

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



June 2024 - Issue #326

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Website: www.mfn.org.au

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

Objectives

To facilitate and promote the knowledge of natural history, and to encourage the preservation and protection of the Australian natural environment, especially that of the Murrumbidgee River Valley

Birds in amongst the trees at Murraguldrrie

Photographers
Janet Hume &
Sarah Danckert



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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the July issue by

Wednesday 3 July

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

*"In all things of nature there is
something of the marvellous"*

Aristotle

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

President:	Sarah Danckert	0427 276 306	Editor:	Rowena Whiting	0429 726 120
Vice President:	Margaret Strong	0434 060 973	Committee:	Eric Whiting	6953 2612
Vice President:	Alan Whitehead	6959 3779		Nella Smith	0428 890 537
Vice President:	Virginia Tarr	0434 831 031		Janet Hume	0408 238 890
Secretary:	Dionee Russell	0428 536 290	Website Co-ordinator:		
Treasurer:	Glenn Currie	0488 563 321		Virginia Tarr	0434 831 031

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; (Leeton, Griffith, Narrandera areas) AND ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH (Wagga Wagga area)

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

Membership enquiries:

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

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Welcome to the June issue

Another issue full of interesting items. Many thanks to all who have contributed. Do include any references to information from other sources and images should be accredited.

Unfortunately two of last month's outings were cancelled due to wet weather making the roads impassable so hence no reports there. However, the earlier one to Murruguldrie forest reserve is well represented with three people sharing their experience and a fourth about some ants that attracted attention. We can learn more about cultural burns and are introduced to a new book Elizabeth Gould (John Gould's wife) who travelled and worked alongside her husband. was the artist for her husband's book. Plenty to enjoy.

Margaret has added the pronunciation for scientific names; does it help? do you like it? We would welcome your feedback.

Let's hope we don't have any weather issues this month.

Enjoy Rowena.

Plants of Ingalba Booklets

Brittany Turner, the Bidgee Mid Local Landcare Coordinator, tracked down some copies of the *Plants Of Ingalba* booklets for our club. It has 70 pages (139 plants) with a coloured photo and a description of each.

A lot of people and organisations were involved in producing these and they're a terrific resource for anyone interested in the flora of the Temora area.

If you would particularly like your own copy, please contact us. Otherwise, I envisage keeping some at Wagga, some at Leeton, and people can borrow them for outings to the area.

Thanks Britt!

Glenn Currie



May Yellow Room Meeting

At May's Yellow Room meeting Glenn Currie did a PowerPoint presentation on the grant MFN awarded **Narrandera Landcare** in 2019. Glenn started with showing his first landcare planting in 2018, then how their group started propagating their own seedlings for planting in future years, and why they applied for a MFN Environmental Grant as a backup in case their propagating didn't go well.

His slideshow covered their propagating and tree planting endeavours over the proceeding years up till 2023 and emphasized the partnerships Narrandera Landcare has built with various schools, businesses, organisations, and the local community.



Propagating group in the early days

For Show and Tell,



Joy Young brought in a dead microbat she had found and Alan identified it as a [Gould's Wattled Bat](#)

And Margrit Martin brought in a **large "leafbag" held together with silk** (left), found on the ground. She had this in her car and house for a month thinking it being so old there would be nothing alive in it. We all got a surprise in the Yellow Room (Margrit most of all) when **a few tiny caterpillars** (right) started to emerge from it. We then cut the bag open and observed the detritus of its older occupants.



MFN's 2024 Environmental Fund Grant Recipients

Our club received a lot of grant applications this year which was great to see. A sub-committee was formed to assess and award the grants and there were three successful applicants.

- ❖ Andrew Thompson, "**Yarrabimbi Glossy Black Cockatoo Nestboxes**". This project will see Habitech nestboxes installed on Andrew's property in the Colinroobie Hills.
- ❖ Hay Plains Landcare, "**Flight To Conservation : Protecting the Black Falcon through Storytelling**". The Creative Catchment Kids program at Hay Public School will be focused on the conservation efforts involving the Black Falcon. Year 6 students will have hands-on learning experiences that will involve writing, community engagement, environmental education and creativity. By instilling values of environmental stewardship, the project hopes to cultivate mindsets that can lead to lifelong commitments to environmental protection and sustainability.
- ❖ Brungle Public School/Brungle Environmental Education Cultural Centre, "**Buwanha-bu Bagaraybang-bu (Grow and Restore)**". This project is an initiative aimed at revitalising the Brungle Environmental Education and Cultural Learnscapes and seeks to mend the disrupted elements of the local ecosystem, fostering a landscape where native flora and fauna can thrive once again. At its core, the project is about healing the land, restoring its original diversity, and creating a sustainable model for environmental education and cultural enrichment.

