

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



February 2025 - Issue #333
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



A pair of Bush Stone-curlew nr Urana - Janet Hume

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the March issue by
Wednesday 5 March
To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

"There is no Wi-Fi in the forest, but I promise you will find a better connection." - Ralph Smart

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 2025

And a new year of fieldnatting. I hope you have all enjoyed your summer break, have had plenty of nature experiences and are looking forward to participating in club events this year.

Our Guest Speaker this month is Jade Auldish from Hay Plains Landcare who will talk about their "Flight to Conservation : Protecting the Black Falcon through Storytelling" project. Then on Friday and Saturday evenings we will be undertaking our annual Glossy Black Cockatoo Count. We encourage you to participate in this; the more locations we can cover, the more accurate the count will be. Details are on the last page - Coming Events.

Our program is beginning to take shape; suggestions for field trips and speakers along with other activities in which the club can play a part are always welcome. Discuss any ideas you have with any of the office bearers.

My thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue, a great choice of photos and topics. Enjoy your read and think of how you can play a part in club activities so it is not left to a few people. The more the merrier.

Rowena

More to Ponder by James Dillet Freeman (contributed by Louise Harrison)

Rivers hardly ever run in a straight line.

Rivers are willing to take ten thousand meanders and enjoy every one and grow from every one.

When rivers leave a meander they are always bigger than when they entered it.

When rivers meet an obstacle, they do not try to run over it - they merely go around, but they always get to the other side.

Rivers accept things as they are.

They conform to the shape they find the world in, yet nothing changes things more than rivers.

Rivers move even mountains into the sea.

Rivers hardly ever are in a hurry, yet is there anything more likely to reach the point it sets out for than a river. (pre 1900s)

Narrandera Food Garden after Dark

Our end of year outing for 2024 was to the Narrandera Food Garden on Saturday evening, the 14th December. 8 members came along and shared what they brought for supper and had a very pleasant catch-up. The plan afterwards was to do some “Mothing”.

When we had finished supper, I was showing Sarah around the Food Garden as she hadn't been there before when a young family arrived hoping to see some moths. I had invited anyone on Narrandera Landcare's email list to come along and Sasha, her two daughters and mum, took up the invitation.

It was 8pm and we didn't have the sheets or lights setup yet, so suggested Sasha and her family explore the Food Garden whilst we got things ready for the mothing. I encouraged them to keep an eye out for the Frog Hotel. I wrote about the Frog Hotel workshop Narrandera Landcare held in our [Nov 2021 #298](#) newsletter. This was an excellent workshop, well attended, people learnt plenty and many hotels were taken home and installed around the town - but I've actually never found a frog in the purpose-built frog hotel at the Food Garden!

Since that workshop we've seen Peron's Tree frogs in the grape vine, the fill pipes of our wicking beds, the retractable hose reel and our mulcher, but never in the frog hotel which has shade, moisture, humidity, shelter and insect attracting plants. I read all the literature, and it should be perfect habitat, but the frogs are never there. I've tried relocating some of the ones we find to the hotel but they don't stay. They seem to know what they like and apparently, it's always somewhere else.



Peron's Tree Frog
– Sarah Danckert

When we were setup for mothing, Sasha and her family had finished their exploring and let me know they had found the frog hotel but there were no frogs in it. This didn't surprise me, but I was able to show them the frog currently hanging out in a locker we have at the Garden. The kids were excited to see it, but I must ask an expert one day, why a frog would prefer a fairly austere steel locker to our 5-Star frog hotel?

It was pretty well dusk by then, so we went across to the lit-up sheet we had hung. On our last Mothin' Night in 2021, moths appeared instantly the moment we switched the lights on. From memory we recorded lots of moths that night and a few bugs like caddisflies and beetles.

This year's mothing was two months later in the year so I expected some sort of different result. What we got after a couple of minutes was a big fat nothing! I was a little disappointed, but we gave it a few minutes more and had one bug land on the sheet. I couldn't get excited, but the 5 year old did. She was there with the “Other Nocturnal Insects” identification sheet

and matched it with the silhouette of a Caddisfly.

After that it was game on – the bugs started arriving en masse. Flying ants, various beetles, earwigs, cockroaches and different weevils. It turned out a bug heavy night but a few moths did show up and were recorded.

