

# The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



**November 2023 - Issue #320**

**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



**Waterfowl at Fivebough Wetland Sewage Ponds**

**Nella Smith**

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## **CONTRIBUTIONS**

**For the December 2023 issue by  
Wednesday 6 December**

**To Rowena Whiting**

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**“Choose only one master—nature”**

**Rembrandt**

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

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**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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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 November issue

October has definitely been a month for the birds with members participating in the Twitchathon, Aussie Birdcount and birds on farms survey; Neil has shared his birding experience on Norfolk Island.

The Bidgee Boobooks had a successful three hours participating in the Twitchathon in the Narrandera/Leeton area. Despite missing out on some they'd expected to see they spotted 76 species in the allotted time achieving 2<sup>nd</sup> place in this category. Bravo. The Nap Nappers were also in the race, they were camped out on Nap Nap Station in saltbush country where they spotted 56 during 3 separate 1 hour sessions.

If you'd like to support their efforts by donating to the **Australian Painted-snipe project** select the Bidgee Boobooks or the Nap Nappers team or both. Details can be found at [http://www.twitch24nsw.org/?page\\_id=72](http://www.twitch24nsw.org/?page_id=72).

On the topic of the Australian Painted-snipe, there have been a number of sightings over recent weeks. Matt herring was on the ABC Riverina talking about their find of approximately 25 birds found by local landholder near Balranald. This is the second largest group of APS found for several years and they were concentrated on flooded wheat stubble with receding water and mudflat islands. Matt has managed to attach a tracking harness to one - she flew off strongly and within two days of release we are already getting valuable insights into local movements, roosting and feeding sites, and learning about the diurnal and nocturnal habits of APS. See the recently launched website <https://paintedsnipe.com.au> for footage and link to Matt fitting the transmitter. GLORIA is her name.

As I wrote in the last newsletter, this month is our AGM so please come along or join via Zoom and come forward and fill some of the roles that are needed for the club to continue functioning. Please consider how you could contribute.

This month's activities are still to be confirmed. If you have any suggestions for topics at meetings or places to visit please come forward and contact Eric, Dionee or any of the office bearers.

Again I haven't had much time to put this issue together having had a couple of trips away, so having less copy has been beneficial. Nevertheless many thanks to those who have contributed.

**Rowena.**

## Bidgee Boobooks Twitchathon Report 2023

Three members of MFN joined the Bidgee Boobooks this year, Glenn, Nella and Alan. The oldest member reckoned he had all the birds at his place. We did begin there and found a few that we found no- where else in the three short hours we had allocated ourselves.



After that we strolled around the Narrandera Wetland. Where were the Red-browed Firetails today? A few woodland birds were found here and no-where else: Grey Fantail, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Western Gerygone. After that we travelled north of Narrandera towards Paynters Siding where a glorious Spotted Harrier was scanning the crops for mice. In these parts we also ticked the parrots, Blue Bonnet, Eastern Rosella, Red Rump and Cockatiel. Most years Grey-crowned Babblers are hard to find but this year they were out foraging for insects and grubs. The small kites

greeted us but the Black Kite was not seen until I was on the way home and one was on some road kill. (Too late)

Time was running away, so we hurried on to Fivebough Wetlands where I had been the previous day and knew the wetlands were full of beautiful mud. The Spotted, Spotless and Baillons Crake thought so too. Sharptailed Sandpipers were largely huddled together resting (500 or more in one spot) Red-kneed Dotterel were still busy and a couple of Marsh Sandpipers were hanging around nearby. You can't miss the Shelduck for their beauty and size but you can miss the 400 Magpie Geese and the 7 Brolga that were there the day before. It was great to see the Red-necked Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Glossy Ibis with



Whiskered Tern hawking above for insects. The Spoonbills and the Herons find enough small carp and frogs to keep them at Fivebough. The ducks were largely Grey Teal and Black Duck. Someone told me about 200 Plumed Whistling Ducks the day before, but not today.

When we dropped Alan at his home, the Red Wattlebird dared to show its face (too late). Actually all the honeyeaters were scarce. That might be because we didn't visit enough woodland sites with flowering shrubs and trees. And we ran out of time.

I reckon the best birding is done on foot which is why a three-hour twitch is frustrating for me.



On foot takes time but gives the best results.

This activity is always fun and we always learn something. It makes it even more fun when we found out later that we came second in the State for the 3-hour twitch with 76 different species after Grant Brosie in the Hunter Valley.

