

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



June 2022 - Issue #304

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



Some of the delights at Yarrabimbi



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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the July 2022 issue by
Wednesday 6 July

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

Quote of the day (World Environment Day)

I speak for the trees,
for the trees have no tongues

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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Treasurer:	Glenn Currie	0488 563 321		Kathy Tenison	6953 4869

MEETINGS are held on the second Thursday each month, except January, at the Henry Lawson Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street, Leeton at 7pm.

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

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

Bank details for direct deposit: BSB 082 672 account no. 722043387, 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 the June issue

We were pleased to welcome John Collins as our guest speaker at our May meeting; and were intrigued by the title 'Intelligent Tourism'. John runs an agricultural tour business in the local area with an emphasis on education. He spoke on the history, the reason for travel along with some benefits and pitfalls. He questioned why people would travel to Bali only to stay in a resort, pointing out the damage vapour trails from aircraft are causing to the oceans.

His main clients are from overseas wanting to learn how our agricultural businesses operate so he has been seriously affected by the travel restrictions imposed over the last couple of years and has become more focused on the domestic market. He provides customised tours to suit his varied clients and finds both the visitors and visited gain benefit from each other.

One of his aims is that participants learn something from their experience (honourable tourists!). Often we feel that threatened wildlife should be protected from hordes of tourists but then if people learn to understand a species and their habitat they will support its protection. With points like that his talk led into a fruitful discussion amongst those present. So hopefully his time with us benefitted us all and everyone learnt something. Many thanks, John.

Stay warm as winter is certainly making its presence felt; enjoy this issue.

Rowena.

Please note: Membership subscriptions are due on the 30th June

Please send your money to the Treasurer, Glenn Currie promptly to PO Box 541, Leeton, NSW 2705 or make a bank transfer (preferred) to the MFN's bank account (Please make sure you are using the current account - BSB 082 672 account no. 722043387). Make sure you include your name and description of payment.

There is no change to our **Annual Subscriptions:**

Family \$45.00, Adult/Single \$35.00, Journal only/Concession \$25.00

Any queries, Glenn can be contacted on 0488 563 321.

Field Trip to Yarrabimbi

Sunday 16 May 2022



We left home in a drizzle of rain. We all know that a bit of rain before a field trip results in a wonderful experience. And so it was. A few of us gathered for a walk firstly through a field of native grasses and herbs and fungi, *Stipa scabra*, *Hydrocotyle callicarpa* (tiny pennywort) were identified together with *Calotis cuneifolia* Purple burr daisy. That's the one that gets in your socks.

Clusters of earth stars (*Geastrum triplex*) were inspected together with numerous other fungi, mosses and lichens and mulga ferns which were all over the soft, moist ground.



The young specimens of earth stars appear as half buried puff balls, at maturity the outer layer splits in the star shape to reveal an inner, thin skinned sac containing the spores.

We crossed the fence into the crown land to an unnamed creek which looked like it had seen even wetter periods from its depth and width (perhaps 10,000 years ago). However more recent wetter conditions allowed some large grey box to grow which seemed large enough to support Glossy Black Cockatoo nesting. Fortunately previous landholders retained these trees and are all important for nesting sites for these large, endangered parrots. Following the creek around we clambered out and soon came across flowering Rusty Grevillea (*Grevillea floribunda*) and Western Urn Heath (*Melichrus urceolatus*) as well as a few Autumn Greenhoods (*Pterostylis ampliata*). Last year there were many of these on this site. It seems that these plants like many other Australian species and introduced fruit trees flower and fruit best in alternate years. Many more rosettes were seen than flowers.

We came across a smallish bearded dragon trying to warm himself, and a very old Black Wallaby who was also not going anywhere.

This private property is a good example of the landscape and the flora and fauna of the Narrandera Hills and as usual it gave us a great walk on a brisk sunny day.