Glenn Currie

Trip to Livingstone – Fungi focused (7 April) and Murraguldrrie (5 May)

While the trip to Livingstone was badged as a fungi exploration despite recent rain it was perhaps too early in the season, not that the walk was without interesting sights.

The walking loop at Livingstone has one major issue. On shooting days, the whole area reverberates with the sound of loud gunfire.

Again, I was reminded how bad I am at looking at small things. Sarah, Pooja, Janet, Glenn and David were finding star fungi, and slime and praying mantis cocoons, which I could see when they were pointed out, but did not notice at first.

I spent a childhood running around in the bush but not learning the names of things, and then I took up rock-climbing with a passion. Walking in the bush was getting to or away from the cliff, often with a heavy pack, and fairly exhausted.

We tended to notice spiders, because one of the crew was an arachnophobe. We used to delight in stepping aside so he would be the one to walk through one of Mt Kaputar's Jewel Spider webs and watch him do his frantic back slapping jig. One day he almost pushed me off a 70 metre cliff rushing from a large spider so he perhaps had his revenge.

When I took up bushwalking later, it was mostly about getting somewhere quickly and efficiently. I did long solo walks, and long walks with others.

I needed to slow down. I knew this. Two of the books I read while studying my thesis were John Landy's (runner and ex-governor of Victoria) *A Coastal Diary: A Study of One of Australia's Wildest and Most Beautiful Coastlines* and *Close to Nature: A Naturalist's Diary of a Year in the Bush*. The first is set on the Victorian coast West of Geelong, and the second up in Khancoban, one of the places I lived while growing up. I was so impressed with his knowledge of flora and fauna.

I'm embarked on a relationship with a woman who was a twitcher. I learnt a lot more about birds. She went on to complete a PhD on Grey Headed Babblers, but we had separated by then. I had come to the realisation that I was more interested in the birds' jizz, than their scientific names.

I took up working in Regional Arts, driving all around NSW, and most weeks I camped in a National Park, but was still running through the bush.

The couple of trips I have gone on with the Field Nats have taught me to slow down and look, but I still have more to learn. At Livingstone, I saw the grey kangaroos, and the back of a running wallaby which looked quite red and Sarah suggested it might be a Red-Necked Wallaby or Bennett's Wallaby *Notamacropus rufogriseus* but it appears they don't live at Livingstone. There was one little patch of birds, but otherwise it was fairly quiet (I did mention the cannons?).

But slowing down I was able to see some ledge fungi, and some Parson's Bands orchids *Eriochilus cucullatus* (see photo). We also saw some manna and had it explained. And then I read the chapter in Tim Low's brilliant book, *Where Song Began* about manna and lerp and their importance to Australian birds both now and evolutionarily.

On the following Thursday night, I met Sarah and Janet again at a talk by Andrew Skeoch, about his book *Deep Listening to Nature*. It was a thrilling talk and over-lapped with the reading I have been doing on Umwelt, ecoacoustics and animal cognition.

The next day, sitting in the sun on Whillans Hill, I read his invocation to slow down and listen to the bush. More to learn.

The following month, I caught a lift to Murraguldrrie where we walked a loop in the Flora Reserve and then in the State Park/Crown Land.

On the first loop the initial part of the track had a lot of rubbish beside the track, but once we reached the top and dropped down back towards the road it was clearer. In a couple of patches there were lots of little birds (others will detail them) included two varieties of pardalote, a White-faced Honeyeater, and Grey Shrike-thrushes. The path down went through a patch of Callitris a then into an old plantation of Cypress Pine. Close to the road some motorbikes passed us.



When we started the other loop, some men in a ute suggested we should not be there as it was private land which the group counter argued and they drove off. A very different area with granite boulders and slabs. We walked along noting birds and plants (the two areas of expertise in the group) until we got to a massive and beautiful multi-stemmed Red Box *Eucalyptus polyanthemos*. We then turned back to the cars, noting a lot of deer damage on the stringy bark trees.

Another great day, and another reminder to slow down and look deeper.

Greg Pritchard



Grey Shrike-thrush (left), Spotted Pardalote (punk rocker)
Photos by Janet Hume



Murrugldrie State Forest and Flora Reserve, field trip

5 May 2024

The forest has remnant native vegetation including White box - Yellow Box - Blakely's Red Gum Woodland alongside Radiata Pine plantations and grazing farmland.

