

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



March/April 2025 - Issue #334

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

PO Box 541, LEETON 2705 ISSN-1327-1172

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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



**Brolgas
at
Fivebough
Wetlands
by
Ada Stoll**

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the May issue by

Wednesday 30 April

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 0429 726 120

"For if one link in nature's chain might be lost, another might be lost, until the whole of things will vanish by piecemeal."

Thomas Jefferson

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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Annual Subscriptions: Family \$45.00 Adult/Single \$35.00 Journal only/Concession \$25.00

Bank details for direct deposit: BSB 082 672 account no. 722043387, a/c name: Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Include your own name and description of payment in the reference box.

Opinions expressed by authors are their own and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

Welcome to our March/April issue

Somewhat late for March I'm afraid due to my time in hospital after breaking my femur whilst visiting southern Victoria. Recovery is progressing albeit slowly so it will be a while before I'm able to venture far. My thanks for the lovely flowers I received; very much appreciated.

In this issue we have reports of our February meeting presentation from Jade Auldish, Hay Plains Landcare about their "Flight to Conservation : Protecting the Black Falcon through Storytelling" project. Along with our February and March outings, both written up by Nella and Janet has written about the Summer Tuesday evening bird walks around Wagga Wagga that have been attended by the public as well as our members. Our thanks go to Janet for organising.

My thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue, do share with us any nature observations of interest you find on your walks, travels or in the garden.

Enjoy your read and Easter break.

Rowena



Call for Applications for MFN Environment Fund Grants

The Fund was set up to provide financial assistance for projects delivering the enhancement of biodiversity, conservation or enhanced understanding of the natural environment within the region covered by the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Club (MFN).

Applications are now open to interested individuals or groups to apply for funding and forms can be obtained by contacting the club secretary via our email address: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

Or use the link that Murrumbidgee Landcare have kindly provided <https://mli.org.au/mfn-environmental-grants/>

Applications close on 1st May and the Environmental Grants Committee of the club will consider all applications and notify people of the result of their respective application after the closing date.

February Yellow Room Meeting

Our guest speaker for the Yellow Room meeting was Jade Auld from Hay Plains Landcare who gave an excellent presentation on their “Flight to Conservation: Protecting the Black Falcon through Storytelling” project, partially funded by a MFN Environmental grant. [Ed Note: a report on their project appeared in our last issue (February) with links to the books they produced.]

Jade couldn't attend in person but gave us a recorded presentation which can be viewed on [Canva](#). This project is part of a Creative Kids Catchment program which has been running for 13 years. You can find the previous year's projects on <https://www.envirostories.com.au/books/> and by entering the search term “Hay”. You'll find some interesting reading there! This has been a tremendous program for Hay Public School.



Students on the excursion where the native vegetation is being encouraged to enhance the Black Falcon's habitat. From Jade's presentation.

Our members who attended were particularly interested in the artificial nests for the Black Falcon and had some questions which were forwarded to Jade. Jade and Lucy from LLS supplied the following:

How are the artificial nests made and where were they sourced from?

A review of current literature gave us an indication of how large the nests needed to be to make them suitable for Black Falcon. A 45cm metal frame was used as the base with sticks of different sizes were woven around. Tie wire was used to secure some of the sticks and hopefully improve the longevity of the final product. We sought the assistance of a landholder from Coleambally who took on construction of the nests with guidance from RLLS.

How many have been installed in the landscape?

Ten so far but I am planning to have some more installed for the final year of the project.

Any evidence of them being used yet?

No evidence of use by Black Falcon yet. However, we are currently outside the species' breeding season and wouldn't expect them to be seeking a suitable nesting site until Autumn/early Winter. A number of other bird species have been recorded at the nests and making multiple visits over several days.

After Jade's presentation we had Show 'n Tell and Glenn had some photos of bugs recorded on our December Mothing Night which didn't make the last newsletter. Lots of insects were observed that night and by far the most numerous were something that iNaturalist suggested could be [Water Boatmen](#). (Photo attached). Glenn didn't mention these in his February article as everything he read said they were aquatic insects. They looked like something everyone sees in swimming pools but why were they flying around?

