

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



May 2020 - Issue #281

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

PO Box 541, LEETON 2705 ISSN-1327-1172

Website: www.mfn.org.au

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

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



IN THIS ISSUE

Office Bearers and Subscriptions.....	2
Welcome to May.....	2
Every Town should have a Wetland.....	3
Glossy Black Cockatoos visit 'Willow Park'	5
To Twine to the Left or to Twine to the Right	6
A BlazeAid Experience at Tumbarumba.....	7
Why do birds stand on one leg?	8
Frog Surveys along Yanco Creek	9
Collared Sparrowhawk vs Brown Goshawk	10
Mouse Spider	10
Plan B – Taiwan, a non-birding trip, Part 2	11
Members' Sightings	13
Eastern Blue Tongue Lizard / Autumn Greenhoods .	14

**Glossy Black Cockatoos
in a Eucalyptus tree where they
have been seen preening
(see story on Page 5)**

Photo: Phillip Williams

CONTRIBUTIONS

**For the June 2020 issue by
Wednesday 3 June
To Rowena Whiting
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.
Phone: 6953 2612**

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

President:	Alan Whitehead 6959 3779	Editor:	Rowena Whiting 6953 2612
Vice President:	Warrick Bradney	Committee:	Phil Tenison 6953 4869
Vice President:	Max O'Sullivan 0434 923 766		Glenn Currie 0488 563 321
Vice President:	Virginia Tarr 6962 5614		
Secretary:	Graham and Dione Russell 0419 350 673 (Graham) 0428 536290 (Dione)		
Treasurer:	Ellené Schnell 0488 080 866	Website Co-ordinator:	Kathy Tenison 6953 4869

MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND THURSDAY EACH MONTH, EXCEPT JANUARY, AT THE Yellow Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street at 7 PM

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

Membership enquiries:

Leeton	Eric Whiting 6953 2612	Griffith	Virginia Tarr 6962 5614
Narrandera	Nella Smith 6959 1210	Coleambally	John Wilkinson 6954 4129
Wagga Wagga	Melanie Baulch melaniebaulch@bigpond.com		

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 a belated May

A little late but members have been in touch via the show and tell episodes. We have certainly been making the most of these restricted times by exploring our immediate areas.

First some feedback from Sue Chittick-Dalton on the report of our Cocoparra outing:

Loved to read about Lady Smith Glenn. great article... Enid took me there around 25 years ago and showed me the Perigrines. They were young and the excreta was age old. She also told me that the black tarry substance was also excreta from animals ages past, which was explained to her by some person of knowledge. All wonderful. Sue.

[NB. The first section of Jacks Creek is actually named Lady Smith Glen. Ed]

Another full issue this month, a couple of items have been held over and items for the next show and tell are filling the inbox.

Rowena.

Identification Cooperation

We have an ID for this moth, seen on the Woolshed Falls walk. It is a *Grammodes ocellata*. We made a point of trying to identify it after a general email from the Mid-Murray Field Naturalists asking for an identification, they hadn't seen it



before. Thanks to Glenn Currie and his use of iNaturalist he was able to determine its name. We also heard from a Canberra group who found it in Moths of Australia. So it is worth putting it out there.

The other picture is of a specimen courtesy of the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney)

If you're really interested here's a link to the Australian Living Atlas's page on it

<https://bie.ala.org.au/species/urn:lsid:biodiversity.org.au:afd.taxon:d0074155-f3db-412f-aa25-e7711a92483d>. It has occurrence records, maps and photos.

EVERY TOWN SHOULD HAVE A WETLAND

The chocolate-brown Swamp Wallaby regarded me cautiously for a few moments before, in his (her?) characteristic staccato leap pattern, he hopped away ... pad-pad-pad-pad-clank-clank-clank-clank-pad-pad-pad ...

The clanking sound was made when he hopped across the steel army bridge which crossed the inlet canal to the Narrandera Wetlands.

This had been erected a decade or so earlier as part of the creation of this wonderful nature reserve, one of Narrandera's most precious natural assets; especially so as it is right on the edge of town.

Organised by Narrandera Landcare most of the labour for both the Wetlands and the bridge was provided by volunteers, including a few members of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists. This is a ringing testament to the treasure which volunteers of all stripes continue to bequeath to Australian society.

I strolled on to my meeting with Glenn Currie; here we were to appraise the success or otherwise of a National Tree Day planting (again by volunteers) in July, 2019; which he in large part organised. A busy group of women, children and men committed to the good earth over 1400 tree, shrub, grass and wildflower seedlings.

And we were not disappointed. For example; a dozen or so of the six-inch tube-lings of a future shady grove of Black Box planted – and watered – by high school students, were now up to a meter high! As well, the many Black Bluebush plantings were almost rivaling the Black Box in their conical ascent. These were complemented by the phenomenally vibrant Deane's Wattles – again pushing to over the magic meter mark.



