

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



December 2024 - Issue #332

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



30th Anniversary

dinner gathering

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the February 2025 issue by
Wednesday 5 February

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 0429 726 120

*Season's
Greetings*

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

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 December issue

The last issue for another great year of newsletters. And a huge sigh of relief!!

It is time to say a big thank you to all contributors for your many and varied articles, sightings and photos and much much more throughout the year; another full and gratifying year for MFN.

Please make a note of what Nella has written (page 4) regarding the format of bird names, it makes compiling the sightings and the newsletter much easier.

At the AGM last month there have been a few changes to the executive and committee Nella Smith was appointed Vice President (Narrandera), and Graham Russell joined the committee. Unfortunately no one has come forward to take on the Secretary's role. On behalf of the Club I would like to extend a big thank you to Dionee Russell for all the work she has done as secretary over the past 5 years, much of it behind the scenes.

Our 30th anniversary was a very enjoyable weekend for those who were there despite the hot weather. Betty Bradney has related her highlights: "For me it was definitely the return of so many old friends from as far away as South Australia and Merimbula. It was a lovely reunion and I am sure it was enjoyed by all. Thank you, Field Nats, Betty".

I received an email from **Elsie Howe (Dubbo Nats)** sending her "Kind regards to all MFN members past and present for your many contributions 'down south' over the past 30 years - and here's to many more new members in the decades to come - and the continuation of your Journal as an excellent and valuable 'audit trail'!" It was Elsie who pointed out the missing 's' in *Ctenotus robustus*. She included the link <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/37054-Ctenotus-robustus> if you'd like to see more photos and find more out about this skink. Lovely to hear from her.

I also heard from Richard and Anne Andrews (Albury-Wodonga Field Nats) conveying their best wishes to the Club for our 30th anniversary.

Enjoy your read,

your festive season and
your summer break.

Rowena.



Our Celebration of 30 years

30 Years!! How time flies!!

On 22nd November a gathering of New and Old MFN Members came together at the Leeton Soldiers Club to celebrate another milestone. 30 years ago Eric Whiting put an advertisement in the local paper looking for like minded people interested in our environment and to his excitement many people replied and the first meeting was held. I would like to say thank you to Eric for stepping forward and making Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc a reality.

For me personally, my husband, Graham, was the one that was asked to join an outing over 10 years ago and I was just happy to tag along. But, I have to say I have made many friends and met many people with amazing knowledge to share and I am really happy to be a part of this wonderful group.

At dinner on Friday night a casual setting created a great environment to catch up with new and old members. This was lovely, as was becoming acquainted with those we had not met previously.

Our Guest speaker, Rahula Perera, gave us a small talk on how he came to meet Max O'Sullivan and MFN members and then encourage 8 members to take a 14 day Bird Tour to Sri Lanka back in 2019. Thank you Rahula for travelling down from O'Reilly's in Queensland where you are working. It was a big trip for you, but we are happy you took the time to join us.

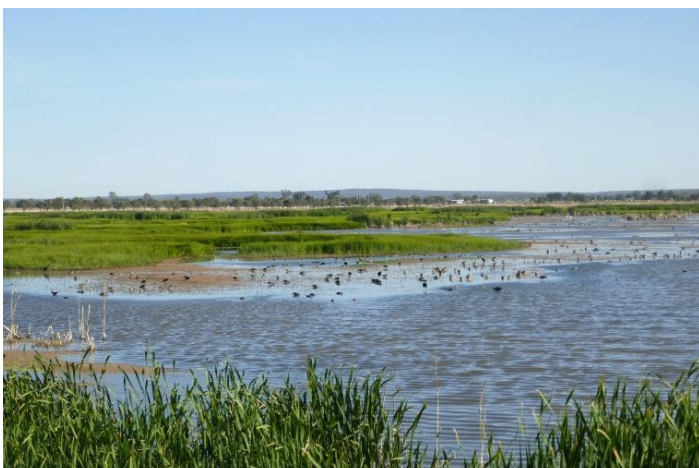


After a good night with lots of stories and a photo with a cake made by Sarah (see cover), we headed home for some fast sleeping so that we could be up and ready the next morning to re-enact the first outing of MFN.