The Flora Reserve (1524ha) has evidence of native forest logging and evidenced by the variety of plant species, has not had stock grazing for many years, possibly decades. Within it there is a small Cypress Pine plantation.

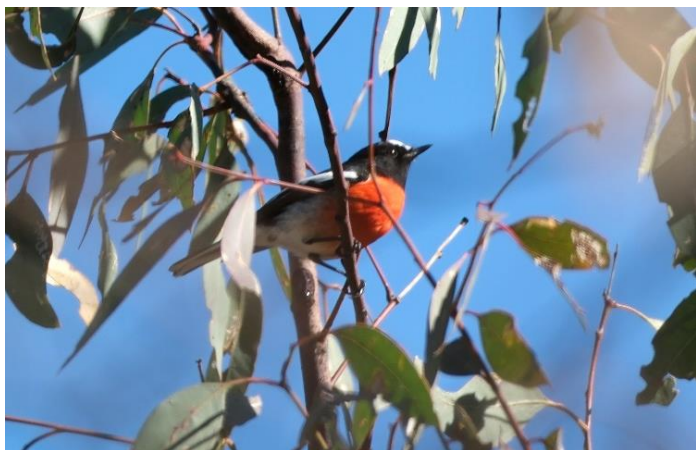
The Travelling Stock Reserve on the opposite (southern) side of the Tumarumba Rd provided an interesting contrast. The disturbed landscape was dominated by Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata*. There were many old growth trees, likely predating European settlement. "Remnant" diminishes their beauty, presence and importance.

Of note, one stood out for me. It was located in an ephemeral creek bed and despite the dry autumn had green grasses beneath its canopy. It had been through drier



seasons seen by many dead limbs with dead mistletoe. Today it has recovered these harsh seasons and appears to be flourishing. May its preservation continue and shade many visitors.

Sarah Danckert



Scarlet Robin by Janet Hume

Murraguldrrie bird list: compiled by Sarah

Eastern Yellow Robin	Striated Pardalote	Spotted Pardalote	Grey Shrike-thrush
Australian Raven,	Grey Fantail,	Golden Whistler	Yellow Thornbill
White-eared Honeyeater	Scarlet Robin	Laughing Kookaburra	Australian Magpie
Brown Thornbill	Crimson Rosella	Galah	Superb Fairywren
Pied Currawong	Fuscous Honeyeater	White-throated Treecreeper	Striated Thornbill
White-winged Chough	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	

Sarah Danckert

Murraguldrrie State Forest - some notes on flora

5 May 2024

The area of the flora reserve that MFN visited was a diverse topography of ridges and gullies. The soil seemed very dry and the ground flora to be in survival mode. That said, this area is obviously rich in diversity and density even though very few flowers were seen. We worked from a plant survey conducted by State Forests in 2003. We were able to add a few to that list but they list an impressive number of ephemerals such as lillies, daisies and orchids that were dormant.

We found St Johns Wort, *Hypericum perforatum* (no surprise there) which prompted a discussion of difference from native Hypericums. So, it seems in our region we may find:

- Matted St Johns Wort, *H.japonicum*. This is a sprawling, herb to 20cm H.
- Small St Johns Wort, *H.gramineum*. This herb is upright, but only 10-44 cm H

In reality these 2 plants look very dissimilar, especially in habit and leaf structure from the weed, *H.perforatum*.

Some Wattles, particularly *Acacia implexa* were found in transition from leaf to phyllode. Our discussion centered on whether a phyllode can have a petiole, as a phyllode is in fact a petiole. So, consulting reference, this may make the issue clearer.

- A phyllode is a flattened petiole which is some plants including many wattles replaces the lamina.
- Petiole is the stalk of a leaf.
- Lamina is an expanded portion of a leaf (or petal).
- Plant keys refer to the 'base' of the phyllode above the pulvinus.
- Pulvinus is a swelling at the base of the base of a petiole.

Paul Walker

Plant species identified 5 May 2024 by MFN compiled by Paul

Numbers refer to - N-E Section of flora reserve (1) and bushland to west of flora reserve (2).

