

# The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



**August 2023 - Issue #317**

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

PO Box 541, LEETON 2705 ISSN-1327-1172

Website: [www.mfn.org.au](http://www.mfn.org.au)

Email: [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto: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



**Australian Painted-snipe by Leo Berzins**

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## CONTRIBUTIONS

For the September 2023 issue by  
Wednesday 6 September

To Rowena Whiting

Email: [ericwhiting4@bigpond.com](mailto:ericwhiting4@bigpond.com).

Phone: 6953 2612

"Adopt the pace of nature.

Her secret is patience."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

<b>President:</b>	Eric Whiting	6953 2612	<b>Editor:</b>	Rowena Whiting	0429 726 120
<b>Vice President:</b>	Alan Whitehead	6959 3779	<b>Committee:</b>	Margaret Strong	0434 060 973
<b>Vice President:</b>	Virginia Tarr	0434 831 031			
<b>Vice President:</b>	Sarah Danckert	0427 276 306			
<b>Secretary:</b>	Dionee Russell	0428 536 290	<b>Website Co-ordinator:</b>		
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Glenn Currie	0488 563 321		Kathy Tenison	0439 596 093

**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.

### Membership enquiries:

<b>Leeton</b>	Eric Whiting	6953 2612	<b>Griffith</b>	Virginia Tarr	0434 831 031
<b>Narrandera</b>	Nella Smith	0428 890 537	<b>Wagga Wagga</b>	Sarah Danckert	0427 276 306

**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.

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## Welcome to the August issue

Another full issue with many people contributing. Despite much of the month being very wintry there have been a number of activities. We were delighted to welcome Matt Herring and hear about his latest project Tracking Australian Painted-snipe. How delightful is Leo's photo on the cover, the pattern in their wings is just wonderful! Thanks to both for their contribution.

This month we will hear about another endangered species, the Plains-wanderer, with David Parker coming to update the club with his continuing research of this species. Then Griffith are having a tree planting morning and later in the month we have an outing to the Kindra State Forest (Coolamon). Taleeban Mining Reserve and Livingston National Park are down for September. Twitchathon is coming up at the end of October (proceeds to the Painted-snipe Project), so hone up your bird recognition skills ready for it. If you have any suggestions for places you'd like to visit please come forward and contact Eric, Dionee or any of the committee. An offer to co-ordinate/lead would be much appreciated, so it's not left to the same people

With signs of Spring emerging our woodlands and roadsides are turning yellow with wattle blossom. Time to get out and enjoy the bush.

**Rowena.**

### Tracking Australian Painted-snipe

Matt Herring was our speaker at our July meeting and we extend our grateful thanks for an inspiring presentation. We look forward to hearing how the project progresses and hopefully contribute some sightings. Who's going to be first to see one? Ed.

Motivated by the lack of recent records, a team of shorebird and threatened species experts and I launched a crowdfunding campaign in November 2022 to begin uncovering the well-guarded secrets of the Australian Painted-snipe (<https://chuffed.org/project/paintedsnipe>). It ended just before Christmas and after 40 days we had managed to raise \$124,048, a truly wonderful result. It will enable us to track the species for the first time, uncovering such aspects as key wintering sites and drought refuges. We will use the information to help trigger desperately needed conservation efforts. But more on that later.

### My first Australian Painted-snipe (APS)

My memories of the first time I found Australian Painted-snipe (APS) are vivid. I knew right away what they were, having seen their striking beauty depicted in my bird books. It was a joyous moment and I felt like I'd struck gold. The year was 2000 and I was trudging through one of my Brolga study sites – Lake Montague,

near The Rock – as part of my Honours at Charles Sturt University. There were six birds and they were in that specific zone the species favours: a receding water level that supports a combination of mudflats, very shallow water and dense, but patchy and low waterplant cover, like *Eleocharis acuta*. Since then, every time I find these enigmatic jewels the feeling is the same. My heartrate escalates and I try to savour every moment. I'm sure many field nats members can relate! I've had the pleasure of sharing this APS joy with many people, from my friends and family, to Riverina farmers and Indigenous rangers in the Kimberley. Most of them end up mesmerised, never forgetting that such a bird exists, albeit one that's usually hidden and out of sight. These birds are so precious and I've often said they are a quintessential birdwatchers' bird, hardly ever seen or recognised by other people.



Australian Painted-snipe – Leo Berzins

### Critically endangered?

For many years I've wanted to track APS and help uncover their well-guarded secrets. This desire was further inspired by the valuable insights we got from tracking a similarly threatened waterbird, the Australasian Bittern. And now it's finally going to happen, thanks to the nudge we felt from the paucity of records over the two years prior to launching our crowdfunding campaign. Basically, there had only been about half a dozen sites nationally, despite the triple La Nina and the species being on many birdwatchers' radars. We had expected to see a surge of sightings, just as we did after the millennium drought ended in 2010, but that wasn't happening. It seemed more urgent than ever to learn more about these birds, particularly with the latest population estimate of just 340 in "The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020". The APS is listed as nationally and globally endangered but one starts to wonder if the species may actually warrant listing as critically endangered like the Regent Honeyeater and Orange-bellied Parrot.

