# The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



# March 2022 - Issue #301

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. PO Box 541, LEETON 2705 ISSN-1327-1172

Website: www.mfn.org.au

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

#### Objectives

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

# Glossy Black-Cockatoos

Male in front right and juvenile rear. Female remained in the tree nearby. (photo on page 9)

Kathy Tenison



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# **CONTRIBUTIONS**

For the April 2022 issue by Wednesday 6 April To Rowena Whiting

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Phone: 6953 2612

To a person uninstructed in **Natural History**, his country or sea-side stroll is a walk through a gallery filled with wonderful works of art, nine-tenths of which have their faces turned to the wall. Thomas Huxley

# Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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Secretary: Dionee Russell 0428 536290 Website Co-ordinators

**Treasurer:** Glenn Currie 0488 563 321 Kathy Tenison 6953 4869

**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.

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 **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 March

A little less for you to read this month! And for me to collate. It is also a chance for me to share some of the items I note along the way that will probably interest you as they did me.

Our first meeting of the year was well attended when we welcomed Luke Friend to talk about the Reconnecting River Country Program; a very interesting learning experience about the historical flows of our rivers and how this program is aimed at achieving greater benefits for the ecosystem. The timing and volume of environmental flows is crucial. However this needs to be balanced with the other water users requirements.

We have reports on our activities: our frog encounter at Coleambally when Keith Thompson guided us as we waded through the water looking for frogs, amongst other things. Later in the month we out counting our special Glossies as well as observing the other wildlife at various dams around the area.

Coming up this month we will be visiting the Mid Murrumbidgee Wetlands east of Narrandera . Our guest speaker, John Collins, who has an agricultural tour business but is extending into the area of ecotourism, is interested in how nature and agricultural can benefit each other - think Australasian Bittern Project. The club could have a part to play in this, so do come along.

We have a call out for applications for a grant from our Environment Fund, you may know someone or a group that has a project associated with the natural environment that could benefit. See below.

Enjoy your read. 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

Applications close on 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

# Water for the Environment & Reconnecting River Country Program

For our first meeting of the year we were very pleased to welcome **Luke Friend** as our guest speaker. Luke is a Community Engagement Officer for the Reconnecting River Country Program. He gave a background to the program with graphs showing how the natural flow patterns of the rivers have been changed with various infrastructures over the years. These indicated that peak levels of flow in the river had reduced and had changed seasonally. He also presented a number of comprehensive graphs showing the way wetlands benefit depending on when and how environmental flows occur.

Adding environmental water to a normal flow for consumption (piggy backing) can allow the fauna and fish to complete their breeding cycle. Some environmental water is also used to flush blackwater events from the rivers. The result would be that 3 or 4 years in 10 there would be a high river (lower than what we are experiencing this year) in order to inundate selected wetlands to support fish breeding, waterbird breeding and for ecological function like maintaining water quality and

encouraging growth of reeds and rushes. However this would cause some access roads and paddocks of landholders to be inundated for some time. It is expected that landholders would have adequate notice of an intending high river and that some infrastructure like culverts and bridges may need to be built.

He played a couple of videos which are available on the department's website. The overall aim is to provide healthier river flows while keeping a balance between all water recipients and their needs.



It was a very informative presentation which we all found of great interest: our sincere thanks to Luke for coming to talk with us.

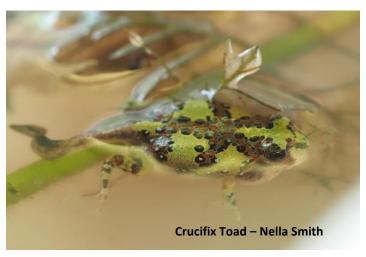
To visit the website: <a href="https://dpe.mysocialpinpoint.com.au/reconnecting-river-country-program">https://dpe.mysocialpinpoint.com.au/reconnecting-river-country-program</a>

**Rowena and Nella** 

# A Cacophany of Frogs

The Murrumbidgee wetlands near us are receiving a decent watering this year from the sky and are recovering well from a dry period. We know because the reeds and rushes have emerged and have provided wonderful breeding grounds for dragonflies and other insects which in turn have provided a feast for the frogs in our wetter margins and even in table drains and puddles. These are all indicators that the wetlands are recovering from the recent past dry periods.