The kids quickly picked up we needed good photos of the insects to put on iNaturalist to get possible id's. So, if something landed on the sheet and wasn't moving much, they'd try and identify it from the handouts and let someone get a photo of it.

If it was moving around too much for a photo they would happily capture in a white container and bring to me and the esky and tell me to “put this one on ice” so we could slow it down and get a good photo of it.

We had one very distinctive insect land on the sheet which caught my eye - basically it was kind of ugly. No-one got a good photo of it but iNaturalist still suggested it could be from the True Weevil family.



Our young partakers – Rowena Whiting

Regarding moths, I like them as I like my birds and flowers – big, bold and colourful so they’re easy to identify. What we got were smaller ones. I was glad a Heliotrope Moth showed up as its one I recognise on sight. Then there were Brown Cutworm and probably Varied Wave Moths, identified using iNaturalist.



Heliotrope moth – Sarah Danckert



orb-weaving spider - Rowena Whiting

We took a time out from observing moths when someone spied an orb-weaving spider starting to build its intricate web for the evening. We could have spent all evening watching this spider weave it’s web as it’s a fascinating process, but we were on a mission, so it was back to the light sheet.

Around 9:30 some Christmas Beetles arrived. I relayed to the group something I read about the concern with the decline in their populations and scientists were asking people to submit any sightings of them. So I explained all these sightings were important and I would make sure they were submitted. When I googled how to do it the next day I found any Christmas Beetle recorded on iNaturalist is automatically included in the project so I didn’t have to do anything else.



Christmas Beetle – Rowena Whiting

Thanks everyone who helped or came along to this very enjoyable and educational evening.
Glenn Currie

A couple of corrections to image captions in December’s issue.

The first is the moth (tan colour) labelled Tree Lucerne Moth on Page 9.



It is the name on the image so this seems this was not identified correctly in 2021. I

used a photo from 2021 (not the one that was in that November issue) which was incorrectly named. We think it is *Diarsia intermixta*.



This was pointed out by Dick Andrews (Albury Wodonga Fieldnats): he sent these photos of the Tree Lucerne Moth and the Caterpillar.

The second was Paul Maytom’s photo on page 11, should be Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Here is the Pacific Golden Plover.

Paul pointed this out and I also heard from a member of the Hastings Bird Club at Port Macquarie.

Thanks for pointing these out; it is nice know that our newsletter is widely read.

A case of me not be being sufficiently vigilant! Rowena.



Hay Plains Landcare Environmental Grant Report

MFN awarded an Environmental Grant to Hay Plains Landcare in May 2024 for their “Flight to Conservation: Protecting the Black Falcon through Storytelling” project. This project involving Hay Landcare, Riverina Local Land Services and Hay Public School, was successfully completed in December.

This initiative not only contributed to the conservation of local wildlife but also provided invaluable educational experiences for the Hay community.

Project Highlights

The project focused on the conservation of the endangered Black Falcon, a rare bird of prey native to our region. Throughout the year, students from Hay Public School engaged in various activities to learn about and support the Black Falcon's habitat. These activities included excursions to local properties, conservation efforts, and the creation of educational materials.

Educational Excursions

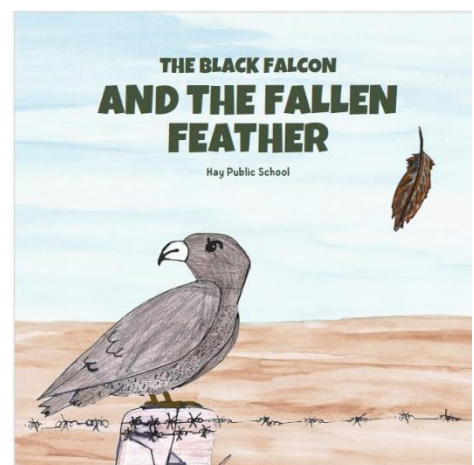
Students visited the Auldist family's properties, including Winilba, Galah, Karoola, and Towong, where they learned about the importance of habitat conservation. They were introduced to the efforts made by the Riverina Local Land Services (LLS) and the Auldist family to provide artificial nests for the Black Falcon. These excursions also included lessons on native vegetation and the significance of traditional land management practices shared by Yiradyuri elder Splinta Woods.