### Sightings this year

Enter 2023 and the situation has improved, with more sightings, but it's still deeply concerning. I'm aware of about 12 sites nationally so far this year, mostly in NSW, such as Pitt Town Lagoon, Mungindi, Lake Cargelligo, Hay and the Macquarie Marshes. Only the Mungindi site supported large numbers, with up to 32 (per Patrick Johnston), the most seen anywhere for years. They stuck around for weeks on end, while the other sites typically involved only one or two birds that appeared to just be moving through. We were ready to strike at Mungindi when, unfortunately, the site dried out. APS typically vanish from south-eastern Australia in the colder months, which means we'll now have to wait until spring and summer to begin the tracking. Having said that, a 12 year old, Tavish Bloom, just found an immature female at Bells Swamp near Maldon in Victoria! We have our first lot of transmitters in hand, ethics approvals done and everything else lined up. We are ready to roll, so please stay tuned.

### Transmitters

We are using two different types of transmitters. The first lot are solar PTT units that use satellites and deliver the data regularly, sometimes close to real time. They are only two grams and cost about \$7000 each, plus significant download costs, while the second lot are much cheaper but rely on the birds entering the mobile phone network to access the data. There is an inherent risk that the birds we tag will not enter the mobile network, or will leave it and not return, whereas we'll always have a good idea of where the PTT birds are. We have hedged our bets between these two transmitter types. In total, we should be able to track at least 12 birds, which will provide a terrific insight into the dynamic and cryptic lives of APS. In order to catch the birds, we are planning to use mist nets, most likely as they move between roosting and foraging sites in the late afternoon or early morning. Catching them shouldn't be too difficult, and they've been caught using mist nets before, but we will be relying on sightings from birdwatchers like yourselves. For MFNC members, there are some excellent potential APS sites around. Fivebough has a bunch of historic records and they rock up around the rice fields sometimes too. Wherever that combination of mud and

cover exists, it's worth a try, especially if ecologically similar birds like Red-kneed Dotterels, Latham's Snipe and Baillon's Crakes are about.

### **Our team**

Our team is well placed to undertake this research. We have Latham's Snipe tracking experts in the form of Birgita Hansen and Lori Gould, while Andrew Silcocks and Chris Purnell from Birdlife Australia have been involved with APS conservation for decades. Danny Rogers is also on the team. He undertook the valuable, early work on APS, demonstrating it was indeed both endangered and a full species, rather than just a subspecies of Greater Painted-snipe. Inka Veltheim, another waterbird tracking expert, is on the team. I worked closely with her on the bittern tracking. Professors Stephen Garnett and James Watson provide additional scientific rigour and are among Australia's most experienced threatened bird experts. Together, we want to turn things around for APS. We believe we will discover overlooked strongholds and document movement patterns that we can only speculate on at present.



Australian Painted-snipe – Leo Berzins

### **Rostratulidae**

Painted-snipes are so unique that they warrant their own family: Rostratulidae. There are three surviving species: the Australian, Greater and South American Painted-snipe. There is an additional extinct species, only known from fossil records in South Africa. Painted-snipes are most closely related to jacanas, seed-snipes and the Plains Wanderer, despite looking similar to true snipes, sandpipers and plovers. Males do all the incubation and raising of the young, while females continue to mate with as many males as possible. The advertisement calls have been recorded for the South American and

Greater Painted-snipe, and they are commonly used for surveying purposes of the latter. However, there are no

known recordings of such a call for the APS. What has confused some people is recordings claiming to be APS are in fact from overseas and made at a time when the APS was still considered a subspecies of Greater Painted-snipe. It's funny to think that we even have a range of different call recordings for the extremely cryptic and mysterious Night Parrot, but basically nothing for the APS.

### **EDGE species**

In conservation we always need to prioritise our efforts, particularly with limited resources. One simple way of doing this is to combine the endangered conservation status with evolutionary distinctiveness. The top species are known as "EDGE" species (<https://www.edgeofexistence.org/what-is-edge/>). For birds, Australia has a handful of species in the Top 100, including the number one spot with Plains Wanderer: critically endangered and in a monotypic family (i.e., only one species). Coming in at 29<sup>th</sup> out of around 10,000 bird species is the APS, making it a high priority for global bird conservation.

### **2023 Twitchathon**

To capitalise on the tracking, I wanted to seize the opportunity to visit key wetlands as our birds move, meet with the landholders, build relationships and trigger targeted conservation. Thankfully, "Engaging the Custodians of Australian Painted-snipe" will be the recipient of this year's NSW and ACT Twitchathon funds via BIGNet (<http://www.twitch24nsw.org/>). Soon, people will be able to donate to Twitchathon teams, with all funds going towards this new project being run in conjunction with the tracking.

