

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



November 2019 - Issue #276

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



CELEBRATING

25

YEARS

Images by
Phil Tenison

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the December issue by
Wednesday 4 December

To Rowena Whiting

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**AGM is on Thursday,
14 November at 7pm
End of year breakup at
Middle Beach on Saturday
30 November**

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 Yellow Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street at 7 PM

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

Membership enquiries:

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

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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 November

We certainly packed a lot into the celebration weekend of our 25 years. And like a Spring camp many members participated in all the outings together with the celebrity dinner. A number of articles have been written about the events and appear in the following pages. I have also included some snippets from the 2nd issue of our newsletter which related to our first outings which were repeated on the weekend. Bird and plant lists filled much of the 7 pages which can't be included here. An electronic version is available if anyone would like a copy.

Many other things have been happening over the last month which will have to be held over to the December issue. We had a display stand at the Leeton Show, ably manned by Alan and Susan Whitehead and others; a few members attended the Malleefowl training session for monitoring this endangered bird; and of course, the Twitchathon. Keep the contributions coming.

I would like to thank those people who responded to the request for a short profile on why they joined the club - they were displayed on the tables at the anniversary dinner. Also to those members who contributed to the photo exhibition which was also on display at this function. Some of these have appeared in the newsletter mainly as illustrations to enhance articles. However it is very different seeing them enlarged and framed. It is planned to have them displayed in the public arena.

Looking to November: please be mindful of the AGM, the club requires a new president (Graham has completed his 3 years) and secretary so please give some thought to who you would like to see in these roles and how you can take an active role in the club.

Enjoy your month, Rowena

A small section of the photo display at the anniversary dinner – Phil Tenison



25 Year Anniversary Celebrating 25 Years of Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists

We don't get to celebrate 25-year anniversaries very often in a lifetime, at the best we get four 25-year birthdays, and maybe three 25 year wedding anniversaries. So, when 25 years of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists came around it was time to organise something different to what we normally do.

The weekend of the 18th to 20th October was chosen to be the weekend of the celebration. There were events organised for the three days of the weekend and there are reports in other parts of the newsletter on the field outings. On the Saturday night we have gathered for a dinner, photo display and the presentation of life membership.



Dinner was three course of excellent food culminating in a desert of a custom iced gluten free red velvet cake. This was enjoyed by 30 past and present members with apologies being received by a number of members that were unable to attend. The cake was cut by the three foundation members present Keith Hutton, Rowena and Eric Whiting

One of the highlights of the evening was an excellent presentation by Matt Cameron on the work that is being conducted on the recovery programs for some of the locally endangered species. All together Matt spoke on about 10 different species starting in the Snowy Mountains with the Corroboree Frog, and ending with an Acacia species, Purple-wood Wattle from around Broken Hill.

Eric gave us an insight into how the club came into being in 1994 with regular excursions and meeting nights over the years; along with weekend camps, conservation projects, workshops and biodiversity surveys. Other activities like the Twitchathon, koala and bird counts are part of our program together with supporting various environmental causes.

Over the months preceding the dinner there were several gatherings to select the photos that would be used in the display. The result was a collection of 35 photos taken by members of MFN of nature that is found in the Murrumbidgee Valley. These photos gave a great background and talking points for the night.

The night ended with the presentation of life membership to Rowena and Eric Whiting. Eric was the driving force behind the formation of MFN 25 years ago and Rowena has been the editor of the monthly newsletter for many of these 25 years. A copy of the Life membership citation appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

Thanks to all those that were involved in the organisation and to those that attended and helped to make it such and enjoyable night. Looking forward to the next 25 years.

Graham Russell



Eric and Rowena's Life Membership Citation

Tonight, I, on behalf of the club would like to acknowledge two long standing members that in the time that I have been involved have been instrumental members in keeping the ship headed in the right direction and also being an invaluable source of the knowledge that has kept me involved. After 7 years I look at plants as more than food and shelter for birds and it is these two that have taught me this.

If you haven't worked out who I am talking about it is Eric and Rowena Whiting

Eric and Rowena arrived in Australia in 1970 initially living in and around the Melbourne region and then moving to Bendigo where Eric became involved in both the Orienteering Group and the Bendigo Field Naturalist Group. It is here that Eric began to gather his knowledge of the plants of his adopted country.

It was Eric that placed the initial ad in the Irrigator calling for a meeting to form a Field Naturalist Group. This initial meeting attracted 20 people and led to the formation of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists that is still going 25 years later.

As Rowena put it herself she never really joined the MFN she just became a member by default as part of Eric's family membership. That's not to say that she has been any less involved becoming the Newsletter Editor in 1998 and still committing a weekend per month to putting this great publication together.