Sponsorship donations are being received by BIGnet BSB 182 222 Acct 121211833. Donations will help support Painted Snipe research. (as well as all the other birds that occupy muddy marshes)

**Nella Smith**

**Top left: Spotted Harrier**  
**Right: Australian Spotted Crake (Penny Williams)**  
**Above left: Magpie Goose**



## Nap Nappers Twitchathon – 3 x 1 hour Sessions / periods

Twitchathon 2023 coincided with a lucky trip to Nap Nap Station on the Bidgee south of Hay, Saltbush country. So our team's variation in habit was limited, we - Janet Hume, Lisa Glastonbury, Kerrie Cullis & I had to work to see or hear as many birds we could of 62 we'd seen the previous 2 days.

Our clock started when a Red-capped Robin perched on a River Redgum next to my tent. At our camp there were Rufous Whistlers - such terrific colour & line and the female, so beautiful. Such a contrast to the sharp lines & calls of the Sacred Kingfisher. Other highly recognisable calls were the Whistling Kite, Pied Butcherbird, Peaceful Dove, White-winged Cough, the delight of the Western Gerygone & Striated Pardalote - sadly we didn't manage to ID by sight during the hour, the Spotted. And overhead there were so many Tree Martins, always distracting me with their calls.



Tree Martins – Janet Hume

Overhead viewing was essential in this landscape with so many raptors, while waiting we saw Little Cormorants, Welcome Swallows, Ibis & a raptor in the trees - tricky to view as it sought camouflage, our first sighting of a Collared Sparrowhawk.

Now for the little birds. We had seen some Yellow Thornbills nesting in an acacia, Weebills, it took me a while to see the flash of butter of the Yellow-rumped Thornbills, and we'd agreed on the Buff-rumped Thornbills..... but what was that other LBB? Pale, dark eyes, sticky-upped tail?? This one waited until after the counts with Field guide & website confirmation, we

were finally decisive on the Inland Thornbill. Before our clock finished the hour, we saw an egret in the distance, "You'll know when you see the Great Egret" - thanks Max! And overhead five majestic Pelicans. Bonus!

Next spot was the swampy Nimmie Creek, we were looking down more than up. No Jo Blake's sighted, just the skin. How do they shed those in one piece? We added White Ibis, Yellow Spoonbill and my favourite, Australasian Darter to our tally & the Herons – White-necked, White-faced & Nankeen.

Our last hour was at a Lignum swamp near camp. So many repeated birds, our highlights were the Black-tailed Native-hen and a pair of Orange Chats.

Our total was 52.

This year I've learnt to be a bit more disciplined during the hour as well as looking up more. It really helped to have surveyed the locations at my leisure during the two previous days. And I'm better at noticing the identifying features of those LBB's.

While the clock was running, we missed the Emus, Wedge-tailed Eagle & stunning White-bellied Sea-Eagles. No matter, they're in my mind's eye, along with the Painted Snipe, Twitchathon's education & fundraising purpose.

Sarah Danckert

Photos from left by Janet Hume  
Nankeen Kestrel, Inland Thornbill, Buff-rumped Thornbill.



## Narrandera's Aussie Birdcount for 2023

Birdlife Australia's 2023 [Aussie Birdcount](#) was held 16-22 October. It was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this project and for several years I've been promoting it through Narrandera Landcare's network to encourage people to take an interest in what's around them and do something pro-active by submitting a count.

The Aussie Birdcount is a great way for novice naturalists to learn about their local birds and contribute to a citizen science project. It involves registering, downloading an app, then counting all the birds you see in your backyard, local park, favourite nature spot in 20min blocks. The app is simple to use and has a useful bird identification function built in.

It also allows people to see all the counts submitted from around Australia for individual postcodes and it was great to see Narrandera's 2700 postcode had 44 counts recorded this year. Our counts have been growing year by year, but this was a huge jump which is so encouraging! There's a lot of people out there who may wish to be more involved with Narrandera Landcare or MFN if we can find a way to reach them.

Out of curiosity I looked up the stats for our neighbours. Leeton's 2705 recorded 41 counts and Griffith (2680) had 55 so Narrandera compares very well. Wagga City Council worked hard and publicised the count heavily this year through their [Sustainable Wagga Wagga](#) team and had an incredible 308 counts for 2650. As a bigger centre they were able to provide staff to hold Aussie Birdcount sessions which undoubtedly contributed to their big total.