After the continuous rains we have had recently frogs have been heard calling for mates at every available depression and backwater. Many clumps of frog spawn have appeared in the shallow wetlands indicating the opportunities that the frogs have had to start breeding. As the rain has been continuous some species may have the opportunity to grow from tadpoles into frogs. And so I have seen the Marsh Frogs hopping all



over the roads like a plague of frogs. (The herons like the feast). The burrowing frogs in particular need about 12 weeks from spawning to adulthood. These are the Crucifix Toads, the Giant Banjo Frogs and the Eastern Banjo Frogs (the pobblebonks) that we have around here.

There are about 7 more species of frogs that we know of in the Murrumbidgee and most call and breed in November, December and January in response to rain. These are the Peron's Tree Frog (with green warts) Plains Froglet, Sloane's Froglet and the Common Eastern Froglet, Wrinkled Toadlet (the squeaky, little ones). Barking Marsh Frogs and Striped Marsh Frogs are

commonly heard calling on edges of depressions wetlands and dams. There are also medium sized iridescent Green Tree Frogs at Grong Grong, south and west of Narrandera but we haven't recorded any around here yet. How do we know this? The Australian Museum has an app for your phone with which you can record frogs in your area. Museum staff and volunteers assess the recordings and send you an email telling you which frogs are present. Also available is a little booklet published by the Office of Environment and Heritage called FROGS which describes the local frogs.

The endangered Southern Bell Frog is found further south and west of us. It is endangered because of land clearing, agricultural chemicals and habitat destruction. It breeds at this time of the year and is being supported by environmental flows into Black Box depressions to maintain their numbers.





Below left: Southern Bell Frog dark form-Phil Tenison

Below right: Southern Bell Frog - Nella Smith

The field trip beginning at Coleambally and led by Keith Thompson was a wonderful adventure. In our gumboots we waded through water and water plants to search for these. The frogs have bred up well and we were able to find quite a lot around the depressions and farm dams. Coleambally is a stronghold for these endangered frogs so we can't think that there are a lot everywhere because they're not.

In addition to recent good rainfall some of the wetlands near Narrandera have also been supported by environmental flows in order to maintain the wetland vegetation and maintain the food chains during dryer periods so that the ecosystem does not collapse.

Why do we care about frogs anyway. (Not because they will turn into a prince). Frogs are really good at insect control. Imagine how many more insects there would be without the birds and frogs eating them. They are also a good biological indicator of healthy wetlands and we need them to keep our river and water healthy. Many thanks to Keith for leading us on this most interesting excursion.

#### **Nella Smith**

Members enjoying wading through the water whilst listening to Keith's firsthand experience of the wildlife and water conditions. Photos by Phil Tension





# Glossy Black Cockatoo Count February 2022

We counted 27 individual Glossy Black Cockatoos all told from 11 sites that we surveyed.

From the 7 bird lists that were submitted Magpies were found at 3 sites. Blue Bonnets were only seen at Middle Road but I saw some on the way to my site on the Barellan Road. Mallee Ringneck were at Middle Road, Wattle Dam and Square Nob (all north of Narrandera)



up to 40 Yellow Rosella.

The one and only Black Shouldered Kite was seen at Middle Road. Australian Raven were seen at all sites. Common Bronzewing, Willy Wagtail, Apostlebirds and White-winged Choughs were nearly everywhere. Dollarbirds were only found at Bogolong. Pink Cockatoos were found north of Narrandera at two sites. Bar-shouldered Doves and Yellow-throated Miners were only found north west of Narrandera. Australasian Grebe were seen in half of the dams and one dam had a Hardhead and another a Little Pied Cormorant and a White necked Heron.

It was good that some people searched for woodland birds which is important as some seed eaters like parrots, doves and finches must drink every day. The little ones were conspicuous on the lists.