Deane's Wattle (above),
Black Box (left)
Photos by Glenn Currie

The botanical name of Black Box is *Eucalyptus largiflorens* which the astute reader will translate as "large flowers". This feature is not uncommon

with gum trees with broad, dark-green waxy leaves, like many of the red-flowering eucalypts, and bloodwoods. So what a bounty this will be in years to come with the copious nectar and/or pollen sustaining massive insect and bird life, which will also ultimately sustain their grateful predators.

As we walked we observed the contrast of the water quality of the surrounding ephemeral lagoons and the near-permanent lake itself. Even though tannin-stained, the shallow billabongs enjoyed clear, clean water, with lush, fringing water weeds.

The lake, however, was permanently turgid, no matter how much recent rain refreshment there had been. This of course was due to the presence of the odious Carp. These may provide a generous food source for the legion waterbirds that visit the Wetlands, but in so many other ways they are an environmental disaster.

Further along, to our delight, we saw that hundreds more of the seedlings were flourishing; especially the Ruby Saltbush with its small, lolly-pink and tasty (not salty at all) fruits. Well, not all lolly-pink; there was also a golden variety, which, to maintain the precious-gem nomenclature, should be called the Topaz Saltbush.

And while on Saltbush, lots of Creeping Saltbush plants were away and running - literally. These lusty groundcovers are happily invested with serious weed-suppression powers.

We also noted in our walk around the lake how many hollow-and-habitat-rich large, dead River Red Gums were sensibly left standing over the years. As well as being life-affirming in death, they are also magisterially sculptural. Along with their giant still-living compatriots, they add even more character to this iconic Australian landscape.

We approved the wisdom of the lake's creators for including a low rock wall across the water. Even as we watched, three species of duck were enjoying its safety and comfort in the warm Autumn morning sun.

So, success in the Tree Day planting was all around us, with even Wallaby Grass, Golden Everlasting Daisies and Purple Burr Daisies thriving.

But how to measure success? Well, heretical as it may sound, I maintain that if only a single tree, say a Black Box, grew to maturity and lived two or three hundred years, providing food, habitat, nesting and shelter to dozens of generations of plants and animals (and humans, for that matter), then the effort and time of sowing the less successful 1399 would still have been worth it. ... let me see, one out of 1400 – 0.01%!? ... Whatever! Naturally the success rate at the Wetlands is far higher than that; overall 30 – maybe 50%

All these extra species add to the already rich biodiversity of this urban sanctuary; symbolized, perhaps, by a Koala nodding a polite good morning as we passed. Further evidence was provided (if any were needed) when our attention was elevated from the ground-dwelling flora to the higher life zones. Here a mixed community of small bush birds fossicked around in foliage, seed-heads and bark. How lovely to see Red-browed Finches, Superb Fairy Wrens, and even a Grey Fantail or two getting on so well.

Actually, this avian gathering is not so much social as survival; the togetherness of several non-threatening species adds many alert eyes and ears to their toilings.

A Silvereye, for example, would be much more vulnerable to attack if it were alone, than amongst this busy throng. Yet one more all-wise evolutionary survival strategy at work!

It was heartening to see on every hand, not only the success of our Tree Day planting, but to stand in the arbored shade of Casuarinas and Wattles planted ten or twenty years ago on similar occasions. Even back then companies of nature lovers sallied forth to spread their seed – as it were.

Finally we watched a Purple Swamp Hen (these breed in the rushes around the lake) and a Dusky Moorhen idly swimming together, white tails a-bobbing. This was near where, only a couple of days before, I saw a large Australian Water Rat spooning along the surface like a mini Loch Ness Monster.

What vision – what altruism – the initiators of the Narrandera Wetlands had all those years ago in creating what today is such a life-rich hotspot.

Every town should have a wetland.

Alan Whitehead



**Creeping Saltbush (top),
Sticky Everlasting (above)
Photos by Glenn Currie**

Glossy Black Cockatoos visit 'Willow Park'

Penny and Phillip Williams

We have been going for morning and /or evening walks to a native vegetation planting (planted in 1996) on 'Willow Park', Erin and Peter Draper's Rice Farm at Koonadan. This is an area with some Casuarina (Belah) trees, wattles, saltbush and other native species. We first saw a pair of Glossy Black-Cockatoos on the 16 April when Peter Draper told us of a pair (male and female) feeding on the Casuarinas in this area. They subsequently visited on several occasions and stayed a while feeding not worrying about us taking photos. After a few days 3 pairs were seen feeding on these trees. Since then they have been around Erin and Peter's garden and on the night of the 28 April stayed overnight. It seems that the birds have spent several days feeding on the casuarinas in the native vegetation planting and then moved to feed on the casuarinas at their house and to stay overnight. They have been seen drinking from the dam next to the house.