Publications

The project resulted in two publications:

1. ***The Black Falcon and the Fallen Feather*** - A beautifully illustrated picture book created by the students, telling the story of a Black Falcon and her journey to find a home. This book highlights the importance of conservation and the hope for the future of this endangered species.
2. ***Finding Home on the Plains*** - This publication is a result of the Year 6 students exploring and documenting the rich tapestry of their local environment. The students had the pleasure of visiting and learning about the Auldist family and their properties: 'Galah', 'Old Galah', 'Winilba', 'Karoola', and 'Towong'. Field trips, interviews, and extensive research were conducted to gain insights into the land and its historical significance. This engagement extended to learning about the threatened species, the Black Falcon, First Nations culture, historical aspects of the property, wildlife, and sustainable farming practices.



The students retained full ownership of the books, being involved in editing, proofreading, photo selection, and layout decisions.

These publications were launched at a book launch event on December 18th, attended by the community, stakeholders and special guests.



This mural at Hay Public School depicts their two precious birds – The Plains Wanderer and the Black Falcon.

Looking Ahead

Hay Landcare greatly appreciate Murrumbidgee Field Naturalist's efforts in wildlife conservation and education. We are proud of the achievements of this project and look forward to more collaborative initiatives in the future. Together, we can make a difference in preserving our natural heritage for generations to come.

Hay Plains Landcare

Here is a link to Local Land Services with information about the Black Falcon and securing it in the Riverina and links to the books.

<https://www.ils.nsw.gov.au/help-and-advice/natural-resource-management/threatened-species/black-falcon>

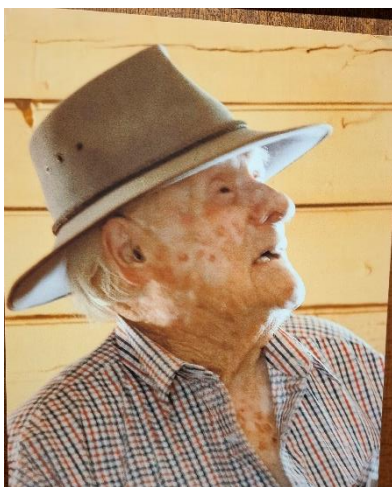
[Finding Home on the Hay Plains](#)

[The Black Falcon and the Fallen Feather](#)

The Club has received printed copies of the books, they will be available to borrow from our library. Ed.

Member News

A milestone birthday



Bill Draper, one of our long-term members, celebrated his 100th birthday in December, the second of our members to attain this great milestone. Bill has lived in the area all his life, attended Yanco Ag High School, living on the land. He has a wealth of knowledge which he willingly shares; of particular interest to us is of the flora and fauna in earlier times. He is an enthusiastic photographer and some of his wonderful photos were displayed in the Leeton Art Gallery recently –



this shot of Brolgas is taken from his print. His portrait is also from a print.

Our congratulations, Bill, on your 100 years. Wishing you continued good health and happiness.

Juvenile birds on nests

The **Apostlebird** chicks were seen in the nest in a stand of *Callitris* at Pomingalarna Reserve on the 12th of January.

They breed from Aug-Mar, after rain. Building a deep mud bowl reinforced and lined with grass on a horizontal branch. Anywhere between 2-20 metres high. Family party shares building, incubation (18 days) and care of the young. Clutch 3-4 eggs (30 x 22mm). Several females may lay in one nest to make a larger, combined clutch. They feed mostly from seed gathered from the ground and insects gleaned from bark. When disturbed the whole entire group flies into nearby trees, with much harsh chattering and hopping from branch to branch.



The **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** were seen in the nest at Wagga Beach on the 22nd of January. The nest was high up in a gum next to the busy main path along the beach foreshore and near the playground. The gardener was mowing the lawn below. A parent came in and fed the chicks while I was watching.

They breed throughout the year but mostly between Aug-Jan. The nest is usually high in the tree and is small for the size of the bird. It is built on open and exposed part of a limb. Blended into the angle of the fork. It is very hard to see, from below it is either invisible or just appears as a slight bump on the upper side of the branch. The nest is constructed of fine rootlets, bark fibre and casuarina leaves, heavily bound and matted with spiders' web to give a soft, yet strong, resilient structure which is shallow and saucer shaped. Clutch 2-3 eggs (31 x 22mm). The male shares building and incubation.