At the meeting Margaret Strong was able to explain the lifecycle of these bugs and how they do fly sometimes. She mentioned their ability to carry an air bubble under their abdomens, making these insects capable of breathing underwater. The air bubble acts like an oxygen tank, allowing them to stay submerged for extended periods and easily move around in their underwater domain. More info can be found on [What's That Bug](#). Thanks Margaret!



Glenn Currie

Glossy Black Cockatoo Count held 15th February 2025

About 20 people participated in the count and about 78 GBC were observed in an area spanning Rankins Springs, Cocoparra, Brobenah Hills, Narrandera Hills and Cowabbie Range.

25 birds counted at Rankins Springs, 11 birds in the Cocoparras, 31 birds at Brobenah, 9 in the Narrandera Hills and 2 birds were counted in the Cowabbie Range. Many birds were counted on private land, some on National Park Reserve and a few on Crown Land.

As we can see, the stronghold is Brobenah and Rankins Springs. Smaller populations at Narrandera and the Cocoparras is usual. The Cowabbie Hills were surveyed for the first time. As usual the birds drink within an area in which they are feeding. Sharing dams were Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Wallaroos, Black Wallabies and Lace Monitors. Seed eaters observed (which must drink every day) were Eastern Rosella, Mallee Ringneck, Galah, Crested Pigeons, Common Bronzewing, Peaceful Dove and Bar-shouldered Doves. Ravens and raptors were keeping an eye on things. Not many little birds were recorded (maybe due to dry conditions with little grass or insects.) Only Thornbill, Tree Martin and Welcome Swallows were recorded.

Many smaller farm dams were empty due to dry conditions. There was not much flowering but the tough White-plumed Honeyeaters and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters were about. This of course is only a snapshot of what is around. It is impossible to visit many of the waterholes and they can be found in very difficult to reach places on private land and we are limited by the number of people participating in the survey. Thanks to the landholders for trusting us to enter their properties



Nella Smith

Glossy Black Cockatoo Count – Cocoparra National Park

After a small shower of rain earlier that week, there was enough water in the Cocoparra National Park dams to entice the Glossy Black Cockatoos. We were able to cover a number of dams.

Neil, Johanna, Reanna and her sister sat at the Woolshed Flats Creek dam. They counted 9 cockies flying in. Sue, Sally and I sat at Wattle Dam. We had a beautiful female Cocky calling in and after a while came down for a drink. She sat back up in the Eucalyptus tree calling; however no others came and she left! Half an hour later a young male called in doing much the same, drank his fill and sat back up in the tree showing his bright red feathers. We counted 15 other species of birds flying about, but mainly the Mulga Parrots came down to water. The third dam we covered was Brogden track dam which Lisa Parker and daughter covered. They were unlucky to have any Cockies fly in but had 6 species tallied: 10 Common Bronze-winged Pigeons, 20 Yellow Thornbills and 6 Mulga Parrots to name a few.

Bill Kite checked his Mt. Pleasant dam and had 20 call in. Another dam near Old Binya Homestead had 30 odd another time he was there. Rodney Guest had 15 on his Hill dam. David Heath missed out on a dam he was allocated.

Overall the cool evening with a fairly gusty wind played havoc with our hearing and sightings but managed to have a good number of birds.

Virginia Tarr

Wagga Wagga Chapter of MFN Tuesday Evening Bird Walks Report.

We had a very successful and enjoyable series of Tuesday evening bird walks through Summer.

We kicked off with a walk at Marrambidya Wetlands on the 14th of January and ended with a fabulous outing to Flowerdale Lagoon last Tuesday. Attendance each week consisted of regular MFN members and other interested members of the public who are keen birders. Our numbers ranging from 6 to an impressive 18 starters for our final outing.