On the 5 May, 6 Glossys were seen at the old house on Willow Park in the morning at about 8.30am. They were in the top of the Eucalypts. It appeared that the group were exploring the area as a possible food source. There are a couple of Casuarinas growing around the house with nuts on them. After an hour or so they flew off and were later seen in Casuarinas in the vegetation planting. They spent the night back at the new house and didn't revisit the old house next morning.

Apart from giving Phil excellent opportunities to take photographs, we've also been pondering about why they have come here and the behaviour we are observing.

The trees which the Glossy Blacks are feeding on are Casuarina (Belah) trees which are native to the area and reproduce by suckering from their root system. They are a different Casuarina species from the She-oak that grow in the nearby hills. The trees are either male or female. The males produce the pollen on long tassles. The females producing the nuts or cones (fruit) that the Glossy Blacks feed on. The birds hold the nut in one foot and break it open with their strong beaks to eat the seeds inside. They then drop the broken nut to the ground below the tree. While they are feeding on the nuts there is a distinctive crackling sound made as they break open the nuts.



Glossy Black-Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) are described as being the smallest member of Black-Cockatoos and to have a powerful bill and highly specialised habitat and diet. There are 3 subspecies, the one around Leeton and Narrandera being known as the *Calyptorhynchus lathami lathami*. They are known to live in the hilly country in this area rather than on the flatter cleared areas. Why had this group of Glossy Blacks come to the farm and stayed for a while? Has the drought affected Casuarina trees in the hills where they would normally feed. It appears that Glossys are fussy about the nuts they like to feed on. Have the Casuarinas in the native vegetation plantation and around the house have the nuts they prefer to eat? The dam next to the house would give them access to water which they would need twice a day. Their trip to the Casuarinas at the old house may have been a scout to see if the trees there were suitable as a food source but seems not what they prefer.

Glossys breed between March and August and use suitable hollows in old Eucalypts to breed in. The female would spend time in the nest rather than be out feeding with her partner during the day. It seems that these 3 pairs are not breeding this year as they have been seen feeding as pairs during the day.

The Glossys have been the subject of conversations and emails and has given us the opportunity observe and photograph them.

Reference: Mooney, P.A. and Pedler, L.P. (2005): Recovery Plan for the South Australian subspecies of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami halmaturinus*): 2005-2010. Unpublished report to South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage. Adelaide.

NSW Parks and Wildlife Service (1999) VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION ON PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LAND Note 2 — 1999 Glossy Black Cockatoo Helping them in the Wild

Acknowledgements: Peter Draper, Max O'Sullivan and Eric Whiting

To Twine to the Left or to Twine to the Right

In his report on our last trip to Jacks Creek, Alan Whitehead wrote ‘... some of us gathered to contemplate why Wonga Vine always spiralled to the right as they climbed their supporting trees’. When Charles Darwin received a paper by Asa Gray in 1858 on the coiling of tendrils he didn’t contemplate why the tendrils behaved that way but asked himself the question how. He immediately set about studying them, growing seeds of one of the marrow family that Gray had sent him.

It was already known that growing tips of plants not only bent towards light but also steadily revolved its bending in a daily cycle. Botanists of the day put it down to the tips just following the sun and never asked how. That was not good enough for Darwin. He devised a simple experiment, either cutting off the growing tip or otherwise covering them, then illuminating them from only one side. They all grew straight up whereas control plants duly bent towards the light. In this way he proved that the bending action was controlled by the growing tips. It was much later and with much better means of chemical analysis that the controlling agents were found to be auxins (plants equivalents of hormones) formed only by the growing tip, and only recently that these auxins actively migrated to one side of the tip to promote the extra growth there.

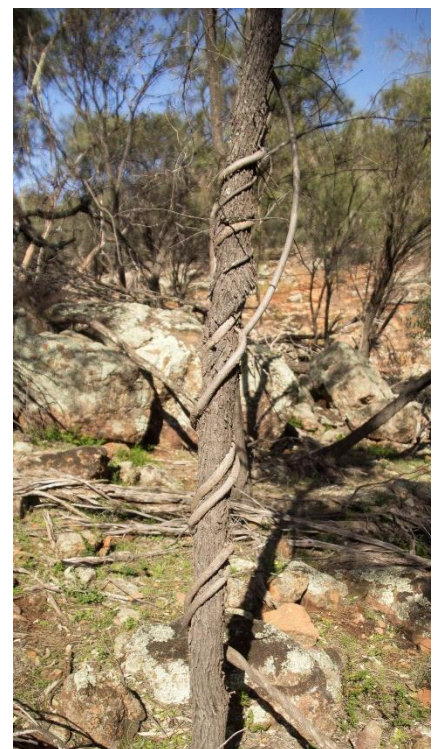
As was common with many of the landed gentry of the day, Darwin collected plants from around the world for his garden. As he was often ill, probably an infection picked up during his voyage around the world, his collection was usually from donations from professional botanists as he seldom left his home at Downs House in Surrey. In his quest to determine how and why twiners formed their coils he turned to his collection of climbers. Carefully observing a Wisteria he noted that stems would only coil around a support if the support was less than a critical diameter. He thereby debunked the current idea that coiling was a response to touch. Turning to his work on the origin of the species and in particular his views on the steady evolution of features from existing features, he concluded that the gyrations of the growing tip is extenuated in twiners resulting in wrapping the stem around the support. He likened it to whirling a rope around your head and then letting the free end hit a post. The end immediately coils around the post.