Janet Hume

References: Morcombe and Stewart Guide to Birds of Australia App Pizza and Knight Birds of Aus App and the CSIRO The Australian Bird Guide book.

Photos from top: Pomingalarna Res Apostlebird Juv on nest; Wagga Beach Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike chicks on nest; Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike nest high in tree (small red circle); Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike juv, parent and nest with young.



Red Earth Ecology

Thought I should share our plans for 2025.

Red Earth Ecology (REE) is developing a couple of projects with support from the Country Art Support Program administered by Western Riverina Arts and Create NSW through funding from the NSW Government.

In previous years we've appreciated the experience and support of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists and you might be interested to learn how we're building on those activities.

First we're looking to return to Fivebough Wetlands, which was a focus of an art installation at the Leeton Community Op Shop with also a morning tea for their volunteers that included presentations from Kathy Tenison and Max O'Sullivan in 2020.

One outcome from that exhibition was the banner that's displayed at the Wetlands, as well as stickers that use the same design which are sold in the Leeton Visitor Information Centre. See below.

The Field Nats might also remember our presentations on the Beak Technique Activity Sheets that were designed to introduce children to the plants their favourite bird species seek.

Those sheets were part of the 2024 Action Day event at Griffith Pioneer Park Museum and they've had a good response from all ages at a number of our workshops now.

This year REE will be continuing with both those projects by developing an activity sheet that focuses on the beaks of waterbirds to be part of an excursion being planned for students at Parkview Primary School in Leeton.

Another project will be later in the year, when we're collaborating with Italy-based Naviar Records to create an exhibition about climate change that incorporates music, photography and haiku poetry.

It's exciting to be sharing the Riverina landscape with local and international audiences through these projects.

These also build on the recognition from local MP Helen Dalton last year, who shared the "Fivebough At The Heart of Leeton" exhibition with NSW Parliament in an address that was recorded in Hansard.

Attached is a photo from a presentation last December that congratulated various Leeton community members for their contributions.

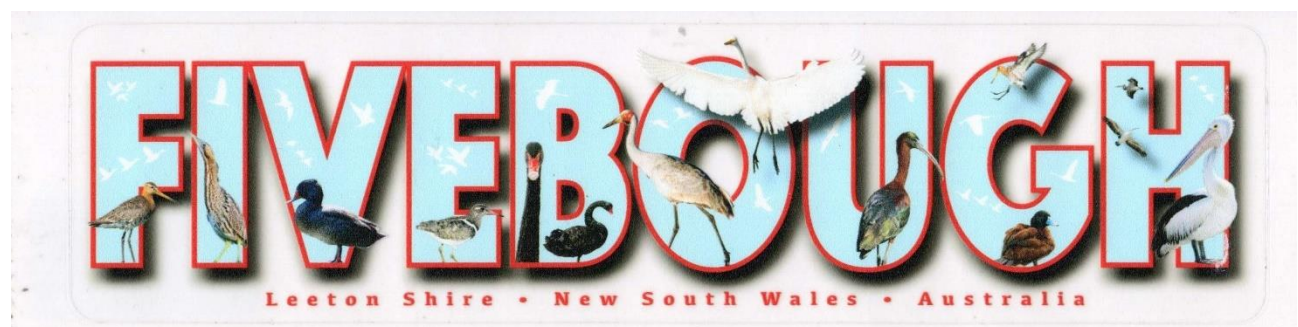
I hope to share a draft of the waterbird activity sheet at a Field Nats meeting in coming months and it will be wonderful to draw on the experiences of members, whose assistance has been greatly appreciated over the years.

We'll also put updates about the progress of these projects on the Red Earth Ecology website at <https://ree.org.au/>

Jason Richardson



Action day Pioneer Park Museum 2024



Member Observations

Keith Hutton Confirmation of Common Myna in Leeton area

For last 5/6 years **Common Mynas** have been recorded by me in small numbers up to 5 between Lockhart and Griffith, including Fivebough and Leeton, usually at truck stops on highways, or close to small farm holdings near towns and villages.



On Monday evening on 07 January about 7 o'clock, while driving west along Fivebough Road towards the Brobenah Road junction I was surprised to see a small single-species flock of these aggressive, invasive introduced birds feeding close to a farm dam. They flew up on to roadside telegraph wires where they perched together for a few minutes after I had stopped my car to count them and confirm species identification; there were 27 with no starlings among them.