A few people from Wagga visited a dam at Pomingalarna and didn't report any Glossy Black Cockatoos but they did report a spectacular sighting of

Black Wallaby, Eastern Grey Kangaroos also were listed. I've seen Goanna, Echidna and foxes drink from farm dams. 9 more Glossy Black Cockatoos were reported on the day from Rankins Springs by a landholder who just happened to be near his dam.

Glossy Black Cockatoos and other birds prefer to drink from a puddle (I think it is because they know they are less vulnerable there). Farm dams are important in the landscape for holding water for great lengths of time for both wildlife and stock.

#### **Nella Smith**

#### **Report from Janet Hume**

Unable to join Glossy Black Cockatoo count on the 25/26th Roberta and I decided we would have a look on the 28 February. We went to the dam on the western edge of Pomingalarna Reserve. I had seen two glossies fly from a dead tree near the dam on morning of the 11 January. There had been also been two separate sightings of glossies a few days earlier.

So we decided to survey the dam. We were seated under a couple small gum trees by 6.50pm. And Sarah joined us at about 8pm. It was an overcast evening with storm clouds and lightning all around, there was no rain at the dam. Lots of insect activity on the dam. Unfortunately we didn't see any glossy blacks we were entertained by the grebe and her 3 chicks. One of which was very vocal and tailed her constantly.

Here are some links to further information which have appeared in various electronic newsletters recently:

# https://glossyblack.org.au/about-glossy/

https://backyardbuddies.org.au/backyard-buddies/glossy-black-cockatoo/

and you may like to explore https://backyardbuddies.org.au/explore/bugs-and-insects/

In addition the February issue of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club has an article titled 'Glossy Black-Cockatoo Habitat Suitability Modelling', a study of The Effect of Fire and Climate Change on Glossy Black-Cockatoo Feeding Habitat by Alexander Western, University of Queensland. I think this newsletter was forwarded to members. If not I can forward a link [Ed]

# Pantry Blitz - My Experience

Our members would have received an email from Sandra McDougall about the "Pantry Blitz" Citizen Science project the Department of Primary Industries was having. It involved registering for the project, receiving a glue trap and lure to place in your pantry, and instructions on submitting the resulting data.

Any data collected would be very important in detecting any new bio-security threats in Australia. The project seemed to be a simple and worthwhile to do, so I signed up and received a kit with the trap and detailed instructions in the mail.

All the data is collected via the <u>MyPestGuide Reporter</u> app setup by WA's Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. NSW's DPI have been able to use this app for their own project.

The instructions said to check the trap after a week, photograph any bugs and enter them in the app. It was with a bit of trepidation I opened the trap after the first 7 days. I didn't know what to expect and wasn't sure I wanted to share with the world whatever I trapped in my pantry.

It turned out I had four beetles stuck in my trap. They were all identical and I photographed them with my phone then sent the results in. A few days later I received a reply that I had trapped Cigarette Beetles *Lasioderma* 

These are one of the most common pantry pests. They feed on a wide

variety of foods and dry material of vegetable origin including flours, dry mixes, pastry, herbs and spices, tea, cured tobacco and/or dried flower arrangements, wheat filled heat packs, rat baits and snail pellets. In searching for suitable material to



consume they will chew through thin plastic and/or aluminum foil and tin sheets. The reply I received included helpful instructions on how to deal with them.

At the end of Week 2 I had the same trepidation when opening the trap but I had nothing to worry about. The trap only had the same 4 Cigarette Beetles – maybe I've trapped them all?

More information on pantry pests can be accessed through Common Pantry Pests.

#### **Glenn Currie**

serricorne.

# A couple of items you may be interested in

# National Eucalypt Day is on the 23rd March

National Eucalypt Day is Australia's biggest annual celebration of eucalypts held every year to celebrate and promote Australia's eucalypts and what they mean to our lives and hearts. As part of this celebration we set out an annual challenge decided by popular vote: which species will be THE eucalypt of the year?