But what of the way the coils go? Darwin looked at his 40 climbers and found 27 were right-handed (growing from bottom left to upper right) and the other 13 left-handed. That was a clear statistical difference. In 2007 a New Zealand ecologist showed that 92% of the world’s twining plants twine to the right – regardless of which hemisphere they grow.

The question for us is – which of our native climbers are right-handed and which are left-handed? Wonga Vine and Twining Fringe-lily are right-handed, the rest are - - - !

Eric Whiting

**Twining Fringe Lily coiling around a Greenhood stem,
a taller, thicker stem and
Wonga Vine coiling around a White Cypress Pine**



Our experience at BlazeAid Tumbarumba

We had 2 trips to Tumbarumba to be part of BlazeAid. The first trip was between the 10 - 23 February and the second trip was between the 16th – 22nd March.



Tumbarumba BlazeAid Showground Campsite

We arrived in Tumbarumba and set up the caravan at the showgrounds where other BlazeAiders were camped. This was a new camp which had been set up in the week before we arrived. Volunteers had their first day working on farms the day we arrived.

BlazeAid allocates teams of 4 or more workers to farmers to rebuild their boundary fences. Our first job was on the Willigobung Road to build a boundary fence between the farmer's property and the forestry owned land next door. We were a team of 5, the other 3 members coming from Brisbane, North Coast NSW and Yarrawonga. Allen, the farmer, had cattle he was hand feeding and keeping in a smaller paddock on his property. He needed to have a secure

boundary fence so that he could let the stock into a bigger area for grazing. Fortunately, Allen had not lost his house though had lost fencing and a hay shed full of hay. The team spent 8 days in total here working along side Allen as he showed us the tricks to pulling down burnt fences, rolling out wire, attaching it to fence posts and straining it all up. On each of the 8 days we noticed more birdlife come back to the burnt forest. Tumbarumba had received some rain and the Eucalypts shooting their new leaves in the forest gave a nice backdrop for us to sit and enjoy stories over morning tea and lunch.



The fence building team with Allen



Regrowth from the burnt Eucalypts

Over the total of 3 weeks we were at BlazeAid we worked on several farms and each farmer had his own way of getting the fence built. Some of the boundary fences ran through cleared open country and others through heavily timbered hilly country. We certainly came away with lots of new knowledge about fence building, and having heard many stories about people's experiences in the bushfires.

We had time off from fencing. On one of the days we went to Paddys River Falls and Batlow

to see how they had come through the fires. The Paddys River Falls area had all been burnt. The steps leading down to the falls were and the picnic tables devoid of vegetation and the toilet block there had been damaged and was closed off. Most of the township of Batlow remained but the old Batlow Cannery had been destroyed and the fire had come to the edge of the town.

Another evening off we went to the Tumbarumba Rodeo. This was held at the Showground where we were camping so our quiet little spot turned into a very busy place including camper/caravaners, sideshows, horse floats, people, horses and cattle. It was a great night with the locals turning out in large numbers to watch riders from all around show their skills. Next day we went to the Tumbafest to hear music, eat and sample local wines and to the local Arts Centre to view an exhibition of photos taken during the bushfires. There were a lot of people from out of town visiting.

Our second visit to Tumbarumba was as COVID 19 restrictions were being brought in. This cut short our proposed time at Blaze Aid. However again we were welcomed at the farms we went to do fencing. On one property our lunchtime view was over the mountains and the valley through which the Murray River runs towards Victoria.

Tumbarumba and the district were devastated by the fires. People told us about their experiences during the fires. The farmers had fought the fires, many of the being volunteers in the local Rural Fire Service. The wives and children were evacuated to Wagga and other towns during this time. Often people had to leave their homes in the middle of the night and quickly. Communications such as phones (mobile and landlines) weren't operating, and the electricity supply was cut. Those who had been evacuated couldn't talk to those left behind.



We felt that Blaze Aid was well worthwhile. When we left Tumbarumba, we knew there was a lot of fencing yet to be done and that the town and local district still had a long way to go to recover from the fire. The Covid 19 restrictions would be a further blow to the town. Some Blaze Aid volunteers remained and continued to work. Some of them were nomads who live in their caravan or mobile homes. If the opportunity comes again, we would be Blaze Aid volunteers again and recommend it to those who would like to give it a try.