<i>Stypandra glauca</i> 1 2	<i>Cassinia longifolia</i> 1	<i>Cassinia sifton</i> 1
<i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i> 1	<i>Xerochrysum viscosum</i> 1	<i>Dichondra repens</i> 1
<i>Callitris glauca</i> 1	<i>Hibbertia obtusifolia</i> 1 2	<i>Acrotriche serrulate</i> 1
<i>Brachyloma daphnoides</i> 1 2	<i>Melichrus urceolatus</i> 1 2	<i>Daviesia latifolia</i> 1
<i>Daviesia leptophylla</i> 1	<i>Dillwynia sp (sieberi?)</i> 1	<i>Glycine clandestine</i> 1
<i>Hardenbergia violaceae</i> 1 2	<i>Hovea heteraphylla</i> 1	<i>Platylobium formosum</i> 1
<i>Pultenaea foliolosa</i> 1	<i>Acacia buxifolia</i> 1	<i>Acacia dealbata</i> 2
<i>Acacia gunnii</i> 1	<i>Acacia implexa</i> 1 2	<i>Acacia paradoxa</i> road verge
<i>Lomandra filiformis ssp coriaceae</i> 1	<i>Amyema miquelii?</i> (on Eucalypts) 2	<i>Eucalyptus albens</i> 1 2
<i>Eucalyptus blakelyi</i>	<i>Eucalyptus bridgesiana</i> 1	<i>Eucalyptus goniocalyx</i> 1
<i>Eucalyptus macrohyncha</i> 1	<i>Eucalyptus polyanthemus</i> 1 2	<i>Eucalyptus rossii</i> 1 2
<i>Leptospermum continentale</i> 2	<i>Dianella revoluta</i> 1	<i>Microlaena stipoides?</i> 2
<i>Persoonia rigida</i> 1	<i>Exocarpos cuppressiformis</i> 1	<i>Cheilanthes austrotenuifolia?</i> 1
<i>Cheilanthes sieberi</i> 2	<i>Brachychiton populneus</i> 1 2	

Colonial Ant Nests at Murraguldrie Nature Reserve

Beneath several clusters of Red Stringybarks, *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha* (mac-ro-rin-ca) were ant nests spread across the entire area covered by that tree species. They were partly covering the fallen leaves and partly covered by them.



Other tree species also tended to be in clusters, with some mixed species between them, for example Scribbly Gum, *Eucalyptus rossii* (ross-i-eye). There were no colonies of ant nests beneath the other tree species that we noticed in the reserve. We wondered if the trees grew in clusters due to specific soil types and also whether it's a coincidence that the nests were only beneath Red Stringybarks at that site. Perhaps it is the soil that attracted the ants rather than the trees species? These questions remain unresolved.

Ants didn't obviously rush out of the nests as we walked across and over them, though I did coax some out by placing a grass stalk into a nest entrance. The photos I took (shown) have proven to be inadequate for identifying the species, though the genus is most likely Sand-funnel Ants, *Aphaenogaster* (af-ee-no-gas-ter).

The colonies with sandy-rimmed entrances are typical of this genus, as is the relative absence of ant activity visible above ground. It's reported that they get most of their nutrients from 'milking' aphids that live on tree roots deep within the nests, which are supplemented by invertebrates that fall into the nest entrances due to their funnel-shaped construction.

Aphaenogaster ants continually maintain their nests underground, as well as at the entrance, by bringing sand grains to the surface and bumping them around the 'funnel'. As the entrances are close together, the result of this is that the fallen leaves and other accumulated organic matter is covered by soil over time. This activity known as bioturbation, combined with their habit of moving the colony site about twice per year, is thought to create a new biogenic layer of soil about every 100 years over large areas of woodland, which benefits the trees. In a dry climate, nutrients are 'recycled' more efficiently in this way. There are 8 species of *Aphaenogaster* ants spread across Australia, with another 192 world-wide.

By chance, I saw similar ant nests beneath Red Stringybarks in Nadgigomar Nature Reserve, east of Queanbeyan, recently which weren't beneath the Scribbly Gums only metres away. The nests may have been empty, as no workers could be enticed to the entrances after my many attempts. These are observational comments only, which gives food for thought while reading about the nesting habits of this genus in future. Details about the social structure of the colony are also amongst the information available at the touch of a keyboard on your personal device or in a Public Library.

In the meantime, getting better ID photos will be my focus next time I visit Murraguldrie Nature Reserve. My photos so far show the 'petiole' and 'postpetiole' (constricted waist segments between the thorax and the plump abdomen/gaster) but not clearly enough to distinguish species. The head including all eyes, mandibles, antennae segments and a side profile are also essential to distinguish one species from another. Fortunately, these ants are known to be calm when disturbed and don't usually bite when handled – a fact that I'd forgotten on the day.