It was definitely England's loss and Australia's gain when the Whiting's emigrated to Australia and when they moved to Leeton and established the only Field Naturalist Group in the catchment, it was ours and nature's great good fortune.

It is my pleasure to present Rowena and Eric with life membership

Graham Russell, President



FROM NATURE LOVER TO FIELD NATURALIST

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Turn 25

Throughout my 1940s and '50s childhood, I was blessed by having a father who self-identified with the somewhat quaint title of 'nature lover'; a tiny fraternity indeed at the time. Naturally, I too became a nature lover.

Over the decades, even with the raising of a family, and the pursuing of various vocations, my interest in the wild world remained, if not exactly a passion, certainly an abiding fondness.

So in my retirement to Narrandera in 2016, and now with time on my hands, I was delighted to discover an extraordinary community of like-minded souls who unwittingly elevated my status from erstwhile nature lover to 'field naturalist'.

This group, the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists, proudly turned 25 this year. They enjoyed their very first meeting and outing in October, 1994.

In fact the three days, 18th, 19th and 20th of this month will be a re-enacting of events that took place a quarter of a century ago. One of these is a birdwatching tour at Fivebough Wetlands at Leeton on the 19th, starting at 6am. If the birds rise early, so, apparently, must we!

The talents embodied in the MFN are a healthy balance of the scientific and the aesthetic. The academic rigor of the former can be found in the many research activities performed by members of the Club. These include bird counts, particularly of the endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo (my top count of these majestic birds was 21 in one afternoon at a local dam!). Then there's the Malleefowl mound counts; native flora surveys, such as along roadside wildlife corridors; and the monitoring of wetlands health, such as at Campbell Swamp at Griffith.

The club also contributes to Narrandera's celebrated annual Koala Count. This year a happy throng of women, men and children spotted 46 koalas, some with young a-back – a healthy population, indeed.

The aesthetic is harder to define, but no less important. The most visual evidence is the Club's collective portfolio of nature photographs; especially of birds.

On any weekend club members can be spotted hauling their tripods and long lenses into hard-to-access locations to capture that elusive picture of a Crimson Chat feeding its young, or Brolgas performing their lighter-than-air mating dance. Some shots, like those of our own rare Superb Parrots, in colour and composition can be truly elegiac.

An edifying element of the Club is the high level of expertise to be found, honed by decades of astute observation, among its 50 or so members. This is especially, but not exclusively, the case with bird identification. One example to illustrate:

On a recent Twitchathon (where a small group of birdlovers race across the landscape all day counting as many avian species as possible), a flock of Sulphur Crested Cockatoos alighted some distance behind one of our members. "Add them to the list!" I proclaimed. Without looking around she corrected "Make that two species. There's a Major Mitchell Cockatoo in that flock." And, only with the aid of binoculars was it confirmed. Incredibly, she had detected the sweeter timbre of a single pink major Mitchell Cockatoo among the cacophony of Sulphur Cresteds!

Group at Mt Brogden and Fivebough (right) - mid 2000s



An important role of the Club is to promote the conservation and appreciation of our beautiful native creatures in their equally beautiful habitats – both under serious threat not only in the MIA, but *everywhere*. An example of this vital PR work is the Club's displays at the recent Narrandera and Leeton Agricultural Shows. These contained samples of mesmerizing photos as described above. Then there were reptile specimens; wildflowers; posters; handouts; books; and children's games and puzzles. There was even a mineral display, with one piece of Cocoparra sandstone revealing a perfectly preserved group of jellyfish-like coelenterates, many millions of years old.

A major enticement to becoming a member of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists is the outings; there being one or two to local beauty spots every month of the year: with a couple of major seasonal camps further afield; sometimes interstate.

The camp last Autumn was at Tumbarumba, at the foothills of the Snowy Mountains. Here our lives were enriched by a plethora of natural wonders; many not seen in our own area. Among these were large colonies of phosphorescent fungi, King Parrots, Lady's Tresses Orchids, and Satin Bower Birds. These were all archived in the Club's monthly Newsletter. (This is a document of gilt-edge quality in its artistry and eloquence, and has seduced many folk, including me, to join the Club.)

During our last dinner together in the High Country, a fellow Club member asked me to describe my trip highlight. The following is how I replied; as recorded in the Newsletter:

We arrived at Sue City at the headwaters of Talbingo Reservoir. Here I had one of those Magic Moments of suspended time. Standing among a group of like-minded nature lovers, on a warm, clear afternoon, embraced by a breathtaking landscape of mountain and sparkling lake, I watched a small flock of Red-browed Finches alight. This tightly feeding group of beautiful little birds perfectly complemented the scenery, the tranquility, and the fellowship. Then they were gone.