### **APS Website coming soon**

As part of the crowdfunding, we will soon launch a dedicated website for Tracking APS, where you can follow the different birds, such as "Gloria" and "Clive", learn more about the species, see or report recent sightings, and follow all things APS conservation ([www.paintedsnipe.com.au](http://www.paintedsnipe.com.au)). In the meantime, you can follow "Tracking Australian Painted-snipe" on Facebook and Twitter for all the latest news. It's going to be enlightening to see where they take us and what we learn.

**Matt Herring July 2023**

## Mt. Caley, Cocoparra National Park July 16 2023

A fine winter's day was the scene for our walk to the summit to see *Pomaderris cocoparrana*, an endangered plant that lives only in that region. Enormous vegetation growth since our last visit in 2020 was obvious and a delightful change from the somewhat harsh site in previous years.



On our ascent, three distinctive shrubs marked stages in altitude beginning with *Myoporum montanum* (Western Boobialla) at the bottom of the slope. They were young, lush, in flower and quite numerous in a line along the base beside Barry Scenic Drive. *Gonocarpus elatus* (Hill Raspwort) in dark green foliage started there and was seen all the way up as was *Melichrus urceolatus* (Urn Heath) in flower. New regrowth in *Xerochrysum viscosum* (Sticky Everlasting) was also seen sprinkled amongst the *Stipa* species (Speargrass) and *Sida corrigata* (Corrigated Sida) on the lower slopes.

At about mid-way we could hardly see past the *Leptospermum divaricartum* (Hill Teatree) due to enormous recent growth, being our second distinctive species. Some buds were open, but it was the height, width and very healthy foliage of the shrubs that were impressive. *Lomandra patens* (Irongrass) was spotted amongst the rocks, also *Pterostylis nana* (Dwarf Greenhood) and one *Solanum ferocissimum* (Spiny Potato-bush), a delicate but very spiny rare plant and not yet in flower. *Cheilanthes sieberi* (Mulga Ferns) were numerous as were seedlings of *Hibbertia obtusifolia* (Grey/Hoary Guinea-flower), but oddly no mature shrubs of these were seen.

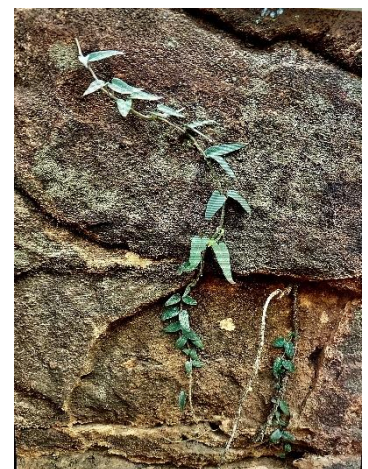
*Phebalium obcordatum* (Club-leaf Phebalium), loaded with buds, came into view as we approached the upper slopes. Seedlings of *Parsonsia eucalyptophylla* (Gargaloo) had been spotted from mid-way, but here mature vines were numerous on both living and dead trees, their size and vigour being impressive. The tree species in the higher altitude were more numerous and included *Eucalyptus dwyeri* (Dwyer's Mallee Gum) and *Acacia doratoxylon* (Currawang/Spearwood) as well as *Callitris glaucophylla* (White Cypress-pine) which grew all the way up the slope.



New shrubs and seedlings of the very distinctive *Cocoparra Pomaderris* were scattered about with vigorous growth being a welcome site. At the summit, the mature *Pomaderris* shrubs from previous seasons (not in flower) were huge in comparison and in excellent condition thanks to the feral goat eradication regularly

carried out by NSW National Parks to protect the species from its biggest threat. Jess Murphy, ranger for Cocoparra, and Field Officer, Jacob, had accompanied the MFNs and were well occupied with measuring and marking GPS points for the shrubs below and around the summit. Monitoring of the species is important due to their rarity and vulnerability and all the good work is succeeding to allow their natural growth and regeneration.

Notable at the summit is the lack of exotic plant species, which would compete with natives in providing food and habitat for many native animals, eg butterflies, which have the habit of hill-topping for courtship during spring and summer. Nowadays, National Parks would try to eradicate exotics on such sites for the benefit of these



Photos from top clockwise: Mt Caley with *Pomaderris* Jacob McCarten  
Spiny Potato-bush Eric Whiting  
Young Gargaloo Margaret Strong  
Young *Pomaderris* Rowena Whiting

insects. With all the **Gargaloo** growing on our mountain tops, we would hope one day to see a **Lesser Wanderer butterfly** (*Danaus chrysippus*) which uses these leaves as a food plant in its larval stage – something to watch out for during the warmer months.

A sign atop the cairn at the summit spells the words “**Cave Hill**”, punched into the metal, so perhaps the site was known by that name in the past. The walk down, as with the walk up, was very quiet regarding birds. We recorded only a few definite sightings and only missed a few due to poor visibility through the trees. A highlight though, at both beginning and end, was the sight and sound of two **Glossy Black-Cockatoos** flying over Spring Hill Picnic Area.