Margaret Strong

References:

1. Eldridge, DJ and Pichard, J. Effects of ants on sandy soils in semi-arid eastern Australia; Relocation of nest entrances and consequences for bioturbation. Aust Journal of Soil research 32(2), 1994.
2. www.antwiki.org with many links to related information about Aphaenogaster, plus photos.

Cultural Burning

An inaugural Cultural burn was conducted on a Travelling Stock Reserve near Narrandera yesterday. It was in conjunction with Dean Freeman First Nations Cultural Burns Officer, Local Land Services Staff, Murrumbidgee Landcare Incorporated staff, and the local community. A great day was had by all. (Parts of this article were gleaned from the Orange Field Naturalists newsletter)

First Nation Australians have used fire as a tool to care for Country by burning vegetation in a controlled way at the right time of the year for millennia. Cultural burning involves low intensity fire that travels slowly and burns in mosaic patterns. The low intensity burning helps regenerate bush and grassland and promotes biodiversity within the landscape. The mosaic pattern left by the fire help to break up fuel loads lowering the risk of severe bush fires. Returning this practice back to country is also an important part of maintaining first nations culture and traditional ecological knowledge.



They knew how plants reacted to fire and what frequency of burning was appropriate for each ecosystem.

Different ecosystems need different fire regimes and timing. Before colonisation, burning was used to manage country to produce food and medicine. Totemic species also needed to be looked after and their habitat enhanced. (quote from Greg Ingram, Wiradjuri traditional custodian.)

Geoff Selwood from Orange RFS explained how hazard reduction burns have changed. In the past burns tended to be done at the wrong time and were too hot. Experiments have shown that lower temperature burns work and any burn above 350 degrees damages soil structure. Low intensity burns have a flame height of 1 metre or less.

The Rural Fire Service make technical assessments prior to a burn using the Keetch-Byram drought index (which looks at rainfall and temperature), a fuel moisture score and the grass curing rate. If the scores are within suitable ranges a burn can go ahead.

They agreed that the temperature of a fire could be judged by the colour of the resultant ash. Brownish ash is from fires up to 150 degrees with other colours up to white ash from extremely hot fires where the soil and anything in it has been burnt. Benefits of cool fires were that they can stimulate seed germination and dew at night starts a chemical reaction that enhances the soil.

Trees with hollows are now protected prior to hazard reduction burns as something may live in them but also because if it catches the burning tree must be managed for days.

Differences between cultural fire management and RFS hazard reduction burns were summarised.

Cultural Fire Management based on the learnings from the Kuku Thaypan people from Cape York peninsula where cultural burning will be different due to different growth and climatic conditions.

Primary purpose – Maintain cultural protocol, ceremony, lore, and responsibility Country

Desired outcome – Maintain health of Country (plants, animals, soil, water, weather).

Planning involved – On Country assessment, permission to burn from knowledge holders, reading of season through known indicators.

Hazard Reduction Burns

Primary purpose – Reduce groundcover biomass.

Desired outcome – Reduce hazard to life and property.

Planning involves – Satellite imagery, aerial photography, maps and data, predication and spread models, submitted burn plans.

Nella Smith



Birds of the World: The Art of Elizabeth Gould

by **Andrea Hart and Ann Datta**. Prestel, London, 2023.

Copyright is held by the Trustees of the Natural History Museum London.

Book Review

This large format (34cm x 24cm), hard-bound book is filled with coloured copies of a selection of Elizabeth's paintings and drawings, arranged in chronological order of their creation. This order also reflects her skill development as an artist, as she gained experience with mixing pigments and skill in depicting the subtle features of her subjects. Her time in Australia, from 1838-1840, was the pinnacle of her career as she saw the birds alive in their

natural habitats rather than imagining them from collected skins and field notes.

Thoughtfully written biographical notes, combining pertinent information about Elizabeth's personal and professional life, fill the introductory pages. Bird paintings and drawings from five continents comprise the rest of the book with indexes, using current scientific and common names, are at the back. Most of the original artwork contained in this book is held by the Natural History Museum, London.



Elizabeth Gould

Elizabeth Gould (1804-1841) lived in an era of significant scientific discovery and documentation, which she contributed to through her bird art. In 1827 she married John Gould (JG), the renowned British taxonomist, taxidermist, ornithologist and publisher of bird books. Her career as a professional bird artist began with their successful partnership in marriage and business, an opportunity she would not have been likely to have otherwise.