Alan Whitehead

A SPIRIT OF PLACE

The late afternoon light was tintured with gold as we filed into the bush on a grassy track between Lake Talbot and its parallel billabong at Narrandera's Rocky Waterholes. This outing, on Friday, October 18, was **the launch of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists's Silver Anniversary celebrations.**



Purple-backed Fairy Wren – Graham Russell

The silent River Red Gums under which we chattering passed were Hans Heysenesque in their majesty. But it was a tiny complement that next captured our attention: a family of Purple-backed Fairy Wrens (nee 'variegated'!), with one glitteringly jewel-like male cooperatively hopping about just ahead of us as we walked.

How opposite from this, in both colour and movement, was a Great Egret as it slowly rose on snowy wings to glide gracefully away, to resume its dolorous musings at a less bustling bank of the Great Canal.

The Buddha once cryptically commented that a thorn bush grows at the gates of Paradise. Our thorn bush in our paradise was the grim discovery of two Eastern Long-necked Tortoise shells lying in the grass; one being very large at over 30 centimeters. These were not natural deaths, but the result of being a reprehensible by-catch in some kind of fish or yabbie trap; where of course they drowned. They were then callously discarded, where nature's clean-up teams, meat ants and others, quickly removed all soft tissue.

Beauty still remained, however, in the tessellated tilings and shapes of the empty carapaces which, curiously, were neither simply oval nor elliptical. Rather they were a quite unique curvature, a perfect response to aeons of evolution on this singular animal to this singular environment.

From looking down to looking out, we were richly rewarded by a *par de deux* of a pair of Australasian Grebes in full mating plumage; the male's amber-chestnut mane glowing gloriously in the bright, slanting light.

A perennial frustration for birdwatchers is that one can hear many more birds than one can see: though both Eastern and Yellow Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots at least partly revealed themselves with flashes of prismatic colour in the canopy.

So the bush was alive with song as we ambled along, our presence most notably acknowledged by that dulcet duo, the Rufous Whistler and Grey Shrike-Thrush. With the latter, I often attempt to put lyrics to its many-varied calls. (An example: "Hi, hi, it's SATurday"!) Then there was the ever-'clamorous' chorus of the many Australian Reed Warblers, freshly returned from their sojourns north.

Later we went for a walk over the bridge to the other side of the canal. This was ostensibly for a spot of koala spotting; where one was, er, spotted. As compensation for the lack of 'native bear' (as koalas were called when I was young) sightings were, as ever, the birds. Of special interest was a Little Eagle, rarely seen in the area – by me at least –, and a Cockatiel at a nest hollow. This feathered real-estate would surely be one of the most secure around, high up in a dead tree surrounded by water, as it was.

At twilight we all returned to the bridge for a shared dinner. In the stillness of the moment, when the frog choir gradually replaced that of the birds, my reflections turned to the bridge itself. This was supported by the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists with a financial contribution.

Importantly, it is a memorial in steel to the now sadly departed Terry Smith, whose enterprise and efforts are rightly rewarded by having the bridge, as the brass plaque attests, named after him.

A Spirit of Place, indeed.

Alan Whitehead



It seemed President Graham was still in pre-daylight saving mode when he made a 6am start at the Fivebough Wetlands for the re-enactment of the original outing 25 years ago.

It was still basically pre-sunrise as the group wandered towards the shelter to watch the sun come up before heading slowly down to the first viewing platform. Several 'strings' of **Glossy Ibis** were the first birds to be seen with over 50 birds flying southward after their overnight roost at the swamp.

The 'window on the wetlands' closest to the platform had a good selection of birds and both ponds from the viewing area produced a healthy list of the local resident species along with a group of **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** and a couple of **Wood Sandpipers** seen. A good collection of waterbirds entertained the group as different birds were identified to the inexperienced in the group – the ducks were mostly **Grey Teal** with just a few **Australian Shoveler** added to the list.

As we were about to move on Dionee and Susan went back to prepare the breakfast at the Presbyterian Hall whilst the rest moved on towards the settling ponds. Not a lot of birds were present but whilst scanning the pond, a **Little Bittern** was heard calling, by some of us, in the reeds opposite the viewing platform. On the way back to the cars, the group stopped to look at 9 **White-fronted Chats** sitting on the fence beside the path. We later learned from Matt Cameron's talk at the Formal Dinner that night that the chats were listed as Vulnerable so we were very pleased to have seen them on the walk.

Finally, the mob moved slowly back to the cars and we eventually all made it to the church hall for bacon and egg rolls.

Eventually the group was encouraged to get back into their vehicles and head to Andrew's place for the second re-enactment of the original outing from 25 years ago. When all had arrived Andrew took us for a walk around the hill where the Black Cockies had been feeding. Sadly, none were to be found – maybe the noise of chatter might have frightened them off well before we got near them! On our return to the house area, we came across a tree with a couple of **Rainbow Bee-eaters** and saw a **Jacky Winter** fly into a tree to feed young in its very flimsy nest.