Bird List:

Glossy Black-Cockatoo [2], White-plumed Honeyeater [9+], Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater [8+], Australian Raven, Eastern Yellow Robin, Striped Honeyeater, Mallee Ringneck, Grey Shrike-thrush, Brown Treecreeper, Yellow Thornbill.

**Margaret Strong**

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## Four Ferns for Falcon Falls

After our walk up Mt Caley and lunch at the Spring Hill Picnic Ground most of us took the walk up to Falcon Falls. I took the opportunity to check the status of the ferns that grow up there.

We rarely see much water going over the falls but water constantly seeps down the crevices to maintain wet areas at the bottom of the falls. During the height of the Millenium Drought there were still wet patches though turned into foul smelling mud holes by goats. I feared for the survival of ferns in particular the Bat’s Wing Fern *Histiopteris incisa*. It survived and I was pleased to see luxurious growth of this yellowish green fern with its broad rounded pinnules (the final segments of the much divided fronds).

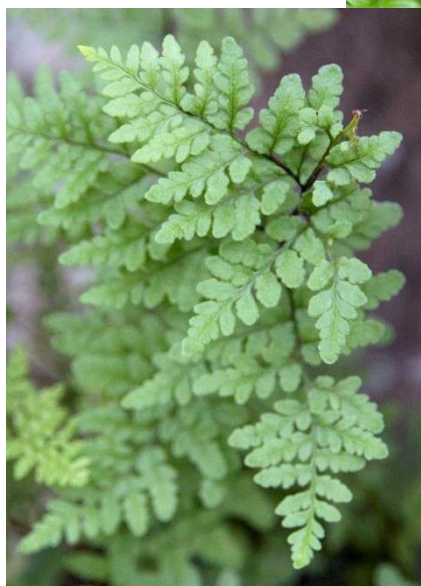


Alongside and almost crowding out the Bat’s Wing were fronds of Tender Brake *Pteris tremula* with its narrower, pointed and mid-green pinnacles giving a sharp contrast. Both of these ferns have a very limited occurrence in the Cocoparra National Park. Goat Creek Falls and Woolshed Falls are the only places in the Park that I know have

ferns other than the Mulga Fern *Cheilanthes sieberians* and Blanket Fern *Pleurosorus rutifolius*. Eagle Falls may be another site but it is very difficult to get to the base of it.



Tucked well into the overhangs, Necklace Fern *Asplenium flabellifolium* spreads its ribbons of paired pinnacles. The fourth fern was the ever present Mulga Fern so frequently found as a major part of the ground cover in the Park. A more thorough search might even find Blanket Fern among the crevices as a fifth fern species.



**Eric Whiting**



Photos from top clockwise by  
Rowena Whiting:  
Bat’s Wing Fern  
Tender Brake  
Mulga Fern  
Necklace Fern

## Narrandera Landcare's Frog Hotel Workshop

Our Landcare group operates Narrandera's Community Food Garden. The members up there help us with our propagating of native seedlings, and we help them with the maintenance of the site. All of us are constantly looking at ways to get more of the community involved in the Food Garden.



With the help of Nioka Dupond from Murrumbidgee Landcare we've been holding school holiday activities there, engaging kids in educational things about the environment and promoting awareness of the garden.

We had a workshop making Seed Bombs in the April holidays. We didn't get a lot of attendees, but it was still worthwhile (and fun!). For the July holidays we decided on a Frog Hotel Making Workshop. For some reason this got a lot of traction on social media and was very well attended.

We had at least 20 kids, and maybe 15 adults, listening to the different calls of the various frogs in the area. I played recordings of the Barking Frog and one of the Banjo Frogs, also known as Pobblebonks. The kids really liked learning and repeating the word "Pobblebonk". (I like saying "pobblebonk"!) And I just had to play the call of Western Australia's

[Motorbike Frog](#) as it's so unique and aptly named. There's a webpage on [Frog ID](#) about them which has a good recording also.

Then we moved on to the Peron's Tree Frog. Lots of the kids had heard the machine-gun like call of this frog before. I explained that tree frogs were the ones hanging on their screen doors and are the only ones going to use these hotels. Then we got stuck into making the hotels.

There's lots of different ways to make these on the internet, but we basically used re-purposed old containers with no holes in them, stood some plastic pipes in them and filled in the container with gravel to support the pipes. We had fittings like elbows and tees to put on the pipe pieces, and we had some soil and Tufted Burr-daisy (*Calotis scapigera*) for anyone wanting to improve the frog habitat by planting something to attract insects.

There was a frenzy of 40 minutes activity and lots of hotels were built in all sorts of configurations. These will be situated all over Narrandera's backyards, just waiting to offer accommodation to any tree frogs looking for a safe refuge.

Our next school holiday activity may be constructing insect hotels. Or it might be a walk around Narrandera Wetlands, listening for frogs and throwing seed bombs. We'll decide in September.

My brother owns [Think Water - Leeton](#) and has given [Narrandera Food Garden](#) lots of unacknowledged support over the years. This time I'd like to offer Narrandera Landcare's thanks for the donation of pipes and fittings for our Frog Hotel workshop.