This observation supports my previous suggestion that these birds are now established in our region, following at least 8 years of favourable seasons for them.

Janet Hume - images of juvenile birds



Wiradjuri Reserve Wagga Little Friarbird feeding young
 Lake Albert Juvenile White-winged Chough
 Lake Albert Juvenile Red-browed Finch
 Wiradjuri Reserve, Wagga Sacred Kingfisher
 Wiradjuri Reserve, Wagga Oriental Dollarbird



Paul Maytom

My very first sighting of the elusive Little Bittern at the Wetlands yesterday (12 December 2024) - it was less than 5 metres from the walking track.



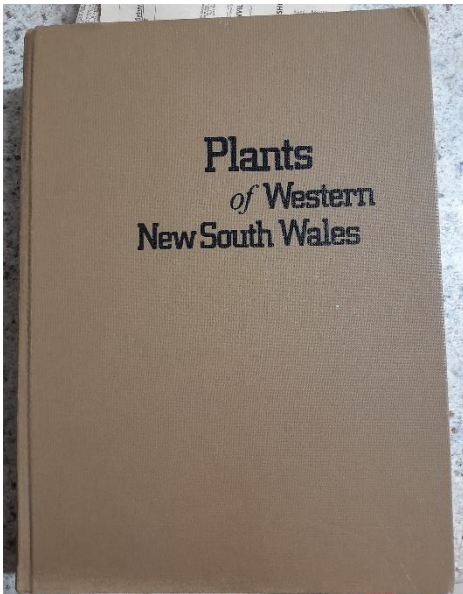
Ilse Katalinic and Chris Dalitz

A sad sight at Narrandera Wetlands.
Carp are dead and aromatic.



Purchasing a Plants of Western New South Wales

Most of our members will be familiar with the book "Plants of Western New South Wales". I think it was originally published in 1981, reprinted with some revisions in 1992 and reprinted again around 2011. It's the go to reference book for flora in western NSW.



When I joined MFN, I was doing a Cert III in Conservation and Land Management and the club kindly lent me a copy of their book which was invaluable in helping me complete my course. I returned that book when I went out to work at Oolambeyan. There was a copy in the homestead there which I referred to a lot over the next two years.

When I left Oolambeyan, I decided I needed my own copy. Some members advised it was out of print, would probably never be reprinted, cost about \$200 when it was last available and to expect to pay a lot if I found one. I thought \$200 for a brand new one was a lot, but little did I know.

Margaret suggested saving a search on eBay so I could get notifications when one was up for sale. I did that (thanks Margaret!) and every month or so would be advised that one was available.

eBay has changed a lot since I last used it 10 years ago. Back then it was mainly an auction format and you either won the auction or didn't. It was all pretty simple. These days the seller lists a price and

you're invited to make an offer, then when you do, the seller makes a counter offer then it goes back and forth a few times, with the buyer limited to making just three offers. It's basically haggling which I was never good at when overseas.

The book came up for sale quite a few times while I was searching with asking prices like \$350, 380 and even up to 450. They all seemed a lot to me and I'm not sure there's a way of knowing of what they eventually sold for. My initial offers were always low (too low apparently), and I wasn't having any success. As each book became available I was slowly increasing my starting offers but they were always rejected. I was getting frustrated and had to ponder stuff like "What is something actually worth" (whatever someone is willing to pay?), "What's a fair price" (again, probably whatever someone is willing to pay?), How bad do I want it (pretty bad.)

It turned out I was willing to pay \$265 for a 1981 edition without a dustjacket. I think this was listed with a "Buy It Now" price and I didn't hesitate. I was sick of looking, making offers etc. so snapped it up. I received it just three days later and am very happy that that little book buying exercise is over with.

