headed for Silverton – a must on any trip to Broken Hill. It is the place where Mad Max was filmed – the end of the earth! And boy did it look that way – hot, dry and very dusty.

We didn't stay long there as some of the galleries were closed and would remain so until well into next year – too hot for tourists it seems with temperatures in the high 50s

for most of January and February.

After lunch we visited the old Jewish Synagogue that is now a museum – an interesting connection in the hey day of the town with most of the Jewish community running the commerce there.

The city art gallery was mounting an exhibition of works celebrating the recent return of Mungo Man to Lake Mungo and we were invited to go the next morning before our departure to Mildura to view the works.

The trip to Mildura was interesting to note the dramatic change in the countryside as you approached Wentworth and came into the lush irrigation area of the lower Murray-Darling Basin.

Celebrations over with Stefano coming to talk to the Birthday Girl at the dinner, we - as in them and I made our farewells at breakfast the next morning and headed off – they to Adelaide and me back home.

Needless to say, I had a few deviations on the way to check out some good birding spots in Western Victoria – Hattah area for **Regent Parrots**, I only saw a pair fly over the car, Goshen Reserve near Lake Boga for reported **budgies** but none appeared – lots of **White-browed** and **Masked Woodswallows** and a couple of **Hooded Robins** were the highlight, Kerang area to Lake Tuchewop hoping to see **Banded Stilts** but dipped there and had to settle for 20+ **Orange Chats** instead – I was happy!, finally, 5 **Ostriches** on the road between Moulamein and Deniliquin completed the must-see sites so I headed for home. My car did well and has now passed the 380,000km mark!

Max O'Sullivan

For those gourmands reading this, Stefano's Restaurant in the Grand Hotel in Mildura is well worth a visit – there is also a Bistro in the hotel that serves great food cooked by Stefano so you don't have to go overboard with the more up-market restaurant. The hotel is good to stay at and a double room cost \$145 B&B. Not bad when I paid \$110 for a basic cabin in the Cobar Caravan Park and would you believe they didn't have ABC or SBS TV available!! Talk about a rip-off! M