Glenn Currie

Frog hotel at the Narrandera Food Garden

## Slimy Seaweed in our Bush

Have you noticed this slimy looking, sea-weedy thing around your garden or in the bush? They are most likely to be seen during wet weather and in the cooler months. They are quite common. I had wondered if it were one of the slime moulds, but no. scientific name is *Nostoc commune*, or Star Jelly, it is a cyanobacteria. The first time I'd heard of cyanobacteria was from a visit to the hypersaline Shark Bay stromatolites in WA, so my brain spiked when I heard of this local species.

*Nostoc commune* is a colonial species of cyanobacterium. It initially forms a small, hollow gelatinous globule which grows and becomes leathery, flattened and convoluted, forming a gelatinous mass with other colonies growing nearby. When wet, *Nostoc commune* is bluish-green, olive green or brown but in dry conditions it becomes an inconspicuous, crisp brownish mat.

*Nostoc commune* is found in many countries around the world. It is able to survive in extreme conditions in polar regions and arid areas (like ours). It is a terrestrial or freshwater species and forms loose clumps on soil, gravel and paved surfaces, among mosses and between cobbles.

But apart from being an interesting slimy thing, the cyanobacteria are the reason why human (and most other life forms) even exist on Earth. Without them we would never have evolved. As of 2010 the oldest undisputed evidence of cyanobacteria is from 2.1 billion years ago, but there is some evidence for them as far back as 2.7 billion years ago.

### The Great Oxidation Event (GOE) (2.5 to 2 billion years ago)

Cyanobacteria are the first organisms known to have produced oxygen. By producing and releasing oxygen as a by-product of photosynthesis, cyanobacteria are thought to have converted the early oxygen-poor, reducing atmosphere into an oxidizing one, causing the GOE and the "rusting of the Earth" which dramatically changed the composition of life forms on Earth. The current scientific understanding of when and how this changed largely began with the work of the American geologist Preston Cloud in the 1970s.

Oxygen started to accumulate in the atmosphere, with two major consequences. First, oxygen likely oxidized atmospheric methane to carbon dioxide and water. This weakened the greenhouse effect of the Earth's atmosphere, causing planetary cooling, which has been proposed to have triggered a series of ice ages.

Second, the increased oxygen concentrations provided a new opportunity for biological diversification, as well as tremendous changes in the nature of chemical interactions between rocks, sand, clay, and other geological substrates and the Earth's air, oceans, and other surface waters. The availability of oxygen greatly increased the free energy available to living organisms, with global environmental impacts. For example, mitochondria evolved after the GOE, giving organisms the energy to exploit new, more complex morphologies.

The GOE triggered an explosive growth in the diversity of minerals. It is estimated that the GOE was directly responsible for more than 2,500 of the total of about 4,500 minerals found on Earth today. Most of these new minerals were formed as hydrated and oxidized forms due to dynamic mantle and crust processes.

Oxygen loving life including us thrived, and cyanobacteria continue too. Cyanobacteria species have uses in biotechnology for bioethanol production, food colourings, as a source of human and animal food, dietary supplements and raw materials. Some also produce a range of toxins known as cyanotoxins that can pose a danger to humans and animals, for example, our common blue-green algae. The Star Jelly is reported to be eaten as a salad.

### Neil Palframan

Sources are Wikipedia entries "*Nostoc commune*", "Cyanobacteria" and "Great Oxidation Event".





## Narrandera Landcare's National Tree Day 2023

Our Landcare group's major project this year was the propagation and planting out of various species of acacias and hobbushes to highlight the threatened status of Superb Parrots, and to add to the habitat they require throughout the district.

This project was funded by Landcare Australia through a donation from Michael King to assist small native nurseries like ours. The goal of the project was to grow and give-away these seedlings to landholders. We provided a lot of the seedlings to six schools from Lake Cargelligo to Whitton/Murrumbidgee for them to plant for National Tree Day. They were all supplied with tree guards and teaching resources about Superb Parrots.

The rest were planted at our own National Tree Day (NTD) planting site at the Narrandera Fisheries Centre. Four local schools helped in the week leading up to NTD, planting the acacias and hobbushes, as well as native grasses, forbs and Drooping She-oaks (*Allocasuarina verticillata*). These She-oaks were our focus last year, publicising and providing more habitat for the Glossy Black Cockatoo. The Fisheries site is a good location for them as the Glossies fly over from the Narrandera Hills to Galore Hill so we wanted to get a few in there.

The schools are always good to plant with. My highlight of their planting was on two different days, two individual students from the primary schools found some cones on the ground from the River Oaks (*Casuarina cunninghamia*) that were planted years ago at the Fisheries site. They both came up with the small River Oak cones and asked if these were what the Glossies ate? The kids probably planted with us last year and remembered the specific diet of the Glossies. I was just impressed by their observation skills and how they wondered about what they had discovered! Then I did my best to explain how the Oaks were related, the fruits were similar, but the fruit from the Glossy's feeding tree is much bigger.