You can vote from a shortlist of 25 species here (and there is a free field if your favourite is not among them). To be in the running for a magnificent book prize you need to say in 50 words or less why this is your choice. The deadline is the 20th March.

https://www.eucalyptaustralia.org.au/eucalyptoftheyear/

The website also has winners from previous years and stunning pictures of the shortlisted ones for this year, so well worth a visit.

#### How a bandicoot digs affect soil.

 $\frac{https://theconversation.com/one-little-bandicoot-can-dig-up-an-elephants-worth-of-soil-a-year-and-our-ecosystem-loves-it-132266}{\frac{1}{2}}$ 

**Echidnas: ecosystem engineers:** 

https://theconversation.com/losing-australias-diggers-is-hurting-our-ecosystems-18590

# **Know your daisies Part 12 Thistles**

Naming the family 'Daisy' conjures up the impression that all have flowerheads made up of ray florets surrounding a mass of tubular florets. In fact most species of the family have only tabular florets. We need to look at other features to be able to divide the multitude into manageable groups to identify them.

Species in the Cynarae tribe exhibit sharp spines on the involucral bracts and/or leaves. The form of these spines is a key feature in the identification of members of this group.

*Scolymus maculata,* Spotted Thistle also has sharp spines on both leaves and bracts but has ligulate florets.

# Centaurea calcitrapa\*, Star Thistle

Annual or biennial weed of pastures, roadsides, wastelands and cultivated areas to 1m. stem much branched, striate. Leaves without prickles or spines; basal leaves oblanceolate, deeply pinnatisect with toothed lanceolate lobes; lower cauline leaves lanceolate and pinnatifid to lyrate, not decurrent; upper leaves entire, narrow-lanceolate to linear. Flowerheads solitary, ovoid-cylindrical, florets pale purple or pink. Involucral bracts: in several rows, each with a straw-coloured appendage ending in a spine and with 1-3 pairs of basal spines.



Annual weed of pastures, roadsides, stock routes, wastelands and occasionally cultivated areas. to 1m. Stem branched, winged in upper portion; lanceolate, pinnatifid, lyrate; cauline leaves lanceolate, decurrent as stem wings, entire to toothed. Flowerheads solitary or in groups of 2 or 3, florets yellow. Involucral bracts in several rows, lanceolate, pale green, with appendages ending in a spine and 1-3 pairs of short lateral spines.

# Centaurea solstitialis\*, St. Barnaby's Thistle

Annual or biennial weed of disturbed sites, pastures and cultivated land to 1m. Stem much branched, greyish,winged. Leaves without prickles or spines; basal leaves lanceolate, pinnatifid, lyrate,; cauline leaves narrow-lanceolate, base decurrent, entire to toothed. Flower heads solitary, florets yellow. Involucral bracts in several rows, pale green, with terminal spine and 1 or 2 pairs of basal spines.

# Carthamus lanatus\*, Saffron Thistle

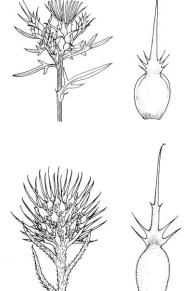
Annual weed of pastures and woodlands, mostly growing in cultivated crops, to 1m. Stem septate-hairy, striate. Leaves and bracts with spines; basal leaves and cauline pinnatifid to lyrate; upper leaves entire, narrow-lanceolate to linear. Flowerheads solitary, florets yellow to cream with dark veins. Involucral bracts in several rows, outer leaf-like, spreading, often cobwebby; inner entire, lanceolate to oblong, with a small spiny appendage

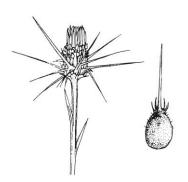
# Onopordum acaulon\*, Stemless Thistle

Biennial herb with a large taproot, weed of irrigated pastures, pastures and roadsides. Stemless. Leaves in a basal rosette, oblanceolate to elliptic, pinnatifid to deeply pinnatisect with triangular lobes and numerous yellow spines; both surfaces white-tomentose. Flowerheads solitary or clustered, sessile; florets white.