Penny and Phillip Williams

Why do birds stand on one leg?

These very patient Spoonbills were sitting on a rail over a channel just chilling out near Leeton. Their legs are so skinny! So I thought I would confirm why they do it.



Yellow-billed Spoonbill - Kathy Tenison



Royal Spoonbill – Kathy Tenison

Rest - Standing on one leg gives the other leg some rest and helps reduce muscle fatigue. Sometimes, birds may tuck their foot in their feather to ensure that one leg always stays warm and they cut down on heat loss.

Birds' legs have an adaptation where the arteries that transport warm blood into the legs lie in contact with the veins that return colder blood to the bird's heart. By standing on one leg, a bird reduces by half the amount of heat lost through unfeathered limbs. It makes good sense but looks very awkward.

Kathy Tenison

Frog Surveys along Yanco Creek

Contributed by Nella Smith. Taken from: Yanco Creek and tributaries: Intensive frog surveys of creek and farm habitats 2019-20 Turner, A., Wassens, S. and McNeil, D.

Summary of Project:

Limited ecological surveys have been conducted in the Yanco-Billabong creek system, particularly for aquatic animals and plants. Information such as frog species and abundance, water quality and vegetation diversity is critical in making informed, evidence-based natural resource management decisions.



Southern Bell Frog - Keith Thompson

This project has been developed in partnership with Charles Sturt University and Yanco Creek and Tributaries Advisory Council (YACTAC) to increase the knowledge of the ecology of this system. More specifically, these surveys aimed to increase understanding of the ecological value of constructed waterbodies such as farm dams and irrigation channels during dry years, when wetlands and billabongs are dry.

Seven properties were selected for the 2019-20 frog surveys across the Mid-Yanco, Colombo and Lower Billabong creek systems. Selection was based on previous surveys in the region during the 2017-18 water year (Walcott et al., 2018) and targeted detection of the endangered Southern Bell frog (*Litoria raniformis*).

To better understand the value of refuge habitats during dry years, six survey sites were selected on each property; three natural sites (wetland or creek) and three constructed waterbodies (dams or irrigation channels). On "Sheepwash" only one of each site type was selected due to the sites available.

Intensive frog surveys were conducted on two occasions. First at the end of November 2019 and repeated during the second week of January 2020, the peak breeding season and therefore increased possibility for detection of the Southern Bell frog. Where wetlands surveyed during the 2017-18 surveys were found to be dry, nearby creek sites were selected.

Overall, seven species of frog were identified across the system: Spotted Marsh frog, Barking Marsh frog and Eastern Sign-bearing froglet, Eastern Banjo frog, Giant Banjo frog (below left), Peron's tree frog (below right) and the Southern Bell frog. Despite the dry season, an increase in water levels occurred prior to the January surveys due to a combination of inter valley transfer and environmental water. This increase in flow led to an increase in frog activity in the creek system observed during the January surveys. Most notably was the increase in calling and sightings of Southern Bell frogs at "Broome".

Based on the findings of this study, natural resource management actions which improve/ sustain aquatic vegetation diversity and provide aquatic habitats which persist during spring and summer could sustain and improve frog occupancy in this system. Farm dams and irrigation channels provide important alternative habitat for many of the frog species detected. Improving the diversity of aquatic vegetation in these structures by mechanisms such as restricting stock access may see an increase in vegetation and consequently in increase frog numbers, providing important refuge habitat during dryer years.



Collared Sparrowhawk vs Brown Goshawk

Kathy Tenison photographed the accompanying bird first with her phone and then a little later with her camera near her place in Leeton. When she sent the first photo to me to check the identification, I wasn't sure so I got Keith Hutton, Allan Richards and Vincent Mourik to tell me what they thought – even they were unsure as the photos weren't showing the bird clearly enough. All eventually opted for a Brown Goshawk but more confusion resulted when Kathy took the photo with her camera which looked more like a Sparrowhawk.

As a result I will endeavour to clarify how best to ID the two species as best I can.

Firstly, there is a difference in size between the males and females of each species – the female being the larger.

Collared Sparrowhawk: Male 30cm and female 38cm.

Brown Goshawk: Male 42cm and female 50cm.



Brown Goshawk – Kathy Tenison



Collared Sparrowhawk – Meredith Billington

So when you see a male Sparrowhawk, it is tiny, smaller than a Kestrel. A female Goshawk is big, about the size of a Brown Falcon – a common raptor locally. So in flight these two are relatively easy to identify just by size alone.

Most of the confusion comes when a female Sparrowhawk and a male Goshawk are seen - especially when perched. In flight a general rule, but not always reliable, is that the Sparrowhawk has a Square tail and the Goshawk has rounded tail – 'Brown is Round' is how I remember it. But as I said this is not always a reliable feature particularly at this time of year when the birds might be in moult and the tail might be regrowing.