Glenn Currie

M E M B E R S ' S I G H T I N G S

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

Significant sightings

Little Bittern [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	12/12/24	Paul Maytom
Magpie Goose [1]	Lake Albert, Wagga Wagga	15/12/24	Sarah Danckert
Crested Shrike-tit [3]	"Marrambidya", Wagga Wagga	22/12/24	Sarah Danckert, J Hume
Adult feeding young out of nest			
Speckled Warbler [1]	Rocky Hill, Kooringal	04/01/25	Sarah Danckert
Diamond Firetail [3]	"Highfield Farm", Mt Adrah	16/01/25	Danckert, J Hume
Brown Treecreeper [6]	"Highfield Farm", Mt Adrah	16/01/25	S Danckert, J Hume
Dusky Woodswallow [6]	"Highfield Farm", Mt Adrah	16/01/25	S Danckert, J Hume
Adults feeding young out of nest			
Brolga [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	16/01/25	M Martin, R Whiting
Early morning, have been sighted there for last 3 weeks			
Glossy Black-Cockatoo [25]	Brobenah Hills	21/01/25	Scott Grigg
Grey-crowned Babbler [11]	"Trewella", Book Book	30/01/25	S Danckert, J Hume
Leaden Flycatcher [1]	"Yabtree West", Mundarlo	31/01/25	J Hume, R Gorman
Bush-stone Curlew [2]	Near Lake Urana	01/02/25	J Hume, D Clark
Pectoral Sandpiper [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	01/02/25	Nella Smith

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

Rufous Songlark [1]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga Wagga	16/01/25	Sarah Danckert
The only one seen this spring/summer			
Australian King Parrot [2]	"Wirraminna", Burrumbuttock	19/01/25	Sarah Danckert
Edge of range			
Dollarbird [4]	"Wirraminna", Burrumbuttock	19/01/25	Sarah Danckert
Adult feeding young out of nest			

Compiled by Janet Hume, reviewed by Nella Smith.

Other Events / Items

Riverina Harvest Festival – weekend 1-2 March

Day 1 – Saturday 1st of March 2025 - Conference Day at Wagga Wagga City Council, 243 Baylis Street, Wagga Wagga, 2650 Time: 12:30 PM – 8:30 PM. Cost: \$100 (includes conference, catering and networking dinner). Speakers are local and leading experts in, community engagement, gardening, horticulture and sustainability.

Day 2 - FREE Festival: Sunday 2nd of March 2025 - Wagga Beach, Johnston St, Wagga Wagga NSW 2650, Time: 10 AM to 4 PM. Support Local Growers, enjoy delicious food, buy and connect with local farmers, live music, workshops, connect with local community groups.

Visit [The Riverina Harvest Festival 2025](#) for more information.

50 Years 1974 - 2014: A History of the Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society has recently been published by the Orange Field Naturalists in celebration of their 50 years. It is very comprehensive chronicle of the activities and achievements over the years. They have kindly given our club a copy which will be kept in our library. Let Margrit Martin know if you'd like to borrow it, email tigram.nitram@gmail.com.

**** COMING EVENTS ****

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions.

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

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

- 13 February Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.
Guest speaker/Topic: **Jade Auldist Hay Plains Landcare**) will talk about their "**Flight to Conservation: Protecting the Black Falcon through Storytelling**" project.
Bring along Show and Tell.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 14 and/or 15 February Friday/Saturday** **Annual Glossy Black Cockatoo count**
We will be monitoring at various locations in the Brobenah and Narrandera hills and Binya Forest and Cocoparras.
- 14 February Friday** **Leeton area**
Contact: Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com Phone 02 6953 2612 / 0429 726 120
Griffith area
Contact - Virginia Tarr vobrien3@hotmail.com Phone 0434 831 031
- 15 February Saturday** **Narrandera area**
Contact: Email: nellasmith0@gmail.com Phone 0428 890 537
- Time will be from 6 pm.
- On registration participants will be allotted a dam to go to; place yourself quietly at your allocated dam by 6pm, next to a tree or shrub. If you hear them you should still record them even if they don't drink. If you are able, please record sex of glossies. Also please record all species and numbers of fauna that come near the dam or down to drink. There are forms for this and they should be sent to Nella so she can collate the results.
Information about the Glossies can be found at www.glossyblack.org.au
Remember the more dams we can cover the more accurate the count will be.
- 5 March Wednesday** **Copy for the March newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com Phone: 0429 726 120.
- 13 March 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
- Wagga Wagga Tuesday Evening Bird Walks are continuing until 1 April meeting at 6pm.**
Bring: Binoculars, water bottle, mozzie repellent, sunscreen, hat and snake bite bandages.
Contact: **Janet** 0408 238 890 or **Sarah** 0427 276 306.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XwaZ4rBEhblSaLqO7d3kS_kYuP3c-zdi/view?usp=drivesdk
- 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