7am @ Fivebough Wetlands and then off to 'Yarrabimbi' in the Colinroobie Hills. It was a very hot morning, but that didn't stop us taking in all the Wetlands and the many birds it had to offer. We didn't begin to head to 'Yarrabimbi' until 10.30am and by now it was 37 degrees.



**Fivebough Wetlands: Group by Dot Green;
At the Brolga Shelter by Graham Russell;
View from the shelter by Rowena Whiting**



A walk up the hill at 'Yarrabimbi' seeing many different birds along the way, brought us to our lunch gathering. Thanks to Andrew and Ana for hosting us on their property, we really appreciate it.

I think it was fair to say it was a nice way to celebrate 30 years of Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists and I hope there are many more years to come.

Dionee Russell

Links to the birdlists – 23 November 2024

Fivebough <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=10233070&h=1e3849f8>

Yarrabimbi <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=10233069&h=6aa2dfce>

Yarrabimbi: walking along the ridge by Graham Russell; lunch time by Dot Green
Right: Singing Honeyeater at Fivebough by Dot Green



News and other items

Draft water sharing plan (Nella Smith)

Last week (12 November) the draft replacement Murrumbidgee unregulated rivers water sharing plan (WSP) went on public exhibition. The draft 2025 WSP, supporting documents, event details, etc. are here:

<https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/plans-and-strategies/water-sharing-plans/public-exhibition/murrumbidgee-unregulated-river-water-sources-2025>. You are welcome to comment on the plan.

Campbells Swamp update (Neil Palframan)

The area is closed to the public. Construction has begun on the new walkway. The swamp is now completely dry, having not received input for many months. There are still a few ibis sitting forlornly in the trees "waiting for rain". Meanwhile Nericon Swamp is full, perhaps overfull, isn't there anywhere else that could temporarily benefit from environmental water?

Standards for Writing Bird Names

Common names of birds need capital letters for both their first name and their second name, for example Stubble Quail. If the first name describes a feature of the bird, then the feature is lower case. Eg Sharp-tailed and mostly hyphenated. This then becomes Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

If this is totally confusing get a birdlist from Birdlife and copy it correctly from there.

Temperate Woodland Bird Conservation Plan CAP Species in Riverina and MIA. Arboreal insectivores in the MIA and Riverina are more likely to be Striated or Spotted Pardalote. Forty Spotted Pardalote are only found in Tasmania and are threatened with extinction. Unlikely to be here.

Nella Smith

Malleefowl Monitoring November 2024

Margrit, Nella and I joined David Kellett, President of NSW Malleefowl Recovery Group in West Wyalong. Our purpose was to train and carry out monitoring of Malleefowl mounds. There are over 750 Malleefowl mounds across NSW. The program is one of the largest single species monitoring programs in Australia and part of the National Recovery Plan to help save this endangered species. If you don't know much about Malleefowl, you might like to skip to the video links below before reading on.

We spent most of Saturday in training with Graeme Tonkin who had travelled from



Adelaide. We were in the classroom then in the field at South West Woodland Blue Mallee Nature Reserve. By observing the shape of the mound, the looseness of the surface soil, any tracks, scats or pieces of egg shell, we were able to determine the likelihood of it being "active", i.e. currently in use by the birds. Whilst capturing our data, we took a photo (these annual images can be accessed on the database) and left the mound as found if it was active or placed sticks X on top if inactive. Consistency in the way that the mounds are monitored and the data collected across four states is used to understand population trends. Sunday we

were released from tutoring and dispersed in twos or threes at Yalgogrin.

New technology has been a game changer. We were given a printed map with the location of mounds we were allocated, provided a mobile phone with the monitoring app installed which included GPS coordinates for the mounds, a back-up paper form to complete and we were taken to our patch of mallee.

The mounds had been identified by Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR). This enables aerial detection of the ground's surface, it can penetrate vegetation to map under tree canopies. It's much quicker than over ground detection! The data is analysed to provide precise GPS coordinates and even to rank the mounds

according to those that were most likely to be active. Taller mounds are more likely to be in use or re-used in future. All our mounds had been "ground truthed".