The Aussie Birdcount will be held again next October.

**Glenn Currie**

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## Wattle Dam Birds

Over a decade or two we had always noted how good the birdlife was at Wattle Dam in Binya State Forest. I recall one Twitchathon when we crawled out of the tent by the Dam and had us a haul of 30 (or was it 40) species within a hundred metres radius.

Now the Dam is a sad place where it is rare to see much at all. Today for a survey I found only Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater and Apostlebird.

So what has changed? The tree cover is the same, scattered mature natives of eucalypt, pine and others. The ground cover is the same, weeds and grasses. The dam is the same, still holding water for a good time. The only change I can see is weekend motorbike use. Can this be enough to send all the birdlife packing?

Meanwhile at the nearby Moss Dam, a half hour brought up a healthy list of 19 species, some in good numbers.

**Neil Palframan**

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## Join the 2023 Great Australian Wildlife Search

This is a citizen science project using environmental DNA (via water samples), to see what's living in the rivers. The program is being run by a not-for profit group out of Melbourne called Odonata with the support of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. It has been launched and will continue through to 27 November and they are looking for volunteers to go out and collect water samples. The sites have been predetermined- and there are a few around the Griffith to Wagga area.

If you'd like to know more and/or become involved go to <https://mailchi.mp/odonata/join-the-2023-great-australian-wildlife-search?e=d29399122f> - there is a map showing the sites and a video of what is involved.

[Learn more](#) about why eDNA sampling is groundbreaking.

Our thanks to Bronwyn Ayre (MDBA) for contacting the Field Nats about this.





## Spring Birds On Farms Survey's Book Book and Mundarlo

Sarah Danckert, Darcy Creece (Birdlife Australia) and I did our spring BOF surveys on the 6/7<sup>th</sup> October.

We were happy with the 20 minute counts across the 10 x 2 hectare sites.

The highlights on day one at "Trewalla" included a pair of lace monitors at site one. They were about 30 meters apart and not at all bothered by our presence.

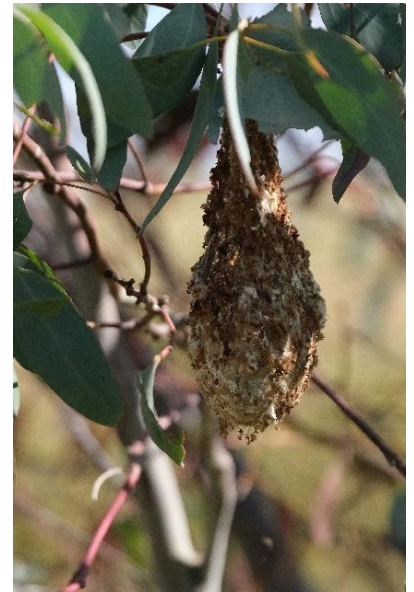
At site number two we saw a small grey bird.....what was that? It had grey upperparts, dark tail, pale underparts and a pale red undertail-coverts. It was a female Mistletoebird and we saw her entering her nest which was a beautiful pear-shaped purse made of plant down, spiders web, egg-sacs, web debris, faded wattle blossom and hung from a leafy twig.

At the homestead we saw a Diamond Firetail and a Little Eagle.

We also saw Chrysolina Beetles feeding on the new leaves of St. John's wort at a revegetation site on Trewalla.

The highlights for day two at Mundarlo were the first sighting of a Rainbow Bee-eater for the season. A Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo and a Golden-headed Cisticola.

**Janet Hume**



**Mistletoebird's nest  
Chrysolina Beetles  
Diamond Firetail**

**(Below) Lace Monitor  
and Sand Monitor**





## A Week on Norfolk Island

The Territory of Norfolk Island, 35km<sup>2</sup>, postcode 2899, is a unique and confusing mix of geography, governance and history. Early settlement by Polynesian and/or Melanesian had disappeared by the time Cook passed by and soon after, the British created their penal settlement which came and went, twice, under the rule of then Colony of New South Wales. The convicts were returned to Van Dieman's Land, the Pitcairn Islanders (descendants of the Bounty mutineers) were resettled there, and the British handed NI to the Australian colonies to administer ... still with me?

It was part of NSW, then transferred to Van Dieman's

Land, then cut from the now Tasmania, to being a "separate Settlement" administered by the Colony of NSW, then the State of NSW. Arriving and leaving you need to show passport and fill out arrivals cards as if travelling international, they vote federally in the ACT, state services including the one school is run from QLD, ... yeah, I'm confused too.