Our walk locations were all near water, partly shaded and hence were quite pleasant even though the temperature was above 35 degrees on a couple of occasions. The chosen locations also give us a good mix of water and woodland birds.



Group at Flowerdale



We had an average of 30 species sighted each Tuesday over the 12 outings. Highlights were seeing some of our Woodland Bird Conservation Action Plan (CAP) species and threatened species on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) list. Birds such as the Brown Tree-creeper, Dusky Woodswallow and 3 Latham's snipe at Flowerdale which gave everyone a real buzz. We also saw a Rakali and a Tailed Emperor Butterfly at Marrambidya.

Janet Hume



Lake Albert - Long-billed Corella; Wiradjuri Reserve - Brown Treecreeper; Marrambidya - Rakali swimming; Marrambidya - Tailed Emperor Butterfly



Rangelands – Recharge for Resilience- Plains-wanderer Project

Feral Cat Management

Last month, I was lucky enough to spend some time with Tim Saunders (from Saunders Spraying-Corowa) and his team before they set off for a night of feral cat/fox management.



Tim and his crew have been fox baiting the Plains-wanderer landscapes within the Murray and Riverina Local Land Service regions for the past seven years, having great success in reducing the fox population in these areas. However, the past few months they have also been concentrating on reducing the feral cat population with regular night ground shooting events. Tim and his team have removed nearly **200** feral cats (over a three-month period) from the Plains-wanderer habitat covering approximately 100,000 ha's. Tim explained that "with such a robust fox baiting program in place keeping the fox numbers

down, feral cats have been allowed to creep in, taking over as the Apex predators".

With the aid of a thermal monocular fitted to the roof relaying images to an iPad, Tim can identify a lot more feral cats than the



traditional spotlighting technique. Feral cats are extremely clever and can easily hide behind tufts of grass, out of view of the spotlight and be driven by undetected. With the help of thermal this is no longer the case, resulting in the removal of a lot more feral cats. I was extremely impressed to be a spectator and watch as their side-by-side moved barely visible through paddocks until the spotlight was required.

We have certainly come a long way from when I was a kid on the farm; spotlighting with two of us standing on the back of a ute and thumping the roof for the driver to stop when we spotted a fox!!

David Kellett – Riverina Local Land Services

Nature Conservation Photography Grants - Joanne Connelly has sent these links to the Wildlife Queensland website for grants for non-professional photographers

https://wildlife.org.au/nature-conservation-photography-grant/?mc_cid=e93396d667&mc_eid=6fdc33e44e

<https://wildlife.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Wildlife-Queensland-Wayne-Lawler-Nature-Conservation-Photography-Grant-Guidelines-2025-Final.pdf>

Field Trip to Fivebough Wetlands at Leeton

A good group from Wagga, Whitton and Narrandera gathered at Fivebough (the early bird catches the worm??)

Fivebough is looking like a thriving ecosystem because of a delivery environmental water to shallower parts to the north and the east. This hopefully encourages wading birds and manages vegetation for next years' visitors.



On this day many Red-kneed Dotterel were seen and one lonesome Wood Sandpiper. The previously fluctuating water levels would not have helped their breeding attempts. Purple Swamp Hen were many and Black-tailed Native Hen were foraging like chooks.

Long legged wading birds: Egret, Spoonbill, Ibis , Spur-winged Plovers and Stilt were found in small groups as is usual. A Brown and a Black Snake had come out to sunbake on this sunny morning. They are easily seen on the light gravel paths. Raptors were varied today: Black Kite, Swamp Harrier and Whistling Kite were seen scanning early. Smaller faster raptors: Kestrel and a Hobby as well as the rarer Black Falcon were observed on the south track.



The Black Swans have returned but alas too late to nest, the required water arrived at Fivebough too late this year.

We found the ducks at the Sewage Treatment Ponds. Lining the banks of the ponds were hundreds of Black Duck, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal and Plumed Whistling Ducks.

300 plus Magpie Geese were also roosting here. They can be seen feeding in the paddocks nearby and also roost in the water near the first birdhide.