Back at the house, Ana had the kettle boiling and we all sat inside for a cuppa and more chat. Thanks to Ana and Andrew for their hospitality it was great for everyone to catch-up and also to Dionee and Graham for the breakfast arrangements and Susan for her help in getting it all set-up.

Max O'Sullivan



Group gathers at Fivebough – Dionee Russell
Group at the 'window' – Dionee Russell
Black-winged Stilt and Red-kneed Dotterel - Graham Russell

Outing to Spring Hill and Wattle Dam

20 October 2019

Yes, I know, we have been to Spring Hill so many times before, but the main aim was to celebrate our 25 years of outings, and Spring Hill has the benefit of comfy benches and toilets for the all-important Morning Tea.

I always enjoy the walk up from the rest area toward the falls, an easy uphill track, and the low trees close in create a shelter, even on the fiercest of days. All was dry, barren, almost bare after months of nothing but minor rains. But there were still features to observe ... the play of sun and shade under the Cypress saplings, the fading beauty of the last few wildflowers, the mosses mostly dry with flowers done but a few light green patches surviving, the freshish

emu plop (don't we love emu plops!), the kangaroo tracks winding off through the forest, now obvious thanks to the lack of groundcover.

A Wedgie flew effortlessly south to north overhead being chased by a Magpie that was unable to get enough height to harass effectively, but it didn't give up trying. A Grey Fantail provided a close encounter, almost a "reach out and touch". MFNers scrambled up the rocks while saner heads like Max and I hung around the area of the creek crossing which, as usual, had some bird activity. What appeared to be a Willie Wagtail corroboree, turned out to be only three, but they were super active, chasing each other constantly.

Back at the smoko spot we had built a modest tally of the usual winged suspects (see attached list) with the Mulga Parrots and the White-winged Trillers probably the highlight, and settled into smoko ... and that is when the magic began.

A squeaky call alerted us to several Turquoise Parrots in the same spot as we had talked about seeing them on previous occasions. It seemed that a juvenile was being fed by parents, so maybe they like this spot and had nested nearby.

Then Crimson Chats were noted in the trees and on the ground and a half dozen (estimate) quickly increased to at least a dozen, and included a lone Black Honeyeater. Several times they all took to the wing and apparently left the area, only to reappear soon after.



Turquoise Parrots – Graham Russell

not a single bird came to drink. One butterfly crossed the scene. It was super quiet. This is Wattle Dam that has a huge reputation for birdlife, the Wattle Dam that once gave me forty species in the hour after dawn on a Twitchathon, but it has been almost abandoned now for around a year.

Neil Palframan



**The last of the fading wildflowers
Grey Fantail
Neil Palframan**

Parrots were scarce both in species and numbers, but the next day back in suburbia on Blumer Ave I watched a pair of Australian Ringnecks on a lawn overgrown with lush weeds, snipping the unopened flower heads off dandelions, eating the base of the flower and leaving the petals as mulch for the lawn. There's better bush tucker in the well-watered towns.

After smoko we tripped back to Wattle Dam. While the group walked a loop through the bush I stayed to guard the dam, and in that hour, all that I saw was one Jacky Winter, one Red-capped Robin on the horizon, and one Bar-shouldered Dove, and

Bird Lists for the 25 Year MFN Celebration 18-20 October 2019

Compiled by Max O'Sullivan

Rocky Waterholes 18/10/19:

Brown Treecreeper	Kookaburra	Grey Shrike-Thrush	Rufous Whistler
Purple-backed Wren	Eurasian Coot	Australasian Grebe	Peaceful Dove
Western Gerygone	Eastern Rosella	Yellow Rosella	Wood Duck
Black Duck	Grey Teal	Pee-wee	Purple Swamphen
Little Friarbird	Willie Wagtail	Great Egret	White Cockatoo
White-plumed H/e	Striated Pardalote	Red-rumped Parrot	Welcome Swallow
Sacred Kingfisher	Australian Raven	Aust. Reed Warbler	Cockatiel
Crested Pigeon	Little Eagle	Little Pied Cormorant	White-breasted Woodswallow
Tree Martin	Pelican	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike	

Fivebough Wetlands 19/10/19:

Glossy Ibis	Aust. White Ibis	Straw-necked Ibis	Grey Teal
Australasian Shoveler	Red-kneed Dotterel	Wood Sandpiper	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
Pied Butcherbird	Magpie	Pee-wee	Black-tailed Native-hen
Pelican	Red-necked Avocet	Black-winged Stilt	Purple Swamphen
Moorhen	Brolga	Silver Gull	Whiskered Tern
Royal Spoonbill	Aust. Shelduck	Little Raven	Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Purple-backed Wren	Aust. Reed Warbler	Tree Martin	Welcome Swallow
Masked Lapwing	Spotted Crake	Darter	Black Duck
Eurasian Coot	Black Swan	Galah	Little Black Cormorant
Cisticola	Hardhead	Fairy Martin	Little Bittern
White-faced Heron	Little Grassbird	Hoary-headed Grebe	Little Pied Cormorant
Starling	White-fronted Chat	Singing H/e	Pink-eared Duck
Blue-faced H/e	Little Friarbird	White-winged Triller	Yellow Thornbill
Superb Wren	Swamp Harrier	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike	

'Yarrabimbi' Andrew's place 19/10/19:

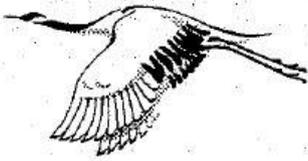
White-browed Babbler	Magpie	Willie Wagtail	Rufous Whistler
Brown Treecreeper	White-plumed H/e	Jacky Winter	Grey Shrike-Thrush
Rainbow Bee-eater	White-winged Triller	Black Duck	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Double-barred Finch	Mallee Ringneck	Purple-backed Wren	Dusky Woodswallow
Pied Butcherbird	Common Bronzewing	Western Gerygone	

Spring Hill Cocoparra National Park 20/10/19:

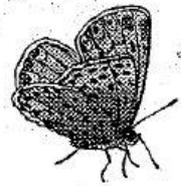
Apostlebird	Mulga Parrot	Crested Pigeon	Starling
Galah	Common Bronzewing	Peaceful Dove	Red-rumped Parrot
Rufous Whistler	Willie Wagtail	Pied Butcherbird	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Magpie	Kookaburra	Spiny-cheeked H/e	Grey Shrike-Thrush
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Grey Fantail	Eastern Yellow Robin	White-browed Babbler
White-winged Triller	Rainbow Bee-eater	Brown Treecreeper	Dusky Woodswallow
Southern Whiteface	Jacky Winter	Turquoise Parrot	White-plumed H/e
White-winged Chough	Crimson Chat	Black H/e	Double-barred Finch

Wattle Dam Binya State Forest 20/10/19:

Peaceful Dove	Red-capped Robin	Rufous Whistler	Grey Fantail
Western Gerygone	Rainbow Bee-eater	Splendid Wren	White-browed Babbler
White-winged Chough	Jacky Winter	Bar-shouldered Dove	Willie Wagtail



Murrumbidgee Field Naturalist's Club Newsletter



Issue # 2

Guest speaker at the November meeting will be **Ian Oag**, who will be talking about the development of a **Land and Water Management Plan** for the MIA. Improved management of our natural resources is essential for the future of our local area - its important for everyone, not just the agricultural sector.

Field Trip: Following on from the successful trip to Fivebough Swamp and the Brobenah Hills on the sixteenth of last month (not to mention the impromptu spotlighting trip on twenty-eighth), our next field trip will be to Barry Hehir's property on the Narrandera Range on **Sunday 13 November**. Our guide for the trip will be Les Mulloy. **Meeting time is 8.30 AM , Riverina Gardens (i.e. Tuckerbag) carpark**. Bring a picnic lunch if you're keen enough to continue in the afternoon.

Things to Bring: - the usual - binoculars, notebook, field guides (if you have them), picnic lunch, hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen (or a raincoat, depending on what the days like).

Any further enquiries, or if you need help with transport, call Michael Schultz on 53-2541 (AH).

Reports, Lists, and Other Things.

Following are the following:

1. Report (by Michael Schultz) on Tuckerbill Swamp visit on 23-10-94.
2. Bird List for Tuckerbill Swamp (by Bill Moller)
3. Plant list for the visit to "Yarrabimbi" on 16-10-94 (by Michael).
4. Bird list for "Yarrabimbi" (by Bill).
5. Report (by Eric) on a spotlighting trip into the MIA State Forest on 28-10-94.
6. Plant list for Fivebough Swamp visit on 16-10-94 (by Michael).
7. Bird list for Fivebough Swamp (by Bill).

TUCKERBILL SWAMP

Sunday morning 23rd October 1994, club members Keith Hutton, Les Mulloy, Patty Moller, Bill Moller and Michael Schultz walked through Tuckerbill Swamp and nearby farmland to evaluate the prospects of the area for future club field trips.

The morning provided a number of highlights: First, an Australian Bitten (103), which is listed as endangered, was seen after being disturbed from a small area of cumbungi *Typha orientalis* growing in a farm supply channel; Second, we were privileged to have a flight of 37 Brolgas (190) pass around us and on landing two birds began dancing; Third but not least, a White Winged Wren (518) was sighted in a stand of lignum *Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii*. This being the first time Keith had seen or noted the species in the Leeton district.