We drove along tracks to the nearest location to walk to the mound. We scrolled through the listed mounds to select the number corresponding to our map and drove until the location arrow was perpendicular to the track. First step was to log the location of the car. Anyone who had been to mounds in the past repeated and stressed this requirement. I heeded. (My google maps had coverage, so as a location back up I sometimes used this as well.) The distances were from 20m to 700m from the track. Mostly it was an out and back follow the arrow walk, drive along, repeat. Frequently the walk was a zigzag, and in some locations, a bush bash. Ugh, Mallee Strangle-vine! One location Margrit and I went to we visited three

mounds before returning

From top: beautiful shot of a Malleefowl credit Mark Leary & Simone Fuller; Inactive mound marked with X; Approaching an active mound - Sarah Danckert

to the car. The mallee wasn't too thick and it was pleasurable walking. In the image, we walked anticlockwise and skirted the edge of the denser mallee going back to the car. At a site the previous day, after a lot of bush bashing I took a chance on google maps to take us sideways/away from the car to more open mallee, then to the track back to the car. The dense mallee really was exhausting. Fun though.



More fun was approaching the mound. Once we were less than 40m away, we were scanning the bush for signs & sounds of movement. Walking slowly the arrow we followed was less accurate, so sometimes the mound just "appeared" to our left or right! Then the search was on for signs of life.

We saw two active mounds for the weekend, one with the Malleefowl present when we arrived, and there were two mounds we were not sure about. The data collection allows for this. One of these had a camera set up, so the camera knows! David Kellett reported that a total of five mounds surveyed were active, I think our group visited approximately 70 mounds in total

Active and recently active mounds are monitored annually, some classified for 5 yearly monitoring and some removed from monitoring. All mound locations remain in the database. One of our mounds was so flattened and disturbed, we recommended it be removed from monitoring. On one search we found an inactive mound that was not mapped (remember LiDAR is not perfect, but very accurate for active mounds). It was *almost* like finding a nugget! We logged it and it will be on next year's list.

NSW needs a volunteer crew of 200-300 people. Some mounds you need good balance and determination to get to, all mounds need someone in the team with good navigation skills. Teams of two to three volunteers are best. If you like getting out in the bush, are interested in the Mallee environment, or the amazing Malleefowl) how do they know the engineering strategies to thermoregulate those mounds?) then contact the **National Malleefowl Recovery Group** has a lot of information on its website.

Sarah Danckert

<https://www.nationalmalleefowl.com.au/>

NSW monitoring contact David Kellett <https://www.nswmalleefowlrecoverygroup.com.au/>

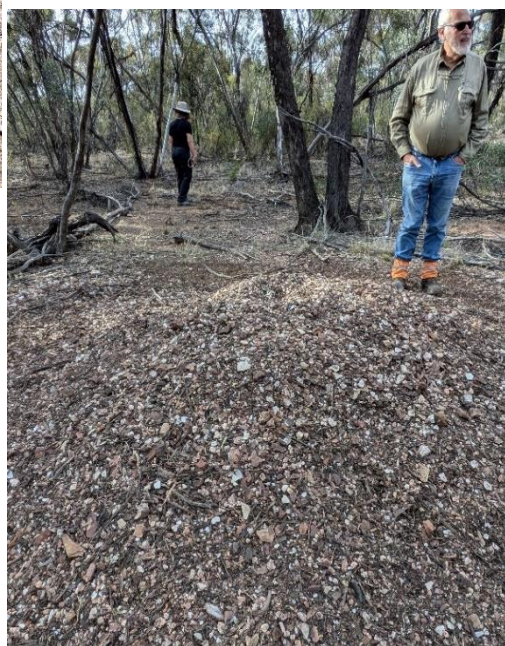
Videos:

The Amazing Malleefowl (Dr Joe Benshemesh) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCrw1rAqiDE>

The Malleefowl (1957) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeYN_JE_slk



STRAVA SUBSCRIPTION



Top: Strava log 2.31km, 40min, 3 mounds surveyed – Margrit Martin - can you guess where they were in the image?