A few Great Cormorant and the odd Darter were also resting on the bank. Two Freckled Duck was found amongst the hordes. No Brolga today but two have been reported recently.

A pleasant walk on a lovely morning. Thanks everyone.

Text by Nella Smith, images by Janet Hume

Clockwise from top right: Group walking; Sewage pond Freckled Duck + friends; Black Falcon; Red-kneed Dotterel



More on *Plants of Western NSW*

In our February newsletter I wrote about how I found my own copy of *Plants of Western NSW* by using eBay notifications (\$265 for a 1981 edition *sans* dustjacket.) A few members found this interesting so I thought I would add to the story.

I received the book and wrote the article last April and am still receiving notifications whenever the book is offered for sale on eBay. In the last month it's been offered for \$575 and someone else has it listed for \$530. They both seem quite high to me! (though one was a first edition signed by an author). They haven't sold in the last month, so maybe they are both a bit expensive.

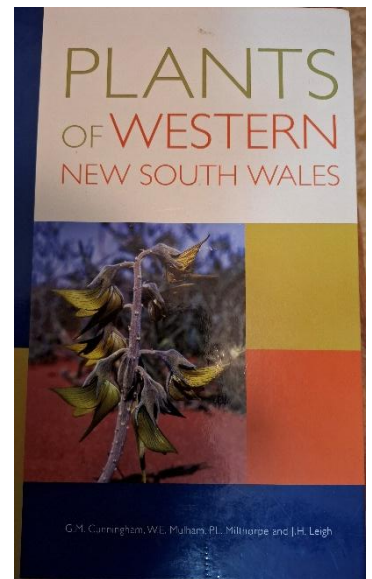
Before they were listed, our President, Sarah, phoned me last July from a bookstore in Canberra. There was a copy on the shelf in front of her for \$230 and she was wondering if she should buy it on behalf of the club? It seemed like an excellent idea but advised her we would have to run it past a meeting, so Sarah left it there. Sometimes you just have to be in the right place at the right time.

When I was talking with Eric a couple of days later, I mentioned the book Sarah came across in Canberra and he agreed a purchase like that would need the club's approval. We both knew it would be sold before our next meeting, but Eric was able to take advantage of the relatively cheap price and got his Canberra based son to call in and purchase it the next day. This was to replace his own well-used, falling apart copy. So sometimes it helps to know someone in the right place at the right time.

Sarah herself is very much bird focussed but has an interest in all aspects of the natural world and is slowly learning about our flora. She was never going to spend \$200+ on a plant book, but as she was going through some books from a deceased uncle's estate in December she discovered a near pristine, later edition which she is now the happy/proud owner of. Sometimes you just get very lucky!

Glenn Currie

Ed: the club has a copy in its library, contact Margrit Martin tigram.nitram@gmail.com if you would like to borrow it.



Members' Observations

From Kath Mahy - Echidna on my walk along river at her place on the Murrumbidgee River at Euroley



From Ada Stoll Brolgas at Fivebough Wetlands in February



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

Latham's Snipe [3]	Flowerdale Lagoon, Wagga Wagga	04/02/25	MFN Tuesday Bird Walk
Rainbow Bee-eater [20]	"Golden Valley" Walleroobie	14/02/25	SD JH & L Cox
Speckled Warbler [1]	"Golden Valley" Walleroobie	14/02/25	SD JH & L Cox
Brown Treecreeper [1]	"Golden Valley" Walleroobie	14/02/25	SD JH & L Cox
Glossy-black Cockatoo [2]	"Golden Valley" Walleroobie	14/02/25	SD JH & L Cox
Jacky Winter [1]	The Rock, TSR	16/02/25	S Danckert
Brown Treecreeper [3]	The Rock, TSR	16/02/25	S Danckert
Superb Parrot [20]	'Quandong Park' Tootool	16/02/25	S Danckert
Pink Cockatoo [24]	Langley Cr, Griffith	28/02/25	Dave Heath
Eastern Cattle Egret [9]	Myall Park Rd, Yenda	15/02/25	Neil Palframan
Eastern Cattle Egret [9]	Nericon, nr Griffith	15/02/25	Neil Palframan