On the Friday morning we planted with Narrandera East Infants. These kids are Kinder to Year Two. Cute as all get out, and so enthusiastic to plant, but after talking for 60 seconds about planting for threatened species, 41 blank faces made me realise I had my demographics wrong, so I handballed the whole procedure to their principal. She ably took up the ball, organised the kid's planting etc. After they planted, these kids threw around some seed bombs we made months ago. I never know how to gauge how well these school plantings go, but if the students and teachers all seem happy, I think we're on the right track.

On Friday afternoon, Neville Bamblett from Narrandera High School, brought some students from their [Clontarf Academy](#) to help plant. I've taken this from their website "*The Clontarf Foundation exists to improve the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and by doing so equips them to participate more meaningfully in society.*" I really liked how each of these students introduced themselves and shook my hand. We planted some trees together then they did me a great favour by helping mark out and position stakes for the community planting day on the Sunday. They did everything I asked and were a pleasure to work with.

On the Sunday community planting morning, several Field Nats were amongst the fifty volunteers who helped us plant. We had brilliant weather, and around 1000 acacias, hobbushes, grasses and forbs were planted, tree-guarded and watered in. This was a great community effort!

A community effort involves many people and our Landcare group would like to thank Michael King, Landcare Australia, all the schools and volunteers who came along or helped in propagating, the Narrandera Argus, and Leeton Toyota for their many years of tremendous support! Peter Cirillo and Narrandera Pizzeria were there in spirit and will probably be with us again next year. And Narrandera Fisheries Centre gets a special mention. It's actually



very hard for us to find a site to plant, so when the Fisheries staff allowed us to plant there, did the site prep, hosted the schools, helped us plant, then put on a BBQ! – it’s especially appreciated.

On the Sunday afternoon, Margrit, a MFN and NLG member, sent me a photo of all the gloves she had washed and hung out to dry. She’s already helping us get ready for next year!

**Glenn Currie**

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## **Birds on Farms**

### **About the Birds on Farms Program.**

We partner with landholders to learn more about birds and their habitats on private rural properties. We can then use the information gathered to conserve and protect woodland birds.

After initial monitoring of the birds which occur on rural properties, to gain an understanding of the species assemblages that occur there across all seasons, the Birds on Farms project then supports the landholders in planning, and then implementing, appropriate habitat management on their properties.

Our long-term objective is to support landholders and local communities to enhance populations and diversity of woodland birds and their habitats within a landscape that continues to be agriculturally productive and profitable. To achieve this, we provide participants with opportunities to be involved in a range of activities, including the development of tailored habitat plans, regular bird monitoring surveys and site visits, training workshops and educational events, and access to partnerships and subsidies for on-ground works.

### **My involvement**

On the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June I went to Mundarlo (on the Murrumbidgee river, 50km east of Wagga Wagga) and Book Book (south of Ladysmith) to complete the winter Birds on Farms surveys with Darcy Creece from Birdlife (Albury). We surveyed 10 sites in total. They ranged from remnant woodland, revegetation sites, areas along the Murrumbidgee and Hillas creek/lagoon and two homestead gardens.

The birds on farms surveys started with 8 sites in January 2022, and the 2 homestead sites at Mundarlo and Trewalla were added in November 2022. The property owners have studied holistic management, which involves rotational grazing to improve grass cover and the range and health of native vegetation.



The weather wasn’t conducive to bird surveying with grey skies and the occasional shower of rain. We saw 41 different birds in total over the 10 sites. The highlights being Southern Whiteface, Grey-crowned Babbler, Striated and Spotted Pardalote.



We also did an incidental search while having our lunch at the “Yabtree West” cattle grid and were entertained

by a couple of Jacky Winter and a Restless Flycatcher.

**Janet Hume**

**The Ngurambang: Our Riverina exhibition** is currently on display at the Griffith Regional Art Gallery.



Jason Richardson has worked with the gallery to gather a group of artists from across the region.

One of the greatest benefits in experiencing art is looking through another's eyes and this exhibition asked the artists to share their observations about an environment we all share. Viewers will find familiar scenes and they will also be challenged to recognise others. The result offers insights into the diversity of creative practice across the Riverina while reflecting on individual interests in the landscape.

The idea that art can help audiences build connections with the environment has been developing since I

worked with Landcare and it's something I've explored through previous exhibitions, our not-for-profit Red Earth Ecology and also recorded interviews with artists and places.

On offer is a variety of media that includes text, textiles, sound, painting, photography, found and manipulated objects. Leeton-based artist Jo Roberts brings a new perspective to local history with her use of a Dadaist technique that cuts and reassembles text. Dr Greg Pritchard has been a prominent advocate for the arts in the region and he shares a project to record the length of the Murrumbidgee River, which has been developing and was part of an exhibition in Canberra last year. Marita Macklin's embroidery skills are blossoming and there will be much more to see from local names as well.

I feel it is important to help connect people with the environment for the demonstrated benefits to mental health and to educate about the distinct beauty of our region. We are all part of the Country and our livelihoods depend on recognising our role to preserve it for future generations.