Many British women began botanical illustrations in this era, but Elizabeth (Eliza) was unusual in depicting birds with scientific accuracy, including the plants that they were seen on. Watercolour paint-makers had started using gum arabic combined with pigments to make cakes that were portable, so that natural history artists could work in the field. Paper varieties of texture and size also became available to artists in this era. This enabled Eliza to take an ample supply of paint and paper with her to Australia when she accompanied her husband on the most important field work of his career.

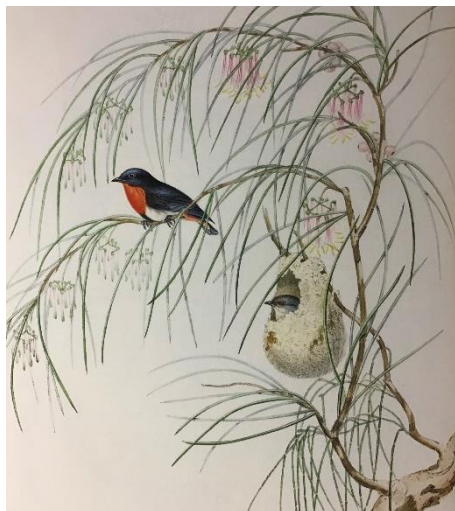
Budgerigar - JG described Budgies as having "extreme cheerfulness of disposition and sprightliness of manner", captured beautifully by Eliza's painting. They took a pair back to England as pets, perhaps starting a trend that spread far and wide.



Crested Shrike-tit - JG described the habit of these birds hopping up tree trunks and tearing bark off to hunt for invertebrates. Eliza shows a male and a female (below) with her olive-green throat.



As Eliza's artistic skills and confidence grew, so John Gould's bird taxidermy improved. Her details of feather colours on various anatomical parts gave John clear directions as to the correct posture for mounting specimens – an observation researched by the authors of this book. John Gould's work was very significant to science in his era, and since, as his taxidermy and taxonomy was commissioned by Britain's leading scientific institutions, being the British Museum and the Zoological Society of London.



Mistletoe Bird - John Gould (JG) described the delicately built nest as purse-like. 'Swallow' *Dicaeum* (Flowerpecker) as common name shows the high esteem these birds were held in.



White-winged Fairywren - JG comments that the bright blue male colours are only displayed while breeding and fade after the chicks leave the nest.



Spotted Bowerbird - JG was the first European to describe bowers, which he marveled at. Eliza's double-plated lithograph includes background Australian scenery and cover two full pages of the frontispiece, displayed as her most esteemed work.

Yellow Rosella - Described by JG from a specimen given by Sir Thomas Mitchell and drawn by Eliza from the same. Not seen alive by the Goulds due to the bird's limited range.



Eliza contributed 600 illustrations to six large, lavishly illustrated folios of birds published by John between 1830 - 1838, plus "The birds of Australia" published in 1848, following Eliza's tragic death after childbirth in 1841. The first six folios feature fine lithographic plates that Eliza herself transferred to stone. She was known for the fast pace and accuracy of her work in all its aspects, while also caring for her children and running the household. They had dedicated servants, but her own workload and output were enormous. She achieved much, both personally and professionally, in her short and brilliant life. The authors suggest that Eliza fully embraced the opportunities she had with John Gould as an avenue for her artistic expression, rather than being driven by his high expectations. This reference book would be a good suggestion to your local Public Library, if you don't want to own a copy yourself.

I learnt about this new book on Elizabeth Gould's bird art after reading a novel by Australian author, Melissa Ashley, titled "**The Birdman's wife**", Affirm Press, 2019. Ashley researched Elizabeth Gould's story from historical sources, including Eliza's letters home to England from Australia and her personal diary.

A review of it, accompanied by more of Eliza's bird art, will appear in a forthcoming MFN Newsletter.

Margaret Strong

Member observations

Eastern Long-necked Turtles

I've been walking the Campbells Wetlands and South Lake Wyangan tracks. At one time a month ago I found a small Eastern Long-neck Turtle stranded on top of thick foot high mangled grass about mid-morning. The day was very warm and sun full on. For it to survive, I picked it up and put it on the wet mud flat close to the water's edge. I didn't think of taking photos until that evening.....

This leads me to the situation, where at South Lake that I had been noticing many small shallow dugouts that have 6-8 white broken eggshells on top of the dugout earth as seen in the photos. There was not any predator footprints found on or near the heaps of sandy dirt. All were exactly the same mounds..... what animal lay those eggs in the sandy soil near the waters edge and then be dug out?



I did a google search and yes they are turtle eggs. So as I've seen the Eastern Long-necked Turtles there, and putting 2+ 2 together, have come up with that conclusion.