Although common in the Leeton area Cattle Egret are not common around Griffith, my sightings are normally years apart

Tailed Emperor Butterfly [1]	Marrambidya, Wagga Wagga	11/02/25	MFN Tuesday Bird Walk
Rakali [1]	Marrambidya, Wagga Wagga	11/02/25	MFN Tuesday Bird Walk
Dusky Woodswallow [1]	Lake Albert, Wagga	18/03/25	MFN Tuesday Bird Walk
Freckled Duck [2]	Fivebough, Leeton	16/03/25	MFN outing
Wood Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough, Leeton	16/03/25	MFN outing
White-Throated Needletail [40]	"Colale" Eunanoreenya	20/03/25	Sarah, Janet & Deb Clark
Pink-eared Duck [2]	Flowerdale Lagoon	20/03/25	S Danckert
Brown Treecreeper [3]	Livingstone National Park	23/03/25	Sarah, Janet & Deb Clark
Restless Flycatcher [1]	Livingstone NP	23/03/25	Sarah, Janet & Deb Clark
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater [1]	Livingstone NP	23/03/25	Sarah, Janet & Deb Clark
Varied Sittella [2]	Livingstone NP	23/03/25	Sarah, Janet & Deb Clark
Dusky Woodswallow [6]	Livingstone NP	23/03/25	Sarah, Janet & Deb Clark
Restless Flycatcher [1]	Livingstone NP	23/03/25	Sarah, Janet & Deb Clark
Brown Treecreeper [5]	Wiradjuri Reserve	25/03/25	MFN Tuesday Bird Walk
White-bellied Sea-Eagle [1]	"Gundillawah" Mundarlo	27/03/35	S Danckert, J Hume
Crested Shrike-tit [1]	"Lilliput" Rutherglen	30/03/25	J Hume

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

Rainbow Bee-eater [20]	"Golden Valley" Walleroobie	14/02/25	SD JH & L Cox
Rainbow Bee-eater [15]	The Rock, TSR	16/02/25	S Danckert

Sightings of interest:

I was enraptured at Flowerdale Lagoon on 28th March:

1 Nankeen Kestrel	1 Black-shouldered Kite
1 Whistling Kite	2 Australian Hobbies

+ a sighting of the local Rakali. Sarah Danckert

Compiled by Janet Hume, reviewed by Nella Smith.

**** 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.

- 10 April Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7pm.
Topic: Nella Smith will be presenting on her recent trip to East Gippsland, Bring along Show and Tell
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 12 April Saturday** **Outing to Jacks Creek, Cocoparra National Park for a walk**
Leader: Virginia Tarr
Meet at the Jacks Creek picnic area at 9am
Bring morning tea and lunch.
Please register with (or for more details) Virginia 0434 831 031
Email: vobrien3@hotmail.com
- 30 April Wednesday** **Copy for the May newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com Phone: 0429 726 120.
- 4 May Sunday** **Outing Livingstone National Park**
Leader: Sarah Danckert
Meet at the at 10 am
Please register or for more details
murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 8 May 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

Other Events

Fungi and Soil Health: An Underground Conversation workshops are being held by Murrumbidgee Landcare in May

4th May, Hay: 5th May Leeton: 7th May Temora: 14th May Wagga Wagga.

Learn about the Kingdom Fungi and principles of ID, ecological significance, cultural aspects and their use in land restoration from **Alison Pouliot**. Also be a part of an interactive soil pit discussion with **Geoff Minchin**, Local Land Services, including understanding and improving soil health.

You can register or find out more [here](#)

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

Thursday 15th May - Special Event Film: Antarctica-the Giant Awakens at the Roxy Theatre Leeton. It follows a team of climate scientists as they embark on a mission to Antarctica.

Book <https://Leeton.sales.ticketsearch.com/sales/salesevent/146998>