Nella Smith

Photos by Rowena and Lynda Whiting



Bird List

Australasian Grebe
Brown Treecreeper
Grey Shrike-Thrush
Kookaburra
Crested Pigeon
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Singing Honeyeater
Striped Honeyeater
Weebill

Magpie Lark
Pied Currawong
Pink Cockatoo
Diamond Firetail
Double-barred Finch
Red-rumped Parrot
Jacky Winter
Olive-backed Oriole

White-browed Babbler
Grey Fantail
Peaceful Dove
Common Bronzewing
Quail sp.
Mallee Ringneck
White-plumed Honeyeater
Superb Fairy Wren

Flowering Plants Observed in May at Yarrabimbi

Grevillea floribunda

Rusty Spider Flower

Erect or spreading shrub to about 2m high with velvety branches.

Leaves alternate, lanceolate 3-6cm long, about 1 cm wide, the upper surface deep green, and minutely hairy, the under surface densely silky hairy.

Flowers short, with a dense covering of rusty hairs on the outside, yellowish green inside, borne in a cluster at the ends of branchlets.

Found on skeletal soils of rocky, gravelly ridges.



Melichrus urceolatus Urn Heath

A low, often dense stiffly erect shrub.

Leaves concave, narrowed to a sharp point, greyish green. Flowers greenish-cream to rose pink with an urn shaped base ending in 5 outward curving lobes, borne singly and stalkless in the leaf axils.

Found on gravelly soils of hill slopes and ridges

Pterostylis ampliata

Autumn Greenhood

Has large, leaning richly coloured white and green flowers with brownish tones.

Has a long sickle shaped hood drawn out into a long slender apex and sharply pointed petals.

A long, curved, lanceolate pointed labellum white with green to reddish brown lines extends beyond the v shaped sinus between the lateral sepals. Rosette leaves 4-11 ovate, dull green, margins entire. Flowering stem is up to 30cm tall.

Found in grassy open Pine-box forest, sometimes in bare, gravelly or sandy well drained locations.



and a fungus

Geastrum triplex Earth Star

Expanded fungus variable in size from 70 mm to 100mm across the tips of the lobes.

The young Specimens appear as small half-buried puff balls; at maturity the outer layer splits in a star shaped form to reveal an inner, thin skinned sac containing the spores.

Widespread in most forest habitats

Nella Smith

Savernake Station and the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT)

In 1994, a survey of native vegetation in the southern Riverina, between Corowa and Conargo, estimated that the cover was far better than districts to the north. This sounds reassuring for that region, except that 'far better' was only 4% of the original native vegetation. Throughout the region, small communities and landholders got busy revegetating roadsides and portions of private land to increase the overall native vegetation cover, with great success.

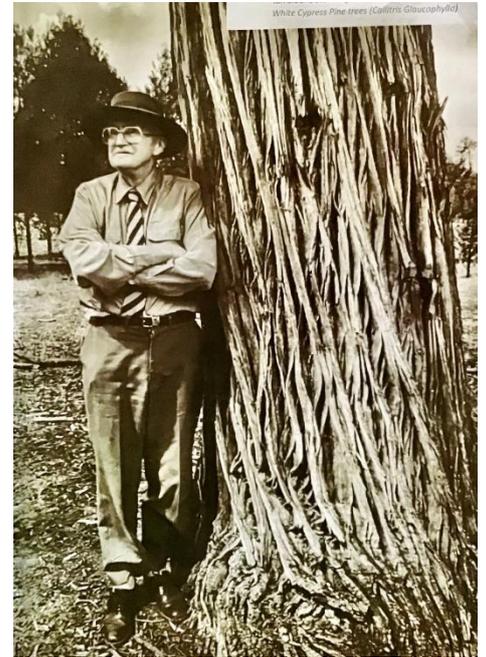
Savernake Station had, and still has, the densest tree cover in that 1994 survey area. Since 1862, four generations of the Sloan family have focussed on conserving the variety of habitats on the station and in 2018 Helen, the great grand daughter of the first Sloan to live there, entered into an in-perpetuity agreement with the Biodiversity Conservation Trust for Savernake Station. This means that certain portions will be 'locked up' from agriculture and grazing stock for the foreseeable future, allowing natural revegetation and the growth of direct seeded trees and shrubs to occur.