So Kathy's bird seen perched is very confusing to ID. Both species are reasonably common in the area so it is not always easy to decide with any degree of certainty just which species it is.

Max O'Sullivan

Mouse Spider - Meant to include this handsome male Mouse Spider (*Missulena occatoria*), I found this handsome male Mouse Spider (*Missulena occatoria*) This is the second time I have a visit from this species some years ago. I think there maybe a female deep down in my front garden.

Regards. Sue Chittick-Dalton

Photo by Eric Whiting found at Yarrabimbi'



Plan B – Taiwan, a non-birding trip ?

February/March 2020

Continued from last month.

Further out into the countryside and among the many clear and bubbly streams around Taipei and on the east coast in Taroko Gorge were delights. The T Whistling-thrush often heard but rarely seen, was a deep blue



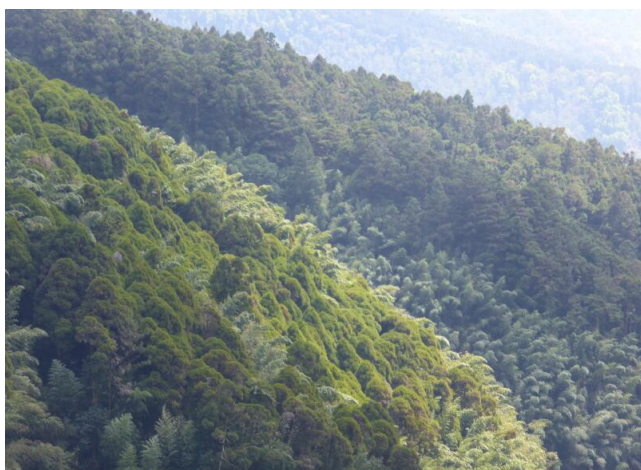
Numerous landslides from earthquake and typhoon create wild rock strewn gorges, like Taroko Gorge, where the Dippers and Redstarts rule

sheen. Very impressive to see the Brown Dipper doing exactly that, dipping, sometimes completely under the wild water that threatened to sweep it away. The Plumbeous Redstart would play in the shallows of the wet rocks, presumably insect hunting as it flared and closed its rufous/red tail the same way you can close and fan your own fingers (try it). The Little Forktail was dwarfed in the chasms and I could only see it as a spot from our high vantage points. Crested Serpent Eagles soared like wedgies.



Plumbeous Redstart hunts in the shallows of the waterfalls, fanning his red tail

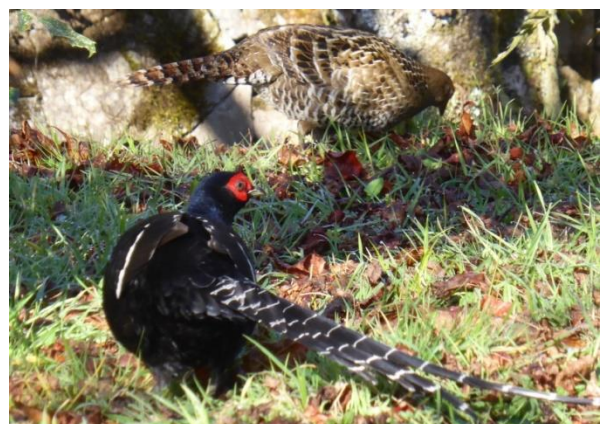
Another scenic and amazing train ride ("No we don't want the cheaper and faster train back thru Taipei thanks, we want to go the long way around" followed by an incredulous look and consultation with her colleague) down the East Coast, thru the Rift Valley with paddy fields and orchards between mountains on either side, thru long tunnels even though we were only a hundred metres from the coast and occasionally popping out to see small villages and beaches and fishers. And suddenly the west coast – we have crossed the country east to west via underground – and it is noticeably drier, not having rained in months. The full island gets monsoon in the summer, while the northeast also gets winter rain and remains lush throughout the year.



Forests of bamboo, broadleaf and conifer on steep slopes up to Alishan

Next day, a rickety ex-logging train, maximum speed 20km/h, takes us from sea level at Chiayi to 2200 metres at Alishan Forest Recreation Area. The vegetation changes from tropical to temperate and finally alpine, progressing from city produce gardens, to orchards, then tea plantations, until all agriculture gives way to native forests of

I had the pair of Mikado Pheasant to myself while the hoards watched the sunrise



bamboo, then broadleaf, and higher up is coniferous. For train buffs it is unmissable, with plummeting valleys, sheer ridges, it includes a double loop and a figure eight over one point, and for the thrill seeker there is a long list of death by accidents!

The hope for me was some mid to high altitude birds, the real high altitude is elsewhere at over 3000 metres. I didn't note any other birdwatchers up there, the other 99.9% of tourists were there to tick off "sunrise at Alishan" from their bucket list, so while they were tending cameras on the frosty decking, aiming the wrong direction it turned out, I wandered down the far end and had the Mikado Pheasant pair to myself as they scratched around like chooks.