Ngurambang: Our Riverina is supported by Griffith Regional Art Gallery, Red Earth Ecology, Western Riverina Arts and Create NSW through funding from the NSW Government.

**Jason Richardson**

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### **An unfamiliar sighting in Griffith (Hyandra St)**



Photo is by Phillip Williams in Leeton 2016

Just at the point when you believe you are familiar with the birds in your surroundings, an unfamiliar call betrays the silence and gets you excited... his call was a delightful combination of twittering, chattering, and tinkling little bird sound I had never heard before. I followed the call to a large dense tree nearby but couldn't, locate the songster.

Some days later a small brown bird came into my Grevillea bush and I noticed the beak was longer than the other L.B.J's that visit my garden..., Walla..., the **Brown Honeyeater...Lichmera indistincta!!!**

I am sure it must be locally nomadic as its calling is spasmodic.

WHATEVER, It is a great delight for me to have this little bird

visit my garden... Sue Chittick-Dalton. s

**A comment from Neil Palframan:** I had heard reports of Brown Honeyeaters for years from Leeton before I saw one in Griffith. I saw it first time in Nericon in Sept 2018, and at Boorga Rd / Campbells in 2020 and 2022, and about the same time in town at Blumer Ave, which is close to Sue. I also heard one off Wyangan Ave but could not get eyes on it. So it would be quite understandable that this is her first sighting. Yes they are around but not common. And do they migrate? I don't know. PK Birds says "Common. Sedentary, locally nomadic".

# MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

<b>White-Bellied Sea Eagle</b> [1]	South Lake Wyangan	22/07/23	Virginia Tarr
<b>Purple-backed Fairy-wren</b> [3F like]	South Lake Wyangan	22/07/23	Virginia Tarr
Virginia Tarr also noted <b>Red Rumped Parrots</b> [9], <b>Yellow Thornbills</b> [5], numerous <b>Spiney-cheeked Honeyeaters</b> , <b>Singing Honeyeaters</b> [3], numerous <b>White-plumbed Honeyeaters</b> , and <b>Eurasian Coot</b> [12] on 22/07/2023			
<b>Blue-faced Honeyeater</b> [4]	Cutler St, Griffith	all July 2023	Virginia Tarr
<b>Purple-backed Fairy-wren</b> [5]	Cutler St, Griffith	all July 2023	Virginia Tarr
<b>Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike</b> [1]	Palla St, Griffith	all July 2023	Virginia Tarr
<b>Along with Red Wattlebird</b> [3, <b>White-plumed Honeyeaters</b> [3] and in same area of Griffith during July 2023			
<b>Black Swan</b> [6]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga Wagga	04/07/23	Janet Hume
<b>Glossy Black Cockatoo</b> [2]	Spring Hill Picnic Area, Cocoparras NP	10/07/23	MFN group
<b>Varied Sitella</b> [6]	Livingston National Park	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>Scarlet Robin</b> [4]	Livingston NP	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>Golden Whistler</b> [2]	Livingston NP	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>White-browed Babbler</b> [2]	Livingston NP	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>White-throated Treecreeper</b> [12]	Livingston NP	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>Brown Treecreeper</b> [2]	Livingston NP	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>Spotted Pardalote</b> [10]	Livingston NP	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>Fuscous Honeyeater</b> [15]	Livingston NP	09/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>Yellow-faced Honeyeater</b> [15]	San Isadore	14/07/23	S Danckert, J Hume
<b>Cattle Egret</b> [100]	Lake Albert (south)	20/07/23	Sarah Danckert
<b>Magpie Goose</b> [2]	Lake Albert (south)	20/07/23	Sarah Danckert
<b>Superb Parrot</b>	Lake Albert (south)	20/07/23	Sarah Danckert
<b>Nankeen Night Heron</b> [5]	Lake Albert (south)	20/07/23	Sarah Danckert
2 adults & 3 juveniles			
<b>Black Swan</b> [2]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga Wagga	04/07/23	Sarah Danckert
<b>Whistling Kite</b> [3]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga Wagga	04/07/23	Sarah Danckert
1 adult & 2 juvenile			
<b>Spotted Harrier</b> [1-3]	Middle Road, Leeton	01-16/07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Magpie Goose</b> [300/400]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Australian Pelican</b> [200/250]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>White-bellied Sea-Eagle</b> [ 2 ]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Black-fronted Dotterel</b> [8]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Wandering Whistling Duck</b> [3]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Magpie Goose</b> [343 counted]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Black Swan</b> [200/300]	Fivebough Wetlands	16/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
1 pair with 5 downy young			
<b>Baillon's Crake</b> [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Black Falcon</b> [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Magpie Goose</b> [250/300]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Nankeen Night-Heron</b> [45]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
Adults roosting			
<b>Buff-banded Rail</b> [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	29/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Brolga</b> [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Superb Parrot</b> [16]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/ 07/23	Keith Hutton