In 1979 it was given limited self-government, but then from the 2000's till today, politics, power and finances have created controversy and grievance. (And I apologise if this condensed history is not the full picture.)

To add to the interesting history, the people are a mix of British and Tahitian from the Pitcairns, mainland AU's, NZers, and a few other Pacificers. And geographically the island is part Zealandia, an almost entirely submerged mass of continental crust that sunk after breaking away from Gondwana, so bears little resemblance to mainland AU.

Yes, you can have a sub-tropical holiday on this island without any of the above facts, but that would be missing half the fun ... don't you think?

Altogether this tiny dot in the ocean has 51 endemic plants, 40 endemic snails, 1 endemic butterfly, and 5½ endemic birds. The half bird is the Norfolk Boobook that was down to only one female of the species left and saved from total loss by making out with a NZ Boobook. Of course, I did not find this bird, but I managed the other five. There have been many extinctions but much of the endangered wildlife is making a comeback thanks to pest eradication and control.

The Norfolk Parakeet is the trickiest to find ... well, you don't find it, it finds you ... and I was lucky to even get the out-of-focus Loch Ness style pic that I did. The Norfolk Golden Whistler is similar to ours, you often see the female and wonder where the more colourful male is, until you find they are sexually monomorphic. The Slender-billed White-eye is a tricky one to id from the books, until you see one and then the difference is obvious ... the calls, the habitat, the darker colour ... but too quick for me to photograph. You hear the Norfolk Gerygone long before you see one, with its call similar to our Western. The Norfolk Grey Fantail is familiar and seems to spend more time at ground level than ours.

The next birding highlight is the ocean birds, unsurprisingly. Hours were "wasted" sitting on rocky headlands snapping seabirds cruising back and forth, almost all the coast is rocky headland. Also there are the blow-ins from across the ocean, and every day around the convict ruins of Kingston I found something new, often solo.

Of the ferals, the California Quail were everywhere, as were the feral chooks which apparently are reverting to their ancestral type the Red Junglefowl. I have never seen so many Sacred Kingfisher. The Black Ducks were almost all hybrids with the Mallards. Song Thrush were easy to see, which was good because apparently they are around Melbourne, but I can't find one. All up I scored a trip



Emily Bay, here be reef, coral and fish



Norfolk Parakeet is easiest to find inside the Parks office

list of 46 including 16 lifers over the six days. Some of the easy ones were those which cause a twitcher frenzy when they land in AU.

From anywhere on the island, the view is of a vast ocean, framed by the Norfolk Island Pines (*Araucaria heterophylla*). There have been efforts to replant the pines where they have been too heavily cleared, and the pines are one of their exports. Norfolk Island Hibiscus (*Lagunaria patersonia*) was often covered in wispy lichen, but not at this moment in flower. It is a paradise for fishing I was told ... the sharks don't bite humans because they are too well fed. There is good snorkelling for fish and coral from the one safe swimming beach. There is beautiful walking in the rainforest of the National Park. It is interesting to watch the boat launchings by crane, which jetty depends on which way the wind is blowing. All up, enough to keep anyone busy for a week.



**Neil Palframan**



**Clockwise from top:  
New stands of Norfolk Pines,  
Norfolk Pine seedlings au naturale,  
Norfolk Golden Whistler was always in the gloom,  
The White Terns are pure white,  
Red-tailed Tropicbird doing circlework.**

**Selected Bird list**

Bar-tailed Godwit  
Brown Noddy  
Great Frigatebird  
Grey Noddy  
Norfolk Gerygone  
Pacific Robin  
Ruddy Turnstone  
Wandering Tattler

Californis Quail  
Norfolk Golden Whistler  
Norfolk Grey Fantail  
Masked Booby  
Norfolk Parakeet  
Pectoral Sandpiper  
Slender-billed White-eye  
White Tern

Pacific Emerald Dove  
Red Junglefowl  
Song Thrush  
Sacred Kingfisher  
Pacific Golden Plover  
Red-tailed Tropicbird  
Sooty Tern



# MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

<b>Glossy Ibis</b> [21]	Nericon Swamp	23/09/23	Neil Palframan
<b>Freckled Duck</b> [1]	Campbells Swamp	25/09/23	Neil Palframan
<b>Painted Honeyeater</b> [2-6]	McCann Rd	27/09/23	Neil Palframan
<b>Painted Buttonquail</b> [2]	Cocoparra (Spring Hill)	31/09/23	Neil Palframan
<b>Eastern Yellow Robin</b> [6 but possibly 20]	Cocoparra (Spring Hill)	31/09/23	Neil Palframan
<b>Turquoise Parrot</b> [1]	Cocoparra (Moss Dam)	31/09/23	Neil Palframan
<b>Australian Ringneck</b> [1]	Botanic Gardens, Wagga Wagga	10/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Wedge-tailed Eagle</b> [2]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>White-bellied Sea-Eagle</b> [2]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	27/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Collared Sparrowhawk</b> [1]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Nankeen Night Heron</b> [20]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	27/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Buff-rumped Thornbill</b> [8]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Inland Thornbill</b> [2]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Black-tailed Native Hen</b> [1]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Sacred Kingfisher</b> [10]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Southern Boobook</b> [1]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Welcome Swallow</b>	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Tree Martin</b> [20]	"Nap Nap Station", Maude	28/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Fairy Martin</b> [6]	"Trewalla", Book Book	06/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Mistletoe Bird</b> [1] Female	"Trewalla", Book Book	06/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Diamond Firetail</b> [1]	"Trewalla", Book Book	06/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Australian King Parrot</b> [1]	"Trewalla", Book Book	06/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo</b> [1]	"Gundillawah" Mundarlo	07/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Rainbow Bee-eater</b> [1]	"Gundillawah" Mundarlo	07/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Golden-headed Cisticola</b> [1]	"Mundarlo"	07/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Fairy Martin</b> [50]	Mundarlo Bridge	07/10/23	J.Hume, S.Danckert
<b>Superb Parrot</b> [8]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga	22/10/23	J.Hume, S. Moore
<b>Superb Parrot</b> [6]	Lake Albert, Wagga	17/10/23	J. Hume, C. Reid
<b>Superb Parrot</b> [6]	Narrandera Food Garden	02/10/23	Glenn Currie
<b>Superb Parrot</b> [7]	Old Narrandera Road	02/10/23	Glenn Currie
<b>Buff-banded Rail</b> [1+H 1]	Campbells Wetland	09/10/23	Virginia Tarr
<b>Glossy Ibis</b> [10+]	Nericon Swamp	09/10/23	Virginia Tarr
<b>Glossy Ibis</b> [20+]	Campbells Wetland	09/10/23	Virginia Tarr
<b>Glossy Ibis</b> [8+]	Tharbogang Swamp	14/10/23	Virginia Tarr

Virginia has a full list of what she has been seeing at the various wetlands close to Griffith over the month

The Manning Great Lakes Birdwatchers visited the area over the week of 19-22 October and have provided a detailed list of what they observed at each site Nericon Swamp, Campbell's Wetland and Lake Wyangan, The Pines Picnic Area and Jacks Creek (Cocoparras National Park); Binya Forest Dam, Springhill Picnic Area, Fivebough Wetlands including the Hooey Road Lookout; Turkey Flat, McCaugheys Lagoon, McCaugheys Park (Yanco); Narrandera Wetlands, Brewery Flat, Narrandera Common; Leeton Caravan Park. Virginia was in contact with them. Please let me know if you'd like a copy - Ed.

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

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions.

Please register with the nominated person.

- 9 November Thursday**      **Annual General Meeting and Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.  
**A Zoom meeting link has been sent to members.**  
**Topic –**  
**Bring along your ‘show & tell’**  
**Contact:** Dione Russell 0428 536 290  
**Email:** [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)
- 6 December Wednesday**      **Copy for the December newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**  
**Email:** [ericwhiting4@bigpond.com](mailto:ericwhiting4@bigpond.com). Phone: 6953 2612.  
**For significant sightings please email** [janethume@icloud.com](mailto:janethume@icloud.com)
- 14 December 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 or 17 December**      **Christmas/end of year get together**  
**Where / what / time – to be discussed at the November meeting**

## Other Events

### OTHER EVENTS

**Frog ID Week** is on 3 - 12th November and is one of the best Citizen Science projects to be involved with. With the amount of water around there's no shortage of frogs calling and the Australian Museum would love your input! It's an easy to use app, very educational and contributes tremendous scientific data.

Download the free app and register now. Remember, every call counts!

[Learn more about FrogID Week 2023 here!](#)

### Bird Surveys

**2023 Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys,**

Dates for 2023/24 are October 14/15, and February 17/18 2024.