A Hay Plains Landcare Revegetation Workshop was held at Savernake Station in early May and the participants viewed the conservation areas there and on a neighbouring property, Five Plains. The protected native vegetation provides habitat for endangered birds moving through and living in that area.

Of the many notable facts we learnt from Martin Driver and BCT presenters, the Sand /Cypress Funnel Ants (*Aphaenocaster barbigula*)

and their positive effects in hydrating and engineering the soil in the Cypress Pine (*Calitris glaucophila*) forests were amongst the most interesting. The ants' behaviour of continually turning over the grains of sandy soil, while tending to their burrows, traps pine needles in layers beneath the soil. These increase nutrient levels when fungi, which grows on the roots of the cypress trees, break them down.

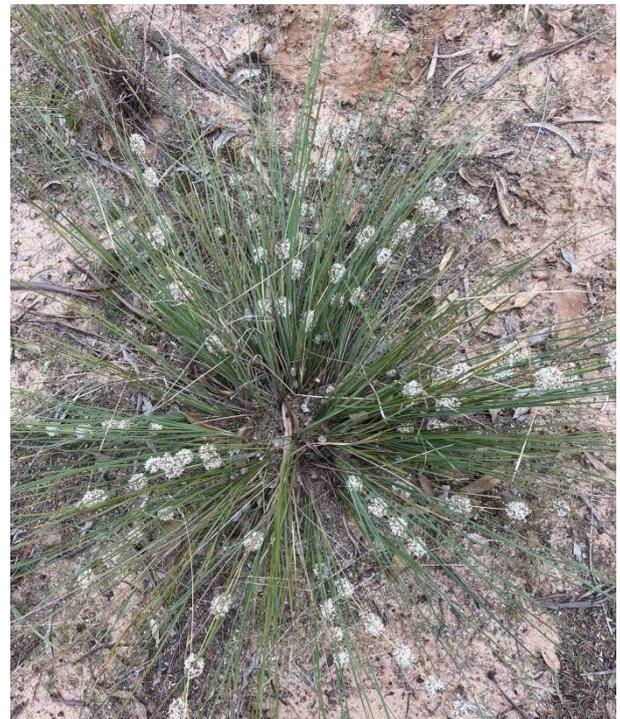
Many of us have seen the entrances to the Sand Ants' burrows in the cypress forests around Narrandera and wondered what they are. Dr. David Eldridge (UNSW) did several research projects on the ants at Savernake Station and has published numerous academic papers which are easily found online, for those who'd like to read the fascinating results of his research. The tiny ants rejuvenate soils that have become impacted due to historic British-style farming methods and help to keep the cypress trees alive.



Ian Sloane + an old Savernake Cypress

Margaret Strong

Sand Ant and burrow entrance.



Lomandra multiflora (direct seeded)

MURRUMBIDGEE LANDCARE'S WEEDSCAN WORKSHOP

Kath Tenison, in her role as Murrumbidgee Landcare's Local Coordinator, organised a fantastic presentation to Narrandera Landcare on the [WeedScan](#) project being developed by the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, CSIRO and the NSW Department of Primary Industries.



WeedScan will be an app and website for identifying, reporting, and managing priority weeds in Australia. Using the same sort of artificial intelligence as [PlantSnap](#) and [iNaturalist](#), users will be able to identify and record weeds they find from 300 of the priority weeds in Australia.

The project will provide the three tiers of government, NRM groups, graziers, farmers and communities with an easy-to-use digital tool enabling priority weeds to be identified quickly, access to the best practice management information and users will be able to act either at the individual level or as part of a community-led regional WeedScan network.

The workshop was presented by Dr Hanwen Wu, *Principal Research Scientist*, Claire Lock, *State Priority Weeds Coordinator*, and Mathew Shillam, *Senior Systems Developer*, all from the Department of Primary Industries. They introduced our group to a prototype of the project, explained the concept and invited us to try it out.