Getting the Feeling on top of Alishan

It was a lovely sunrise, but the sun is the same everywhere hey, it's all about the place, and the top of this hill was a delight for an hour or two as I struggled to keep up with all my new feathered friends including, Eurasian Jay with colours far superior to the guidebook, Flamecrest, T Yuhina, White-whiskered Laughingthrush familiar now but unapproachable later in the day, Black-throated and Green-backed Tit, Collared Bush-robin, T Barwing and something that looked like a sparrow on steroids which does not appear in the guide! I heard a noise down the valley, probably

a worker's jackhammer, but ten minutes later a White-backed Woodpecker dropped by.

Back at sea level, a bicycle ride along the rocky NE coast drew delightful scenery, interesting geology, and a sprinkling of birds, notably Pacific Reef-heron, the colourful (male) Blue Rock-thrush, Common Kingfisher, and we watched an Osprey take-away a good sized fish. But not a single gull or tern or cormorant or other oceanic bird or water based animal.

And along the muddy banks of Taipei's rivers, easily seen from a rented U-bike on the riverside paths, were a variety of Egrets, Gray Heron, Common Sandpiper, and Sacred Ibis looking like they were nest building. Not a single duck in the Wild Duck Reserve. A flock of around a hundred Eurasian Magpies was a contrast to the singles I had seen prior. The escapee Black-collared Starling was bullying even the Mynas – let's hope we don't get them here in Oz!

My biggest dip was the emblematic Taiwan Blue-magpie, but I did find an origami version in one of the brochures which came out (almost) right.

For a non-birding trip I managed a list of 86 species, of which around half would be new species, using only public transport, the internet, and following our noses.

Red Collared-dove waiting for the fast train



Interesting geology of the pacific coast of Taiwan



Taiwan is very Asian and yet easy for a westerner. Friendly, efficient, safe, scenic, clean, hasslefree. Public toilets are everywhere and spotless. Tourist info is readily available in English. Public transport is reliable, cheap, and ubiquitous with excellent phone apps. The EasyCard is too easy. The iced fruit teas are to die for. The 300kph fast train is not to be missed. Recommended. 10/10 from me.

Neil Palfreman

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Rainbow Bee-eater [14+]	Whitton – migrating north	14/03/20	Margaret Strong
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike	Whitton – passing through daily	April '20	Margaret Strong
Black-fronted Dotterel [5]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/04/20	Keith Hutton
Black Falcon [pr]	Middle Rd, Leeton	04/04/20	Keith Hutton
Collared Sparrowhawk [fem]	Pine Ave, Leeton	05/04/20	Keith Hutton
Peregrine Falcon	Fivebough Wetlands	06/04/20	Max O'Sullivan
Australasian Bittern [1]	Campbell Swamp, Griffith	07/04/20	Max O'Sullivan
Blue-billed Duck [male]	Campbell Swamp, Griffith	07/04/20	Max O'Sullivan
Australian Shelduck [65]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/04/20	Keith Hutton
Wood Sandpiper [3]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/04/20	Keith Hutton
Red-capped Robin	Mt Brogden track,. Binya State Forest	09/04/20	Meredith Billington
Rufous Whistler	Mt Brogden track, Binya State Forest	09/04/20	Meredith Billington
Grey Shrike-Thrush	Mt Brogden track, Binya State Forest	09/04/20	Meredith Billington
White-faced Heron [31]	Fivebough Wetlands	10/04/20	Keith Hutton
Double-banded Plover [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	10/04/20	Keith Hutton
Swamp Harrier [Imm]	Fivebough Wetlands	10/04/20	Keith Hutton
Collared Sparrowhawk	Yanco Reserve	11/04/20	Kathy Tenison
Cattle Egret [24]	McCaughy Park, Yanco	14/04/20	Max O'Sullivan
Superb Parrot [4]	Yanco Reserve	14/04/20	Max O'Sullivan
Glossy Black Cockatoo [pr]	Koonadan Rd – Peter Draper's place	16/04/20	Phillip Williams
Zebra Finch [pr]	Koonadan Rd – Peter Draper's place	16/04/20	Phillip Williams
Brolga [2]	Cantrill Rd, Koonadan – Peter's rice crop	16/04/20	Phillip Williams
Rainbow Lorikeet [3]	Leeton Golf Course	17/04/20	Max O'Sullivan
Striated Pardalote	Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest	18/04/20	Meredith Billington
Singing Honeyeater	Bilbul – Meredith's place	All April	Meredith Billington
Zebra Finch	Bilbul – Meredith's place	All April	Meredith Billington
Collared Sparrowhawk	Bilbul – nested and raised young	During April	Meredith Billington
Collared Sparrowhawk [Imm]	Cassia Rd/Palm Ave, Leeton	19/04/20	Keith Hutton
The bird was bathing in a small puddle on the side of the road being harassed by White-plumed Honeyeater.			
Wedge-tailed Eagle [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	19/04/20	Keith Hutton
Brolga [15]	Fivebough Wetlands	19/04/20	Keith Hutton
Peregrine Falcon [1]	'Willow Park', Koonadan Rd, Leeton	23/04/20	Penny Williams
Pied Currawong [1]	Narrandera Wetlands – season return	23/04/20	Alan Whitehead
Reed Warbler [1]	Fivebough Wetlands – still singing!	25/04/20	Keith Hutton
Black Swan [325]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/04/20	Keith Hutton
Wood Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands – still present	25/04/20	Keith Hutton
Glossy Black Cockatoo [2prs]	Koonadan Rd, Leeton – Peter's driveway	27/04/20	Peter Draper