Above left: Measuring an active mound credit Mark Leary & Simone Fuller

Above right: Observations of the mound and a 20m radius – Sarah Danckert

Nobbi Dragon *Diporiphora nobbi*

The Nobbi Dragon was seen at the South West Woodland - Blue Mallee, on 2 November during the Malleefowl mound surveying. It is classified as a dragon of least concern, is widely distributed in ungrazed, remnant vegetation from southeastern South Australia, through northern Victoria and the central west of NSW into central and eastern Queensland. This may be an explanation for the morphological variations in size and colour.

The Nobbi Dragon is adapted to a wide variety of ecosystems including rainforest, dry woodlands, coastal swamplands and cool temperate forests. Dry woodland features of the mallee are suited which include understory shrubs, spinifex, tree trunks and hollows which it uses for shelter and finding food.

Its identifying features are its

size - length averages 22cm and body to tail length ratio 1:2,

markings and colour - two distinctive pale yellowish stripes either side on its back which are sometimes notched with dark crossbands, which is what you see in the image. They are sexually dichromatic, being brighter on a mature male as well as having mauve or pink colouring on the flank, and the tail can have a pinkish hue. The dorsal colour of females and non-breeding males can be a duller, greyish brown with cream stripes. Similar to other dragons the body can range from grey to brown. This one may be a gravid female, the stripe is cream, otherwise she has rich colouring, although not as strong as black which can occur in breeding males. (You can just see the bulges on the abdomen from the eggs. On average they lay six in a burrow.)

Thirdly, it has only five rows of **scales**: along the back on the vertebral, paravertebral and dorsolateral ridges. These are not raised in the image, you can however see the spinose scales close behind the ear.

She was seen next to our car when we returned and remained very still as I approached to be within a metre. In the image, she has the classic pose of a dragon when disturbed, frozen still, with her head and body held up at an angle of about 45 degrees. This is also the position for catching prey, waiting in an ambush position before striking or lashing out to grab the prey with its mouth at speed. They are diurnal and eat invertebrates, mainly insects. She later ran off, but if threatened may have run on hind legs.

Reference: *Field Guide to Australian Reptiles*, Stephen Swanson, 2007

I also took small amounts of information from various web pages

<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/species/8369>

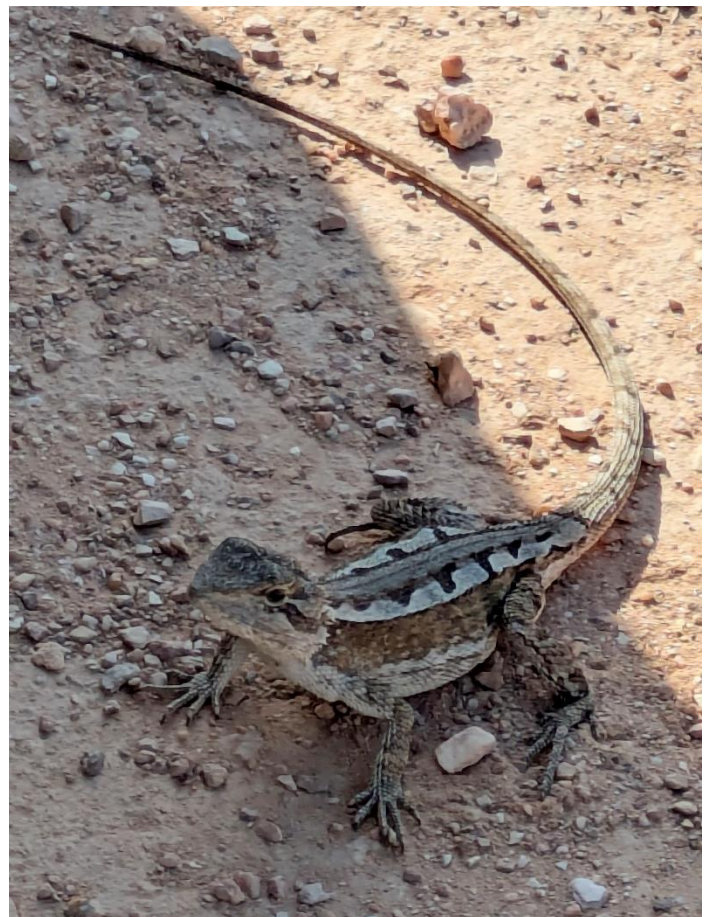
<https://sown.com.au/amphibolurus-nobbi-agamidae-nobbi-dragon/>