Tuckerbill was dry, other than two saline dams near the centre, another large dam near the drainage inlet at the southern end, and drainage overflow from adjoining rice farms filling approximately 20 hectares in the north west portion. The main section of Tuckerbill, which is usually wetland habitat, was completely dry and devoid of fauna. A nest of a White Faced Heron (91) was one of many other unidentified nests seen in a remnant stand of Black Box *Eucalyptus largiflorens* in association with the odd remaining Belah *Casuarina cristata*. The unavailability of Tuckerbill this season as a nesting area for wetland avifauna species is regrettable.

3

"YARRABIMBI" FIELD TRIP

The "Yarrabimbi" field trip gave those taking part, an appreciation of the dry conditions. A number of plant species displayed signs of stress and there was little or no growth of groundcover plants. Plants of *Grevillea floribunda* carried flower buds which had ceased developing, a small number of other plant species were flowering. The majority of plants identified were overstorey and shrublayer species.

So on Friday 28th October nine members gathered at Bill Moller's place equipped with spotlights and torches, prior to setting out for the Graham's Grave area of the MIA Forest. Jim Rook, the Forester in charge of the river forests was our guide - no fear of taking wrong tracks!

We spent some two hours or so wandering around the lagoons searching the majestic River Red Gums, the Yellow Box (some were in flower) and the occasional White Cypress Pine. The rewards - 6 Ring-tail Possums, 1 Brush-tail Possum, 3 rabbits, 1 roosting Butcher Bird, and a few irate Galahs. At least 3 Boobook Owls were heard, and several bats flitted rapidly through the spotlight beams. One of the Ring-tail Possums was found low in a Red Gum affording a relatively close view of it. The Brush-tail was spotted on the ground and was quite happy to parade up and down a fallen log regardless of the brightness of the spotlights.

Bird Tour Around Rankins Springs

28-29 September 2019

For a small community group, the **Lachlan Fold Wildlife Action Group**, put on a great weekend for aspiring and experienced birdwatchers. The tours attracted at least half a dozen MFN members, birdwatchers from the Blue Mountains, Condobolin, Wagga, Griffith and Sydney.

Rankins Springs had some decent winter rains which are good for crops and wildlife and we saw the result of this in both the flora and fauna.

Most of the birds we saw were furiously busy sitting on eggs or feeding youngsters or keeping them safe. Some of them were practicing building nests for next year. One Splendid Wren even had a blue flower in its beak maybe to offer to his girl.



A nice early start on Saturday morning was a trip to Gap Dam for some great woodland birds. It was here that some people saw a Raven picking off baby Wood Ducks for food. Reportedly the clutch had started with a dozen and was down to three today. I would have blamed foxes for this. The White-winged Trillers and Crimson Chats were everywhere. Most of us have never seen so many in one location.

Driving on we came across Major Mitchell Cockatoos which looked like they were chewing out a hollow for a nest in a Cypress Pine. A bit late for this year but maybe a good start for next year.

A visit to the

Malleefowl enclosure where the shrubs were flowering well was followed by a drive through a crop of Vetch and Lupins which Crimson Chats find very attractive for the Heliotrope Moths which feed on it. Many chats were seen feeding tailless young. David kindly explained the values of these as nitrogen fixing and as crops useful for rotation and stockfeed. On the way a flock of emus were seen up to their haunches in a crop, share farming.

Have you ever sipped champagne while sitting at a dam at a special location and watched the highly threatened Glossy Black Cockatoos fly in with their whining calls, perch in nearby trees and then sip from the dam themselves. Not one or two either.....a total of 15. This is what we do instead of nightclubbing you know.

Sunday morning proved equally spectacular. A dam in the Northern Cocoparras attracted all the special woodland birdsexcept Turquoise Parrots. I think we were a bit late for them.



Here we were treated to Finches, Double barred and Diamond bathing on the edge of the dam; Honeyeaters, White plumed, Yellow plumed and Brown headed; Pigeons, Bar shouldered, Peaceful Dove Common Bronzewing. Plus all the other little passerines and big passerines and parrots attracted to scarce water in the landscape. Just look at the list.

That bird watching was as good as it gets. Our next stop at Eight Mile road was pretty good too. The shrubs were also flowering nicely and additions to our lists were Southern Whiteface and the Sapphires of the west -Splendid Wrens and Budgies using the nests provided by roadside trees on the travelling stock route.

Splendid Wren (top), Major Mitchell Cockatoo (above right), Mallee Ringneck (left)

Looking beyond the birds, Some acacias had nearly finished flowering but others were at their best. Philotheca, Micromyrtus, Olearia, Rhodanthe, Grevillea, Eremophila, Hakea and Brachyscombe species put colour into the landscape that rivals Western Australia. Some sharp eyes found the spectacular Mallee Blue Flower and a Scaevola species.