Weedscan is still under development and 18 out of the 300 priority weeds are in the database at the moment. Using it was quite straightforward and the potential value of the project was obvious to all the attendees. We were very happy to be involved in this development stage of it and the presenters were very interested in the feedback from us as potential users.

An important part of the presentation was the survey at the end. One of the big aims of the project is to get action on the information submitted, and the survey asked very pertinent questions on how we might use the app, how we might share the data and whether we would join a local network to track the weeds submitted. All this information will be used to develop the project to its maximum advantage.

I'm still awe-struck by how AI can help identify so many things often to species level and what I like about this project is the emphasis on prompting some sort of action on what's discovered.

The CSIRO is currently developing the AI needed for recognising the rest of the 300 priority weeds and the release of the WeedScan website and smartphone app is scheduled for mid-2023.

Narrandera Landcare greatly appreciates Kath and DPI including our group in the development of this project. Hopefully our input will help this project achieve its very important goals!



Glenn Currie

[Our thanks go to Glenn for inviting MFN members along. Ed]

Five W's and an H

On hearing or seeing something new in the bush the first response is **WHAT** is it called? The name may be supplied by one of our experts but it is much more rewarding to have named it yourself. However building up the knowledge to be able to name more and more requires time – lots of time, and usually reinforcement. It is all part of the enjoyment of regularly going on excursions.

A second question generally has been answered in general terms – **WHERE?** After all we needed to know the general location just to get there. It is in the finer detail that we can add interest. In what part of the habitat was it seen – open areas or in deep shade, among ground flora or higher up? It is all part of putting things in context. It is the way the brain works. You may not be able to recall a particular event unless reminded where it took place.

This idea of context extends into the realm of time i.e. **WHEN.** Most of bush life is seasonal. It is easier to recall a name if it is expected to appear in that season. However it's the exceptions that are more noteworthy. This also applies to the time of day.

A second **WHAT** is all about adding interest to what you are seeing. Feeding and nesting habits, was the animal on migration, was the plant in full flower or fruiting? All these questions change a single 'okay I see it' into 'here is life acting out before my eyes'. It's like just reading a book title against reading the whole book.

The next two questions are more philosophical. **WHY** seeks to put the sightings into place in the ecosystem. Why is it acting in that particular way? Why is it shaped the way it is? Why is it coloured the way it is? In nature the reason is not always obvious but nonetheless intriguing, but there is always some reason.

HOW can be as simple as what adaptations have been made (evolved) to working out or even visualising how these adaptations have come about.

Invariably there is a cause and effect coming into play and the cause is frequently from an interaction with another species or even geographic or climate changes. Thus is the fascination of nature. Asking questions and seeking answers is what makes us human.

Eric Whiting

To compensate for a lack of material about birds this month I have included a couple of recent items from the BirdLife E-news which are relevant to us. Rowena

Swifties flock in

A significant proportion of world population all at the same location

The single largest flock of the Critically Endangered Swift Parrot seen in Victoria since records began in 1996 has been spotted by citizen scientists in the Chiltern Mt Pilot National Park, in the north-east of the state.

The flock — comprising a whopping 280 Swift Parrots — was recorded on 7 May during [BirdLife Australia's community Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater survey event](#), conducted by our Woodland Birds for Biodiversity project and attended by around 50 keen volunteers.

Amazingly, the parrots were all recorded at one site in the park, and follow-up surveys in the area showed that there were plenty more about — more than 400 birds, all up — making it a significant proportion of the world population, all in the one location!

To say that we're very excited about this incredible result is an understatement!

Swift Parrots breed only in Tasmania, and they fly across Bass Strait to the south-eastern Australian mainland, where they spend the winter months among the flowering eucalypts of the forests and woodlands. Although the birds are often considered 'nomadic' on the mainland, this find underlines the importance of the Chiltern Mt Pilot National Park for the species and others like it.