<https://bie.ala.org.au/species/https://biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/030bee66-6ad2-4725-b1d6-3daf0866d4b0>

<http://reptilesaustralia.com/lizards/agamids/agamids.htm>

<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/radionational/archived/perspective/don-driscoll/3519608>

Sarah Danckert



Native wildflowers and orchids in Western Australia

This year I have been fortunate to have been able to make an extended visit to Western Australia during the mid-to-late “wildflower season”.

It was a fantastic season for wildflowers with local comment that it has been the best year for many seasons following favourable winter/spring rainfall. The wildflowers were spectacular particularly in the more arid regions of central W.A.

My interest however was with the native orchids which have also experienced a favourable season. Native orchids unlike the small, herbal, annual wildflowers do not occur in abundance but have to be found in their favoured locations.

To locate native orchids, unlike many other wildflowers one does not just drive along and stop continually to inspect the wildflowers. “Bush bashing” is not the way to find native orchids; they need to be specifically located in their natural habitat and it helps greatly if you have some knowledge or advice as to where they can be found.

A most interesting feature of native orchids in Western Australia was that they are actively promoted as a visitor attraction by local communities. Small local communities will make a feature of their local orchid population and have information on flowering with directions and “mud maps” readily available to assist. Frequently the location will be marked by coloured ribbon attached to nearby vegetation.

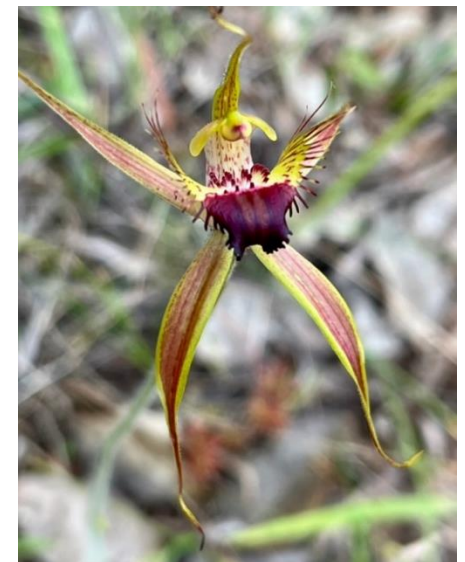
Local communities clearly benefitted from their support and promotion of local native orchids. Many of the smaller towns and villages also have significant mural features depicting their local orchids.

During our 3 month visit we actually located approximately 40 different orchid species and took hundreds of photographs. Interestingly identification was not a great problem as the local visitor centre and their promotional material generally had available updated lists of orchids currently flowering.

This is quite different to the eastern Australian practice of virtually no promotion of local orchids as a visitor attraction. This is to the extent of almost keeping their presence as a secret from interested community!

Again, unlike the Eastern states, the native orchids to be found in identified Nature Reserves or National Parks are actively promoted with considerable “interpretation” material made available. (quite unlike for example of the lack of promotion and recognition of native orchids within Livingstone National Park!)

David Glastonbury



Clockwise from top:
Vanilla Orchid *Thelymitra antennifera*;
Karri Spider Orchid *Caladenia brownii*;
Cowslip Orchid *Caladenia flava* subsp. *flava*;
Purple Enamel Orchid *Caladenia brunosis*
Donkey Orchid *Diuris* Sp.



End of Year Outing

Our end of year outing this year will be **Saturday, 14th December** at Narrandera's Community Food Garden. It will be a "bring and share" supper at 6:30pm. After supper, members can go for a walk around the grounds and generate a birdlist, whilst others will set up some sheets and lights to do some "Mothin'" when dusk falls.