Home prepared catering was really appreciated by all as was the accommodation at Rankins Springs. Even the Willy Wagtail had found himself a nice warm place to nest between floodlights on the way to the bathroom. But where was the Spotted Bowerbird??

Nella Smith

[Nella provided a bird list for the weekend, but due to a lack of space I have not been able to include it. Please contact Nella or me if you'd like a copy. Ed]

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Cockatiel [6]	Rocky Waterholes Narrandera	28/09/19	Alan Whitehead
A pair at a nest hollow.			
Cockatiel [20]	Brobenah Farm	31/09/19	Peter Draper
Rainbow Bee-eater	Nericon – season arrival	04/10/19	Neil Palframan
White-fronted Chat [4]	Sandigo Farm	04/10/19	Peter Draper
Little Corella [9]	Brobenah Farm	04/10/19	Peter Draper
Rainbow Bee-eater [5+]	Lake Talbot, Narrandera	07/10/19	Alan Whitehead
Painted Honeyeater	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	07/10/19	Kath & Phil Tenison
Mistletoebird	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	07/10/19	Kath & Phil Tenison
White-winged Triller	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	07/10/19	Kath & Phil Tenison
Singing Honeyeater	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	07/10/19	Kath & Phil Tenison
Yellow Rosella [2]	Narrandera Wetlands	09/10/19	Susan Whitehead
Silvereye [1]	Narrandera Wetlands	09/10/19	Susan Whitehead
The bird was gathering spider webs for possible nest building.			
Banded Lapwing [2]	Yarrabimbi via Leeton	10/10/19	Andrew Thompson
Glossy Black Cockatoo [10]	Yarrabimbi via Leeton	10/10/19	Andrew Thompson
Shining Bronze Cuckoo [1]	Yarrabimbi via Leeton	10/10/19	Andrew Thompson
White-winged Triller [2]	Yarrabimbi via Leeton	10/10/19	Andrew Thompson
Magpie [50] – large number	Yarrabimbi via Leeton	10/10/19	Andrew Thompson
Noisy Friarbird [2]	Narrandera Wetlands	10/10/19	Susan Whitehead
Gull-billed Tern [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	10/10/19	Keith Hutton
Black-tailed Native-hen [1]	McCaughy Lake, Yanco	10/10/19	Sandra Henderson
Nankeen Night Heron [1]	McCaughy Lake, Yanco	10/10/19	Sandra Henderson
Latham's Snipe [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	11/10/19	Sandra Henderson
White-winged Triller [3]	Pendula St, Leeton in my backyard	11/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Fan-tailed Cuckoo [1]	Yanco Reserve	12/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Painted Honeyeater [3]	Yanco Reserve	12/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [1]	Koonadan Rd, Leeton	12/10/19	Penny Williams
Crimson Chat [male]	Koonadan Rd, Leeton	13/10/19	Penny Williams
Purple-backed Wren	Koonadan Rd, Leeton	13/10/19	Penny Williams
Black Honeyeater [8+]	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	13/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Pied Honeyeater [30+]	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	13/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
In the top of a dead tree there were 10 pairs of Pied and 2 pairs of Black at the one time!			
Painted Honeyeater [5+]	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	13/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Red-backed Kingfisher [1]	Vance Rd, Leeton – on power line	16/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Little Eagle	Rocky Waterholes, Narrandera	18/10/19	25 th Celebration

Little Bittern [H] – season return	Fivebough Wetlands Settling Ponds	19/10/19	25 th Celebration
White-fronted Chat [9]	Fivebough Wetlands	19/10/19	25 th Celebration
Rainbow Bee-eater [4]	Yarrabimbi via Leeton	19/10/19	25 th Celebration
Turquoise Parrot [4]	Spring Hill, Cocoparra National Park	20/10/19	25 th Celebration
Mulga Parrot [4]	Spring Hill, Cocoparra NP	20/10/19	25 th Celebration
Crimson Chat [12+]	Spring Hill, Coaoparra NP	20/10/19	25 th Celebration
Black Honeyeater [1 male]	Spring Hill, Cocoparra NP	20/10/19	25 th Celebration
Splendid Wren [4]	Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest	20/10/19	25 th Celebration
Red-capped Robin [pr]	Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest	20/10/19	25 th Celebration
Bar-shouldered Dove [5]	Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest	20/10/19	25 th Celebration
Red-necked Stint [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	20/10/19	Keith Hutton
Red-capped Plover [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	20/10/19	Keith Hutton
Marsh Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands – season return	23/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Superb Parrot [4]	Pendula St, Leeton	23/10/19	Max O'Sullivan

Birds were feeding on the seeds of my Cootamundra Wattle in the front garden.