The egg shells I've found are white and if I put 1 shell together it would only measure about 3.5 - 4 cms length! They were all similar size..... So who owns these eggs?

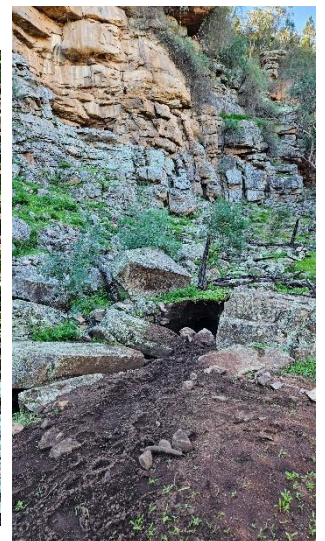
Virginia Tarr

Cocoparra National Park

The Autumn Greenhood *Pterostylis sp* found in the usual spot beside the track on Mt Bingar was the only one found. Close by there were tufts of Cranberry Heath shrubs (*Astroma humifusum*).



The freshly used Wombat hole was beside the Jack's Creek walking track along the creek bank.



Virginia Tarr

Virginia Tarr

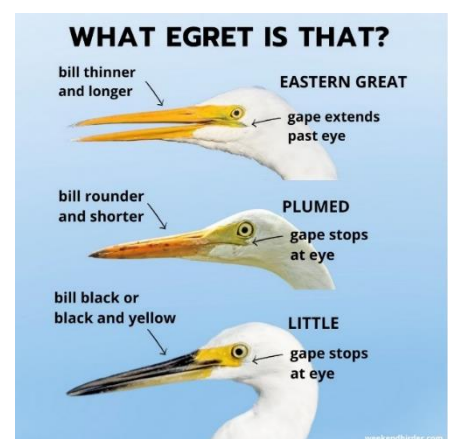
Need a little help in identifying egrets?

I received this image when clarifying an id for the newsletter – it was taken from a website: weekendbirder.com.

Checking this out I found it is quite comprehensive and shows many birds, highlighting their features to help identify.

Worth a look.

Rowena



Spotted at the Causeway at Lake Wyangan. I'm not certain of the id but clearly feral or escaped ducks. Not seen there before and hope they don't breed up.

Similar birds online had these comments "While there is a difference of opinion on whether or not there are still Aylesbury Ducks in Australia, these white ducks may be hybrids or purebred "English Ducks". Pekin and Aylesbury are both known as "English Ducks" and those in Australia may be a mix of the two breeds or possibly pure Pekins." from [McCallum Made](#) a duck and chook website.



And "Both would be domestic variants derived from mallards, escaped or released, the first probably a Pekin Duck." from [Birds in Backyards](#) website.

Does anyone know more?

Neil Palframan

Did you see the Aurora Australis?



I had planned that I would never see the Aurora. The Borealis is too far to travel to warrant the expense. The Australis is rarely seen as we are too far north on our planet. Unless you live on Tasmania, forget it.

But by luck I was in Bacchus Marsh on that night of Saturday the 11th of May. The numbers on the Aurora app were going off the scale ... sky high you might say. Just out of Melbourne the light pollution is less and you can find quiet country backroads. But the pubs and loungerooms must have been empty, it seems everyone had tripped out of town for the chance to see it. And see it we did!

The common advice is "it's difficult to see by eye but it might show up in a photo". Not this night. Not a cloud would hide the beautiful colours spreading across half the sky, clear to the naked eye. Subtle horizontal washes of colours of the rainbow 180° around the horizon ... green, yellow, orange, pink, purple ... at times, the same colours streaking from the horizon straight up into the black starry sky.

The photo is NOT artificially saturated ... this is what it looked like! The only edit to the photo was a small crop, and I straightened the

tower.

Lots of people went out the next night, but sorry, it was a one night only production, and I'm stoked to have seen it.

Neil Palframan

And from the Inbox

Using spiderwebs to catch eDNA (environmental DNA) and learn about local wildlife

By Cason Ho

The author of this article believes spider webs could be our 'secret weapon' to understanding nature.