## Silybum marianum\*, Variegated Thistle

Biennial weed of cultivated areas, pastures, roadsides and disturbed areas. Stem striate. Leaves and bracts spinose. Basal leaves forming a rosette, pinnatifid; cauline smaller, less deeply divided, sessile and auriculate, with yellow to white spines on the margins and over the veins, variegated with white veins; both surfaces white-tomentose. Flowerheads solitary, terminal, on erect peduncles, florets purple. Involucral bracts in several rows, outer with spines; inner shorter than florets, not spiny edged, lanceolate tapered into a straight spine





### Cynara cardunculus\*, Spanish Artichoke

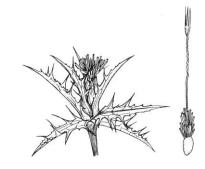
Perennial weed of roadsides, wasteland and pastures, mostly on clayey soils. to 100cm high, stems ridged, cobwebby; leaves basal and cauline; pinnatisect with spiny ovate to linear-lanceolate segments; lower petiolate, uppermost sessile. Flowerheads solitary or few in terminal cymes, globose; florets blue, lilac or whitish. Involucral bracts in several rows, ovate to elliptic, tapering to erect spreading spines;

#### Cynara scolymus\*, Globe Artichoke

Perennial cultivation escape. Similar to above except florets purplish-blue and outer bracts ovate to triangular with a sub-erect cuspidate appendage; inner bracts oblong with scarious mucronate appendage.

#### Carthamus dentatus\*, Toothed Thistle

Annual weed of pastures. Stem striate, glandular hairy. Basal leaves ± pinnatisect, oblanceolate, soon lost, lobes spinose; cauline leaves sessile, lanceolate, septate-hairy, prominently veined; Florets pale violet to pinkish purple. Involucral bracts in several rows, outer leaf-like, spreading to deflexed, often cobwebby; inner entire, lanceolate to oblong, erect, glandular, with a small spiny appendage



#### Cirsium vulgare\*, Spear Thistle

Biennial weed of pastures, roadsides, wasteland and cultivation. Stem with discontinuous spinose wings, cobwebby. Basal leaves obovate to lanceolate, narrowed at base, toothed to pinnatisect, with spinose margins; upper surface dark green, hispid; lower surface white-tomentose. Cauline leaves similar, smaller, decurrent; Florets purple. Involucral bracts in several rows, leathery, narrow-lanceolate, outer tipped with long spreading to recurved spines.



Spear Thistle



#### Carduus nutans\*, Nodding Thistle

Biennial serious pasture weed. Stem with wings cut into spinose lobes. Basal leaves in a rosette, lanceolate to oblanceolate, deeply pinnatisect, concolorous. Cauline leaves similar, shorter, smaller, stem-clasping. Florets purple. Involucral bracts: in several rows, herbaceous, lanceolate, outer with slightly spreading spines; intermediate spinose, erect; inner shorter, not spiny.

#### Carduus pycnocephalus\*, Slender Thistle

Annual weed of pastures, roadsides, wasteland and cultivation. Stem with ± discontinuous wings cut into spinose lobes. Basal leaves few, oblanceolate, deeply pinnatisect, margins with spinose angles, upper surface green, pubescent, lower surface white, cobwebby. Cauline leaves oblanceolate pinnatifid. Florets purple-pink. Involucral bracts in several rows, herbaceous, erect, narrow-lanceolate, outer with spines, minutely hairy to pilose; intermediate spinose, thickened; inner shorter than florets, not spiny

#### Carduus tenuiflorus\*, Winged Slender Thistle

Annual weed of pastures, roadsides, wasteland and cultivation. Stems with continuous wings cut into spinose lobes. Leaves as above except basal leaves faintly variegated. Florets purple. Involucral bracts in several rows, herbaceous, narrow-lanceolate, outer spinose with scarious margins,; inner slightly longer than florets, not spiny.