See Penny and Phillip William's article on Page 5:

Two things that are a puzzle:

How did the original pair find the source of food at Peter's place in the first place – did they do a reconnaissance flight from their usual habitat in the hills and stumbled on Peter's trees? It's not as if they 'knew' of the source of food from previous experience as the trees in the driveway are still quite young and only 3 or 4 of them are mature enough to have cones.

And how did the other later arrivals know of this food source? Was there some communication between them to have the others turn up to share in the new food source?

We really don't know all that much about our own birds and how they operate as a unit.

Whistling Kite [5]	Dam at 'Willow Park', Koonadan Rd	28/04/20	Penny Williams
Brolga [14]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/04/20	Nella Smith
Brolga [5]	Tuckerbil	28/04/20	Nella Smith
Brolga [2]	Narrandera	28/04/20	Nella Smith
Black Swan [150+]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/04/20	Nella Smith

Grey Fantail [2]	Lake Talbot, Narrandera	02/05/20	Alan Whitehead
Blue-billed Duck [14+]	Campbell Swamp, Griffith	03/05/20	Max O'Sullivan
One female had 6 half grown ducklings with her – they were separate from the other adult birds.			
Plumed Whistling-duck [1]	Campbell Swamp, Griffith	03/05/20	Max O'Sullivan
Musk Duck [fem]	Campbell Swamp, Griffith	03/05/20	Max O'Sullivan
Little Eagle	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	03/05/20	Max O'Sullivan
Plumed Whistling-duck [10]	Fivebough Wetlands	03/05/20	Keith Hutton
Black-fronted Dotterel [10]	Fivebough Wetlands -	03/05/20	Keith Hutton
Striated Pardalote	Whitton	04/05/20	Margaret Strong
Glossy Black Cockatoo [6]	Koonadan Rd, Leeton – roosting	05/05/20	Phillip Williams
Glossy Black Cockatoo [9]	Flying over Brobenah/Grigg Rd corner	05/05/20	Brett Richardson
Brett reported these two lots of Glossies flying over his place this morning and reported them to Dionea. Five flew over followed by another 4 heading north above Brobenah Rd.			
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [2]	Bilbul – Meredith's place	06/05/20	Meredith Billington
White-breasted Woodswallow [40]	Barellan Rd, Narrandera	08/05/20	Glenn Currie
Double-barred Finch [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/05/20	Max O'Sullivan
Red-necked Avocet [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/20	Kath & Phil Tenison
Whiskered Tern [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/20	Kath & Phil Tenison
This was part of the Global Big Bird Count – 34 species were recorded at Fivebough that morning.			
Wedge-tailed Eagle [2]	'Mountain Dam', Colinroobie Rd	10/05/20	Graham Russell
Flame Robin [2m 6f]	Galore Hill Reserve – Winter return	13/05/20	Max O'Sullivan
The robins were seen on the top of the hill near the Telecom Towers – no Scarlet Robins were seen.			
White-throated Treecreeper [2]	Galore Hill Reserve	13/05/20	Max O'Sullivan
Golden Whistler [fem]	Galore Hill Reserve	13/05/20	Max O'Sullivan

Eastern Blue Tongue Lizard

I have just moved house this past week and whilst moving some metal from my metal pile behind the shed I found this beautiful Eastern Blue Tongue Lizard. He was the largest one I have ever seen (between 40 - 50 cm) and thought I would share his picture.

The eastern blue-tongue lizard (*Tiliqua scincoides*), one of the largest skinks in Australia, is found throughout most of NSW and can grow up to 60cm in length. When threatened, the eastern blue-tongue lizard displays its blue tongue in a wide-mouthed intimidating show. Not an agile animal, they feed on slow-moving beetles and snails.

David Kellett



Autumn Greenhoods *Pterostylis revoluta* are being seen in many locations and in large numbers.

This patch was photographed at "Yarrabimbi" in the Brobenah Hills.

Photo: Rowena Whiting.