Our last mothing night was written up in our [Nov 2021 #298](#) newsletter. That night we recorded moths, caddisflies, beetles amongst other things.

The aim of the night (apart from the end of year/Christmas get together) is to take some good photos of whatever arrives and get them identified on iNaturalist.

As The Food Garden is operated by Narrandera Landcare, we'll be inviting their members to come along around dusk if they're interested, so we may have company.

If you want to prime yourself beforehand for the moths we may see, <https://lepidoptera.butterflyhouse.com.au/imagos.html> is an absolute trove of information about moths and butterflies.

The Food Garden is located in the Narrandera Showgrounds, (near the Men's Shed). It's on [google maps](#). For anyone who doesn't want to travel home afterwards, camping is available at the Showgrounds, \$25 for a powered site, \$20 for non-powered. Bookings aren't required, just select a site (there's lots) and the caretakers will come around and collect the camping fee sometime.

Please register if you plan on attending to <mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com> so we can advise of any outing changes due to weather etc.

Glenn Currie

Photos taken in 2021 - clockwise from top
Caddisfly Phil Tenison; Tree Lucerne Moth
Uresiphya ornithopteralis Phil Tension; *Nacoleia*
rhoealis (moth brown mottley) Eric Whiting



30th anniversary - Eric Whiting, Phil Green, Joanne Connelly, Nella Smith and Dot Green at the information area, Fivebough Wetlands after our walk – Graham Russell

Member Observations

First a correction to one of last month's observations: the name of the skink was missing an 's', it should be **Eastern Striped Ctenotus**, *Ctenotus robustus*. As has happened before this was pointed out by a reader from another club; Elsie Howie, Dubbo. Thanks Elsie.

Janet Hume



I managed to get this photo on the 30th in my backyard in Malebo Pl, Wagga Wagga

We have had them in our neighbourhood for the last few years, heard calling daily but not seen very often.

This was second time we have seen him in our yard. He was in the tree for quite some time and not concerned at all by me moving about below trying to get the best angle through the foliage.



Eastern Koel singing

A follow-up photo of the **White-plumed Honeyeater**. They had 3 chicks and were almost ready to flee on my last visit and were very crowded in their home



Above: White-throated Gerygone, Livingstone National Park
Left: Red-browed Finch, Lake Albert, Wagga

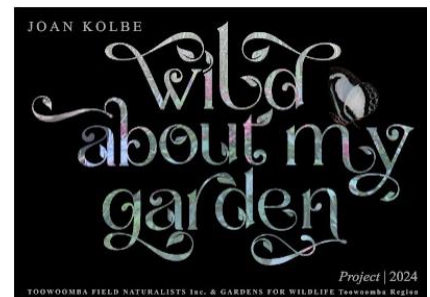


From the Inbox

"Wild About My Garden"

Toowoomba Field Naturalists sent our club an eBook wondering if we'd like to share it with our members. It's titled "Wild About My Garden" and was a project made in collaboration by Toowoomba Field Nats and Gardens For Wildlife, Toowoomba Region.

It was produced in memory of Joan Kolbe (1921-1992), a passionate gardener and field naturalist, funded by a donation from her sons as a gesture of appreciation for the enjoyment Joan found in being a member of TFNC.



The project invited community members of all ages to share a special moment with nature using photography, nature journaling, poetry, prose or a work of art and resulted in a wonderful tribute to Joan's appreciation of nature.

We're happy to share this eBook which has details of Joan's remarkable life and it can be accessed <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ueqYxxwHkfbzPFyaGAX-sFUyMyrDA2BR/view>

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

The first four items on the list should have been in last month's newsletter; I inadvertently inserted a earlier version of November's list. My apologies, Rowena.