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

| | | | |
|--|--|------------|-----------------------|
| Eastern Koel [H] | Narrandera | Late Oct. | Nella Smith |
| Red-kneed Dotterel [63] | Fivebough Wetlands | 02/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Brown Goshawk | Fivebough Wetlands | 02/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Spotted Harrier | 'Mountain Dam' via Leeton | Early Nov. | Graham Russell |
| Barbary Dove [escapee] | Petersham Rd, Leeton | 07/11/17 | Penny Williams |
| Eastern Koel | Griffith | 08/11/17 | David Parker |
| Musk Duck [fem] | Fivebough Wetlands | 11/11/17 | Max O'Sullivan |
| Glossy Ibis [1000+] | Fivebough Wetlands – evening roost | 11/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Little Friarbird | Petersham Rd, Leeton | Regular | Penny & Phil Williams |
| Noisy Friarbird | Petersham Rd, Leeton | Regular | Penny & Phil Williams |
| White-winged Wren | Barren Box | 12/11/17 | MFN outing |
| Red-necked Avocet [630] | Fivebough Wetlands | 12/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Black-winged Stilt [2000+] | Fivebough Wetlands | 12/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Marsh Sandpiper [6] | Fivebough Wetlands | 13/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Glossy Black Cockatoo [15] | 'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton | mid-Nov | Andrew Thompson |
| Yellow Thornbill [group] | Cutler Ave, Griffith | 17/11/17 | Virginia Tarr |
| Weebill [1] | Cutler Ave, Griffith | 17/11/17 | Virginia Tarr |
| Mallee Ringneck [4] | Campbell St Griffith | 17/11/17 | Virginia Tarr |
| Whiskered Tern [412] | Fivebough Wetlands – evening roost | 17/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Glossy Ibis [2150] | Fivebough Wetlands – evening roost | 17/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Emu [40+ together] | North of Rankins Springs | 19/11/17 | Max O'Sullivan |
| Variegated Wren [3] | Palla St, Griffith | 26/11/17 | Virginia Tarr |
| Grey Shrike-thrush [with mouse] | Palla St Griffith | 26/11/17 | Virginia Tarr |
| Glossy Ibis [2000+] | Fivebough Wetlands – evening roost | 27/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Whiskered Tern [1500+] | Fivebough Wetlands – evening roost | 27/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Marsh Sandpiper [20+] | Fivebough Wetlands | 28/11/17 | Max O'Sullivan |
| Superb Parrot [pr] | Fivebough flyover | 28/11/17 | Max O'Sullivan |
| Australasian Bittern [5] | Campbell's Swamp | 29/11/17 | Max + Danish Birder |
| Blue-billed Duck [10] | Campbell's Swamp | 29/11/17 | Max + Danish Birder |
| Freckled Duck [4] | Campbell's Swamp | 29/11/17 | Max + Danish Birder |
| Painted Honeyeater [6] | McCann Rd Lake Wyangan | 29/11/17 | Max + Danish Birder |
| Little Bittern [H] | Campbell's Swamp | 29/11/17 | Keith Hutton |
| Eastern Koel {H} | Cypress St, Leeton | 30/11/17 | Eric Whiting |
| Painted Honeyeater [calling] | Beelbangera Store | 02/12/17 | Neil Palframan |
| Little Friarbird | Bella Vista Ave, Leeton | 03/12/17 | Phil Tenison |
| Black Honeyeater [fem] | Campbell's Swamp feeding young | 05/12/17 | Neil Palframan |
| Swamp Harrier [4] | Campbell's Swamp – 2 adults and 2 juv. | 05/12/17 | Neil Palframan |
| Australian Spotted Crake | Campbell's Swamp | 05/12/17 | Neil Palframan |
| Banded Lapwing [5] | Millis Rd, via Hanwood | 06/12/17 | Max O'Sullivan |

Birds seem to have disappeared from Fivebough since the rain.

Sue Chittick-Dalton's sightings at her place at McNabb Cres in Griffith:

| | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Grey-crowned Babbler | Sacred Kingfisher | Blue-faced Honeyeater | Striped Honeyeater |
| Rainbow Lorikeet | Hobby | Little Friarbird | Variegated Wren |
| Yellow Thornbill | Mallee Ringneck | Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike | '28' Parrot |

Sue's '28' Parrots appear to be an aviary escaped population that have been in the Scenic Hill area for a number of years. They are endemic to the far south-west corner of Western Australia and are part of the Australian Ringneck family of parrots – the Cloncurry, Mallee, Port Lincoln and Twenty Eight Parrots.

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.

14 December Thursday **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.

Topic: Victorian Travels with The Whitings

Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210.

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). Third drive way on the left after the Gliding Club Gate, 4.66km from Cnr Brobenah and Colinroobie Rd, If you reach Milbrae gate turn around! Graham will send a map by email

Meet: at 6pm for a leisurely walk around 6:45pm to 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.

Dione would appreciate knowing what you intend to bring.

Contact: Dione on 0428 536 290 or

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.

2018

25 – 28 January 2018
Thursday to Sunday
(Australia Day w/e)

Summer camp – staying at the Caravan Park in Talbingo

With day trips to the northern area of the Kosciusko National Park, Blowering Reservoir

Graham & Dione are organising and the accommodation booked is full. Camping sites may be available.

Contact Dione on 0428 536 290 or email

murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.

31 January Wednesday

Copy for the February newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.

2 February Friday

World Wetlands Day

**This year's theme - Wetlands for a sustainable urban future
– Urban wetlands making cities liveable**

8 February Thursday

Monthly Meeting in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.

Topic: Member's Show & Tell - images of the year – Eric Whiting will co-ordinate.

Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210.

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.

10 February Saturday

Rocky Waterholes, Narrandera

A twilight meeting for a walk along the channel bank followed by nibbles at the area by the bridge.

Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com