Magpie Goose [1]	Campbell Swamp	25/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Dollarbird [1]	Euroly Bridge via Yanco – season arrival	26/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Diamond Firetail [1]	Yarrabimbi via Leeton	26/10/19	Andrew Thompson
Australasian Bittern [1]	Campbell Swamp	26/10/19	Silly Galahs Team
Brown Songlark [male]	Fivebough Wetlands – unusual sighting	27/10/19	Silly Galahs team
White-bellied Sea-eagle [2]	Lake Wyangan Causeway – flyover	27/10/19	Bidgee Boobooks
Brown Honeyeater [1]	Nericon – in Neil's garden	29/10/19	Neil Palframan
White-winged Wren [male]	Whitton Rd, Gogeldrie	29/10/19	Kathy Tenison
Curlew Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	31/10/19	Max O'Sullivan
Varied Sitella [3]	Euroly Bridge via Yanco	01/11/19	Max O'Sullivan

Purple-backed Fairy Wren / Variegated Fairy Wren split: There has been a species split between the Variegated Wren east of the divide (*Malarus lamberti*) and that of the western parts of Australia (*Malarus assimilis*). The east coastal wren will remain as **Variegated Fairy Wren** whilst that to the west of the Great Divide is now called the **Purple-backed Fairy Wren**. This includes all of the rest of Australia including the Kimberley form and the Lavender-flanked form of north-west Western Australia.

An unusual occurrence

Recently while riding my bicycle I was startled by a violent bang to my helmet. Looking up I saw a blue-faced honeyeater flying away. It went to the TV antenna on a nearby house. Because the perpetrator of this hit was of a species of bird I hadn't encountered attacking before I decided to ride back along the road and return to see if it would come at me again. But no, it stayed put on its perch. Perhaps it was getting over the hurt of hitting my helmet so violently. Who knows?

Barry Allen

Nest Box Survey 23/10/19

Margrit Martin, Eric Whiting, Andrew Thompson and myself met at Fivebough at 8am to check out the 34 nest boxes placed around the forested areas. As expected, most boxes contained **Common Starling** fledglings some of which escaped but most, as in 26 odd, were removed. No other birds appeared to utilise the boxes and only the upright parrot-type boxes were used by the starlings. The other smaller horizontal type with very narrow tube entrances were empty. These boxes were possibly designed to attract small birds like Pardalotes but as these birds are rarely seen at Fivebough it was not surprising that they were unoccupied.

One puzzling feature was that some of the boxes contained dead fledglings as well as live ones which may indicate the parent birds were finding it difficult to feed all chicks so some perished.

Also, the boxes were poorly constructed in the first place and most showed signs of gradual disintegration – warped tops, split sides, lids blown open and so on, so it is in effect a wasted exercise. Partly because the trees are still too small and the boxes attached too low to attract any native species. The only bird likely to utilise them would have been Red-rumped Parrots but they seem to have moved elsewhere to breed.

Max O'Sullivan

**** COMING EVENTS ****

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions please email or phone if you intend to come.

- 14 November Thursday** **Annual General Meeting and Monthly Meeting** in the Henry Lawson Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7 pm.
Topic: to be decided
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 16 November Saturday** **Murrumbidgee Valley National Park (Cuba Forest)**
Meet at the Lions Park, Darlington Point at 8:30am.
Bring morning tea and lunch.
Contact: Graham or Dione Russell P: 0419 350 673 / 0428 536 290 resp.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 17 November Sunday** **A Superb Day Out**
Annual count of Superb Parrots along the Murrumbidgee River
Meet at the Lions Park, Darlington Point.
Time 7:45am – 12:00pm (followed by lunch)
Please RSVP by 14 November to gfifield@greeningaustralia.org.au (02) 6129 5400
Contact Max O’Sullivan on 0434 923 766 for more details
- 8-17 November week** **FrogID Week**
Download the Australian Museum’s Frog ID app and record frog calls wherever you are. Details of this project can be found via this link <https://www.frogid.net.au/>
- 11-18 November week** **Spring Wild Pollinator Count**
This gives you an opportunity to contribute to wild pollinator insect conservation in Australia. You can **join in** by watching any flowering plant for just ten minutes sometime during the week.
<https://wildpollinatorcount.com/>
- 30 November Saturday** **Christmas / End of Year break-up at Middle Beach on the Murrumbidgee River**
Meet: at 6pm for a leisurely walk, followed by a cold meat & salad meal.
Bring: a salad or desert to share; your own drinks. Meat will be provided, \$5 a head should cover costs. Don’t forget a chair, binoculars, insect repellent.
Contact: Dione Russell P: 0419 350 673 Please let her know what your food contribution will be.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
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- 4 December Wednesday** **Copy for the December newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com **Phone:** 6953 2612.
- 12 December Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Henry Lawson Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7 pm.
Topic: to be decided
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.