While spider webs could not trap an elephant, their ability to trap minuscule fragments of DNA from skin cells, hair or bodily fluids could change how scientists learn about wildlife, according to new Australian research. Read the full story:

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-01-31/spider-webs-dna-traps-curtin-university/103402264?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=mail

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Significant sightings

Scarlet Robin Hume	Murraguldrrie State Forest	02/05/24	S Danckert, J
Brown-headed Honeyeater [6]	Murraguldrrie State Forest	02/05/24	S Danckert, J Hume
Golden Whistler [10]	Murraguldrrie State Forest	02/05/24	S Danckert, J Hume
Plumed Whistling Duck [400]	Coleambally Sewage Ponds	03/05/24	Neil Palframan
Superb Parrot [7]	Silvalite Reserve, Wagga Wagga	07/05/24	S Danckert
White-breasted Woodswallow [20]	Silvalite Reserve, Wagga Wagga	07/05/24	S Danckert
Grey-crowned Babbler [4]	Silvalite Reserve	07/05/24	S Danckert
BrownTrecreeper [4]	Bush Heritage, Tarcutta	07/05/24	J Hume
Black-chinned Honeyeater [2]	Bush Heritage, Tarcutta	07/05/24	J Hume
Scarlet Robin [3]	Bush Heritage, Tarcutta	07/05/24	J Hume
White-browed Scrubwren [2]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga Wagga	09/05/24	S Danckert
Duck Pekin and/or Aylesbury	Lake Wyangan, Griffith	13/05/24.	Neil Palframan
Eastern Robust Slider	Nericon	15/05/24	Neil Palframan
Spotted Pardalote [6]	Pomingalarna, Wagga Wagga	16/05/24	S Danckert, J Hume
Brown-headed Honeyeater [6]	Pomingalarna, Wagga Wagga	16/05/24	S Danckert, J Hume
White-browed Babbler [8]	Pomingalarna, Wagga Wagga	16/05/24	S Danckert, J Hume
Brown Trecreeper [2]	Allandale, Narrandera	17/05/24	S Danckert
Red-capped Robin [1]	Woolshed Flat, Cocoparra National Pk	18/05/24	Virginia Tarr
Grey-crowned Babbler [8]	Woolshed Flat, Cocoparra National Pk	18/05/24	Virginia Tarr
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill	Mates Gully TSR, Tarcutta	25/05/24	S Danckert

Other sightings of note These do not meet the criteria of significant sightings that the Committee are discussing – see Meeting minutes for details.

Olive-backed Oriole [1] Feeding on an Orb-weaver spider, we watched it pull the spider from the web.	Murraguldrrie State Forest	02/05/24	Danckert, J Hume
Zebra Finch [2]	South Lake Wyangan	24/05/24	Virginia Tarr



Brown Trecreeper (left), Black-chinned Honeyeater (above)
Taken by Janet Hume at Bush Heritage, Tarcutta

**** COMING EVENTS ****

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions.

Please register with the nominated person so they can be contacted if there is a change in arrangements.

Registering also means that the leader is better able to plan activities.

- 13 June Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.
Topic: Recycling and FOGO
Presenter: Guy Retallick and Jessica Puntoriero, Leeton Shire
Join in person if you can. Zoom will be available.
Bring along your 'show & tell'
Contact: Dione Russell 0428 536 290
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 16 June Sunday** **High environmental value roadsides of the Murrumbidgee area.**
Meet: at 9am
Place: the intersection of the Brobenah Hill Road and Evan Smyles Road
Bring: binoculars, morning tea and lunch
To register or for more details: Eric Whiting ericwhiting4@bigpond.com
- 3 July Wednesday** **Copy for the July newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com Phone: 6953 2612.
- 4 July Thursday** **Committee Meeting @ 7pm via Zoom**
All members are welcome to participate.
Contact: Dione Russell 0428 536 290 or the Club email.
- 7 July Sunday** **Livingstone National Park with Ovens & Murray BirdLife**
Meeting: 9:30am north entrance
Bring: morning tea & lunch.
Contact: Sarah Danckert 0427 276 306 spdanckert@gmail.com
- 11 July Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.
Guest Speaker: Meet the new Murrumbidgee Landcare Co-ordinator Jessie McPherson – awaiting confirmation
Join in person if you can. Zoom will be available.
Bring along your 'show & tell'
Contact: Dione Russell 0428 536 290
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 28 July Sunday** **National Tree Day**
Tree plantings will take place at Narrandera Wetlands and Lake Wyangan, Griffith
- Other events**
- 19 June Wednesday** **Author Talk with Andrew Skeoch**
About his book 'Deep Listening to Nature', Andrew uses audio examples of birdsong and nature in his presentation.
At the Griffith City Library. Registration is required, a free event
Time: 5:30 to 6:30pm
- Andrew Skeoch will be in Wagga Wagga at The Curious Rabbit on 8 August, 6-8pm.