<b>Red-kneed Dotterel</b> [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
<b>Australian Reed-Warbler</b> [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/ 07/23	Keith Hutton
First singing this season			
No Spotted Harriers have been seen at Middle Road site since 16 July.			
Wandering Whistling Ducks are rare and irregular visitors to Fivebough. The Baillon's Crake sighting and singing Reed-Warbler are early signs of Spring action already, but the early brood of swans was a surprise, as there have been no signs of nest building yet despite big numbers of swans and apparently suitable seasonal conditions at Fivebough.			
<b>Olive-backed Oriole</b>	Woolshed Flat, Cocoparra Nat Park	20/07/23	Neil Palframan
1 adult, 1 immature			
<b>Rock Parrot</b>	Denmark, WA	July /23	Neil Palframan
<b>Eastern Barn Owl</b>	Cnr Apostleyard / Stony Point Rd	mid June to mid July/23	Graham Russell
<b>Firetail Finch</b>	Narrandera Wetlands	09/07/23	Alan Whitehead
<b>White-plumed Honeyeaters</b>	Narrandera Wetlands	09/07/23	Alan Whitehead
and <b>Silvereye</b> feeding together			

## Ground Cuckoo-shrike sighting

On the 21.06.23 Stephen Moore photographed these two (presumably juvenile) ground cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina maxima* in a paddock at the CSU farm Wagga Wagga.

Ground cuckoo-shrikes are an inhabitant of sparse open woodland, mulga and semi-arid scrub. They are the only cuckoo-shrike adapted to foraging on the ground and are often seen perching on fence posts and stumps, hawking flying insects. When flushed they usually fly up to the trees and perch, showing their white rump between black wings.



Janet Hume

## Other Events

### Nicola Dickson – *Only a Remnant* until 20 August 2023 at the Wagga Art Gallery

This exhibition explores biodiversity loss in the Riverina, centering upon the Box Gum Grassy Woodlands that once covered much of south eastern Australia and were the homelands of Indigenous Peoples including Wiradjuri.

<https://waggaartgallery.com.au/whats-on/upcoming-exhibitions/nicola-dickson-only-a-remnant>

### National Science Week 2023 is from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> August

The **Atlas of Living Australia** are holding a series of lunch time webinars 15, 16 & 17 August, 1.00 to 2.00 pm

This special webinar series will cover the following topics: Beginner's guide to the ALA Galah tool (15 Aug); The importance of open science (16 Aug); and maximising your metadata for citizen science (17 Aug).

**Animal sounds.** The ABC are looking for Australia's most loved native animal sound to celebrate National Science Week (August 12 - 20). There are 28 to choose from; from a carolling magpie, bellowing koala, eerie bush stone-curlew ... or the petrifying Tassie devil?

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2023-07-31/australia-favourite-animal-sounds/102577008>

# \*\*\*\* COMING EVENTS \*\*\*\*

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions.

Please register with the nominated person.

- 10 August Thursday**      **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.  
**Guest Speaker:** David Parker Senior Threatened Species Officer, Ecosystems & Threatened Species, South West  
**Topic:** 'conservation of the Plains-wanderer on the NSW Riverine Plains'  
**Bring along your 'show & tell'**  
**Contact:** Dione Russell 0428 536 290  
**Email:** [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)
- 12 August Saturday**      **Tree Planting in Griffith (National Tree Day)**  
**Meeting place:** corner Bromley Rd and Walla Ave.  
**From 9:00am to 11:00pm**  
**For more details, click on** [Griffith Tree Day Planting](#) or [Griffith Tree Day Planting | Facebook](#)
- 27 August Sunday**      **Kindra State Forest, Coolamon**  
**Meet at the entrance on Lewis St North at 9am**  
**Contact:** Sarah Danckert 0427276306 or [spdanckert@gmail.com](mailto:spdanckert@gmail.com)
- 6 September Wednesday**      **Copy for the September newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**  
**Email:** [ericwhiting4@bigpond.com](mailto:ericwhiting4@bigpond.com). Phone: 6953 2612.  
**For significant sightings email** [janethume@icloud.com](mailto:janethume@icloud.com)
- 10 September Sunday**      **Livingston National Park – orchid hunting**  
**Meet at the northern entrance next to the shooting range, off O'Brien's Creek Rd at 10am**  
**Leader:** David Glastonbury [dwglastonbury@gmail.com](mailto:dwglastonbury@gmail.com)
- 14 September Thursday**      **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.  
**Topic –**  
**Bring along your 'show & tell'**  
**Contact:** Dione Russell 0428 536 290  
**Email:** [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)
- 16 September Saturday**      **Outing to Taleeban Mining Reserve**  
This is mallee country, an opportunity to see this country in Spring.  
**Meet at the corner of Burley Griffin Way and Erigolia Road @ 8.30am**  
**Bring:** morning tea and lunch.  
**Register with Dione Russell** [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com), phone 0428 536 290.
- 7 October Saturday**      **Annual Koala Count in Narrandera**  
**Email:** [ericwhiting4@bigpond.com](mailto:ericwhiting4@bigpond.com). Phone: 6953 2612.

## Other Events

Please see Page 13.