Significant sightings

Pacific Golden Plover [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	26/10/24	Paul Maytom
A rare sighting, stayed 5 days			
Australian Pratincole [2]	Koonadan	01/11/24	Peter Draper
Tawny Frogmouth with 3 nestlings	Koonadan	01/11/24	Peter Draper
Masked Lapwing many nesting	Koonadan	01/11/24	Peter Draper
White-eared Honeyeater [7]	"Yarrabimbi", Colinroobie Rd, via Leeton	12/11/24	Andrew Thompson
Straw-necked Ibis [800-900]	"Yarrabimbi", Colinroobie Rd, via Leeton	12/11/24	Andrew Thompson
Eating insects in the paddock on most days			
Glossy Black Cockatoo [3]	"Yarrabimbi", Colinroobie Rd, via Leeton	14/11/24	Andrew Thompson
Black-tailed Native Hen [15]	Campbells Swamp	02/11/24	Virginia Tarr
Dusky Woodswallow [2] nest with young	Lake Albert, Wagga	01/11/24	Sarah Danckert
Malleefowl [1]	Yalgogrin, west of West Wyalong	03/11/24	Malleefowl Recovery Group Survey
Superb Parrot [60]	Pomingalarna	07/11/24	Sarah Danckert
Speckled Warbler [1]	Pomingalarna	07/11/24	Sarah Danckert
Superb Parrot [5]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga	07/11/24	Sarah Danckert
Speckled Warbler [2]	Livingstone National Park	08/11/24	Sarah Danckert
Australasian Bittern	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing
Glossy Ibis [30]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing
Magpie Goose [500]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing
Brolga [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing
Marsh Sandpiper [3]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing
Avocet [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing
Spotless Crake	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing
Buff-banded Rail	Fivebough Wetlands	23/11/24	MFN Outing

Other sightings of note

Cockatiel (2) rarely seen in Wagga	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga	07/11/24	Sarah Dankert
White-throated Gerygone	Livingstone National Park	08/11/24	S Dankert J Hume
Nobbi Dragon	South West Woodland - Blue Mallee	02/11/24	Malleefowl Recovery Group Survey

Reviewed by Nella Smith

Far right: Pacific Golden Plover, Paul Maytom

Right: Speckled Warbler, Janet Hume



**** 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.

12 December Thursday Monthly Meeting in the Yellow Room has been cancelled this month.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

14 December Saturday Mothing Night - End of Year outing see page 8 for additional information
Narrandera Food Garden, located at the Showgrounds
Time 6:30pm “bring and share” supper
We’ll have sheets and lights to attract moths and other insects for observing
from dusk (8:30ish)
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.

2025

2 February Sunday World Wetlands Day
Theme is “Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future” Value. Protect. Inspire.
This year is of particular significance, as it coincides with the 15th Meeting of the
Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (COP15).

5 February Wednesday Copy for the February newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com Phone: 0429 726 120.

13 February Thursday Monthly Meeting in the Yellow Room at the Leeton Library, Sycamore St., Leeton
commencing at 7pm.
Topic to be decided. Show and Tell
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

15/16 February (tentative) Our annual Glossy Black Cockatoo count

Other Events

MFN volunteering at Wagga Botanical Gardens – ongoing

Complete a WWCC volunteer application form prior, contact Sarah 0427276306

2nd & 4th Tuesdays 8am - contact Paul Walker

2nd & 4th Fridays 8am - contact Sarah Danckert

28-30 March 2025. Moths and Butterflies Australasia (MABA) Annual Event

Venue: Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV) Hall, Blackburn (Melbourne).

Registration is due by **31 December 2024** via the MABA Website <https://www.maba.org.au/upcoming-events>

There are five events over the weekend, which focus on moth ID, photography and preservation.

The moth light-trapping event will be run by the Entomological Society of Vitoria, who published the 10 part book series “Moths of Victoria”.

A couple of useful links from the Murrumbidgee Landcare newsletter

[Look out for new weeds in fodder](#) Many weeds can be brought into new areas through the movement of fodder. This guide will help you make informed choices when buying or receiving fodder, identify new weeds, and stop the spread. NSW Department of Primary Industries.

[Snake bite first aid](#) to brush up on your first aid skills. This page covers types of snake bites, signs & symptoms, and snakebite management. St John Ambulance.