While Regent Honeyeaters (the other target of the surveys) proved to be elusive on the day of the survey, volunteers, partner agencies and BirdLife Australia staff will continue to search for both critically endangered species over the coming months.

If you've seen a Swift Parrot or Regent Honeyeater this winter, we'd love to hear from you. Simply let us know of sightings made at any time and location by [email](mailto:woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au) - woodlandbirds@birdlife.org.au

The event was part of the national survey program coordinated by BirdLife Australia and supported by DELWP. Round 2 of the survey will run from Saturday 16 July to Sunday 28 August.



Pelicans aplenty

NEW COLONY AT LAKE BREWSTER ONE OF THE LARGEST EVER

The record rainfalls that fell over eastern Australia in recent months have proved to be a boon for many different species of waterbirds. Since late last year, everything from ducks to ibis and herons have flocked to inundated wetlands to take advantage of the wet conditions, with widespread breeding recorded across many regions. Australian Pelicans are among their number.

Pelicans traditionally breed in colonies, which usually contain hundreds or a few thousand breeding pairs, but significant events may see tens of thousands of breeding birds flocking to form a colony. Most of these major pelican breeding events occur when inland wetlands fill with water from summer rains, and pelicans flock inland from the coast, flying hundreds or thousands of kilometres to get there.

One such site is the recently filled Lake Brewster, in the Central West of NSW, where more than 30,000 pelicans have assembled to establish a substantial breeding colony. A breeding event of this magnitude is said to be unprecedented in the Central West.

Productive breeding seasons are vital to maintain the pelican population, as increasingly frequent and prolonged droughts have meant that suitable breeding conditions are experienced ever more infrequently.



The colony at Lake Brewster undoubtedly represents one of the most significant breeding events for many years; to put it into perspective, the celebrated colony at Lake Eyre in 1977 held about 4000 nests. Nevertheless, the Lake Brewster colony pales into insignificance in comparison with one in the Menindee Lakes about a century ago, where 50,000–100,000 nests were recorded.

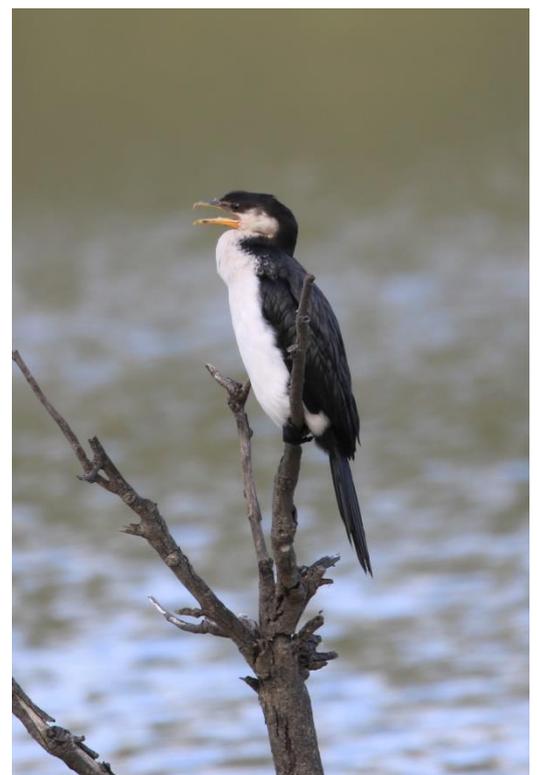
MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater [2]	Whitton	April/May	Margaret Strong
Buff-banded Rail [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	01/05/22	Keith Hutton
Royal Spoonbill [30]	Fivebough Wetlands	01/05/22	Keith Hutton
Yellow-billed Spoonbill [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	01/05/22	Keith Hutton
Darter [8]	Fivebough Wetlands	01/05/22	Keith Hutton
Flame Robin [male]	Hooley Lookout – winter return	02/05/22	Anne Lepper
Double-barred Finch [8+]	Evans Smyles Rd via Leeton	06/05/22	Max O'Sullivan
Also seen were Hooded Robin [pr], Red-capped Robin [male] and Yellow-rumped Thornbill [10]			
Emu [12]	Newell Hwy, Jerilderie	07/05/22	Alan Whitehead
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Newell Hwy, Jerilderie	07/05/22	Susan Whitehead
Diamond Firetail [1]	Evans Smyles Rd via Leeton	08/05/22	Kathy Tenison
Hooded Robin [pr]	Evans Smyles Rd	08/05/22	Kathy Tenison
Little Eagle [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/22	Keith Hutton
White-bellied Sea-Eagle [Imm]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/22	Keith Hutton
Swamp Harrier [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/22	Keith Hutton
Black-shouldered Kite [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/22	Keith Hutton
Magpie Goose [170+]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/22	Keith Hutton
Yellow-throated Minor	Murrami Road	12/05/22	Graham Russell
Australian Magpie [37]	Fivebough Wetlands – in a loose flock	12/05/22	Keith Hutton
King Parrot [male]	Nericon – Neil's place (escapee!)	15/05/22	Neil Palframan
Indian Ringneck [4-6]	Nericon township, definite escapees!	May '22	Neil Palframan
Stubble Quail	Tharbogang	15/05/22	Neil Palframan
Magpie Goose [74]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/05/22	Keith Hutton
Royal Spoonbill [37]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/05/22	Keith Hutton
Peregrine Falcon [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/05/22	Keith Hutton
Black Kite [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/05/22	Keith Hutton
Brown Honeyeater	Sycamore St – singing vigorously	25/05/22	Keith Hutton
Brolga [2 Ad 2 juv]	Hooley Lookout	29/05/22	Max O'Sullivan