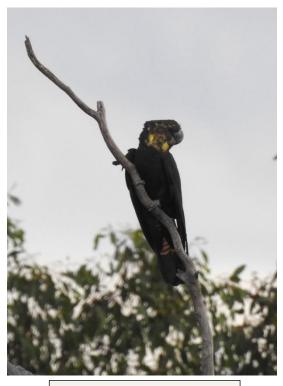
# **Eric Whiting**

# Member's images and observations

**Louise Harrison** has sent a link to the <u>Big History Project</u> it examines our past, explains our present, and imagines our future. You can journey through nearly 14 billion years of history in this self-guided, six-hour version of Big History. A fabulous initiative.

She also sent a link to an ABC Catalyst program aired a few weeks ago, a good insight into where to find birds in and around Melbourne. The Secret Lives Of Our Urban Birds - Catalyst (abc.net.au)

**Phil & Kathy Tenison's** photos taken at 'their' dam in the Brobenah Hills for the Glossy Black Cockatoo count: Female **Black Glossy Cockatoo** and a **Common Bronzewing** 



Female Black Glossy Cockatoo and a Common Bronzewing





Janet Hume

Darter with chicks at Flowerdale Lagoon



Nankeen Night Heron at Wonga Wetlands, Albury



# \*\*\*\* COMING EVENTS \*\*\*\*

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions.

Covid-19 restrictions need to be adhered to, for outings you must register with the nominated person by email (preferred) or phone to participate, do not come if unwell. By registering you declare that 'I am symptom free and have not been in contact with a confirmed case of Covid 19, or directed to isolate'. Masks and social distancing are required as per current Covid rules.

**10 March Thursday** Monthly Meeting in the Yellow Room at the Leeton Library, Sycamore St.,

Leeton commencing at 7pm.

Topic: Intelligent Tourism

Guest Speaker: John Collins

Contact: Dionee Russell 0428 536 290

Email: <u>murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com</u>.

13 March Sunday Outing to Mid Murrumbidgee Wetlands east of Narrandera.

Plenty of water around – diurnal and nocturnal birds and frogs everywhere. Meet at the Narrandera Arts Centre / Information Centre, Newell Hwy

Time 4pm.

Bring nibbles and/or evening meal – we'll be out until around 8pm.

Contact: Nella Smith Email: nellasmith0@gmail.com

Phone 0428 890 537

Please register with Nella

3 April Sunday Field Trip at Pomingalarna Reserve

Time: 7:00 - 11:00am

Contacts / RSVP Sarah Danckert <a href="mailto:spdanckert@gmail.com">spdanckert@gmail.com</a> and Janet Hume

6 April Wednesday Copy for the April newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.

14 April Thursday Monthly Meeting has been cancelled due to Easter long w/e

**OTHER EVENTS** 

### **Catchment Keepers Workshop Narrandera**

Murrumbidgee women sharing stories and actions that empower and sustain us as custodians and farmers

Thurs 17th March 2022, 9am - 5pm

Meet at the Ex- Serviceman's Club, 39-45 Bolton St, Narrandera

Morning tea and lunch provided. Covid Safe rules apply.

RSVP essential for this free event.

Catchment Keepers Workshop – Narrandera Tickets, Thu 17/03/2022 at 9:00 am | Eventbrite

For more information, please contact Kathy Tenison – <a href="mailto:bidgeeirrigation@mli.org.au">bidgeeirrigation@mli.org.au</a> or 0428 396 826

# **Bringing back the Glossies**

Join us for a Conversation about Glossy Black Cockatoos:

The Birds: behaviour, nesting, feeding.

Planting and growing feed trees. Options for protecting the habitat.

## Thursday 24 March | 8:00am to 12:00 pm

Meet at Leeton Presbyterian Church Hall, 29 Sycamore St, Leeton for Breakfast.

Then onto 'Yarrabimbi' for Glossy Black Cockatoo walk and talk.

Registration for this free event is essential – <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/bring-back-the-glossy-black-cockatoo-tickets-275216127847?aff=ebdssbdestsearch">https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/bring-back-the-glossy-black-cockatoo-tickets-275216127847?aff=ebdssbdestsearch</a>

Covid Safe rules apply.

For more information, please contact Kathy Tenison – <a href="mailto:bidgeeirrigation@mli.org.au">bidgeeirrigation@mli.org.au</a> or 0428 396 826