Max O'Sullivan

A couple of photos which didn't make last month's issue...
Kathy Tenison's Great Crested Grebes (immature) in the distance and Phil Tensions's Little Pied Cormorant



**** COMING EVENTS ****

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions.

Any Covid-19 restrictions need to be adhered to, for outings you must register with the nominated person by email (preferred) or phone to participate, do not come if unwell. By registering you declare that 'I am symptom free and have not been in contact with a confirmed case of Covid 19, or directed to isolate'. Masks and social distancing are required as per current Covid rules.

- 9 June Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.
Topic: John Oxley and Alan Cunningham in the Cocoparras
Presenter: Eric Whiting
Contact: Dione Russell 0428 536 290
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 12 June Sunday** **Outing to Cocoparra Ranges – Duncans Creek to Steamboat Creek walk (no tracks).** Will include cultural and historic features.
Meet at 9am at the junction Whitton Stock Route and Mt Bingar Road (road to communication towers)
Bring morning tea (to carry) and lunch
Contact/leader: Eric Whiting Please register with him.
Phone 02 6953 2612 Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.
- 17 – 19 June** **Campout Kalyarr National Park on the Lachlan River (North of Hay)**
Friday to Sunday **Limited accommodation – financial members only.**
- 26 June Sunday** **Swift Parrot Day – Save the day**
(Dr Debbie Saunders will lead the walk).
8.30am to 10.30am (or however long people like!).
TSR next to Ingalba Nature Reserve, just off Burley Griffin Way.
More details to follow via email. Complimentary morning tea afterwards.
- 3 July Sunday** **Field Trip at Livingstone National Park**
Meet at northern end of the park at 10am, approx 5km walk followed by lunch.
RSVP Sarah Danckert spdanckert@gmail.com or 0427276306
- 6 July Wednesday** **Copy for the July newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 14 July Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.
Topic: To be decided
Contact: Dione Russell 0428 536 290
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.

OTHER EVENTS

[Biannual Swift Parrot / Regent Honeyeater surveys](#) (BirdLife Australia) -23 April to 5 June, various locations. These surveys will utilise the new method, introduced last year, using a 5 minute-50 metre radius survey technique. You are also encouraged to complete a rapid assessment of resource availability (eg flowering, water availability), and also document the status of lerp and Golden Wattle, two known food sources used by Swift Parrots. Full details and local contacts are available via the link, to guide you through the process.