YELLOW THROAT

The newsletter of BirdLife Tasmania:

a branch of BirdLife Australia

Number 111, Spring 2020

Welcome to all our new readers, including new members, to the Spring edition of *Yellow Throat*. Normally we would be letting you know when the next BirdLife Tasmania General Meeting will be held and who will be speaking, but that is still not happening as yet. Please take the survey in the e-bulletin that will assist BTas to organise some webinar meetings, if readers think it will be a good idea!

Outings have finally resumed with Covid-19 safety measures in place. Our first outing took place to Coningham on Saturday 29th August (see report).

In this issue of *Yellow Throat* are many articles and observations that will be of interest to all. Our first article analyses 116 years of data on Welcome Swallow observations in Tasmania, which, by coincidence, Don Knowler discussed in a recent *On the Wing* article. An update on Birdata and the importance of volunteers collecting data on a regular basis is presented too; it's even worth collecting data on introduced species.

A topical article in this issue is on the Westbury proposed prison site and the reasons outlined for the conservation of the 70 hectares of woodland on Crown Land. Woodland habitats are a declining resource and ones with tree hollows are especially crucial habitat for birds and other wildlife.

There are also interesting observations about bird behaviour such as the nectar-feeding Grey Currawongs and the Superb Fairy-wren's dangerous obsession with a side-mirror! Enjoy.

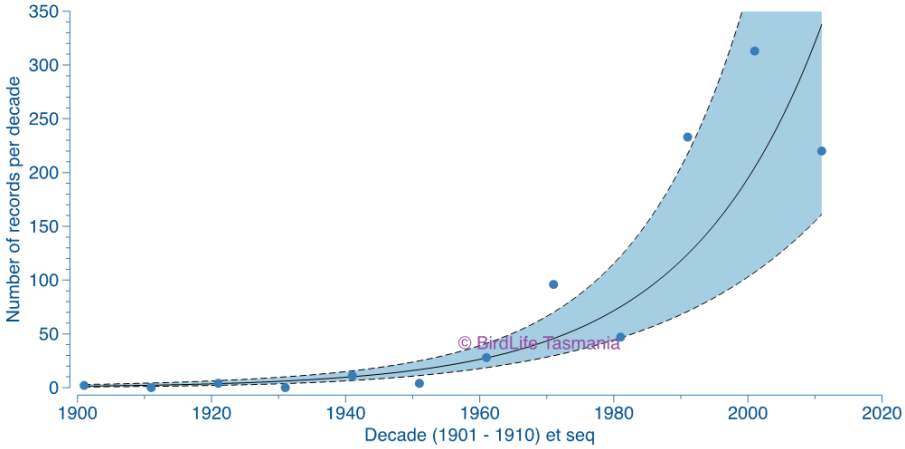
If you have any thoughts or would like to give feedback to any article, or write a letter for *Yellow Throat*, please email the editor at yellowthroateditor@gmail.com *Eds.*

Contents in this issue

An increase in wintering swallows?

BY ERIC WOEHLER

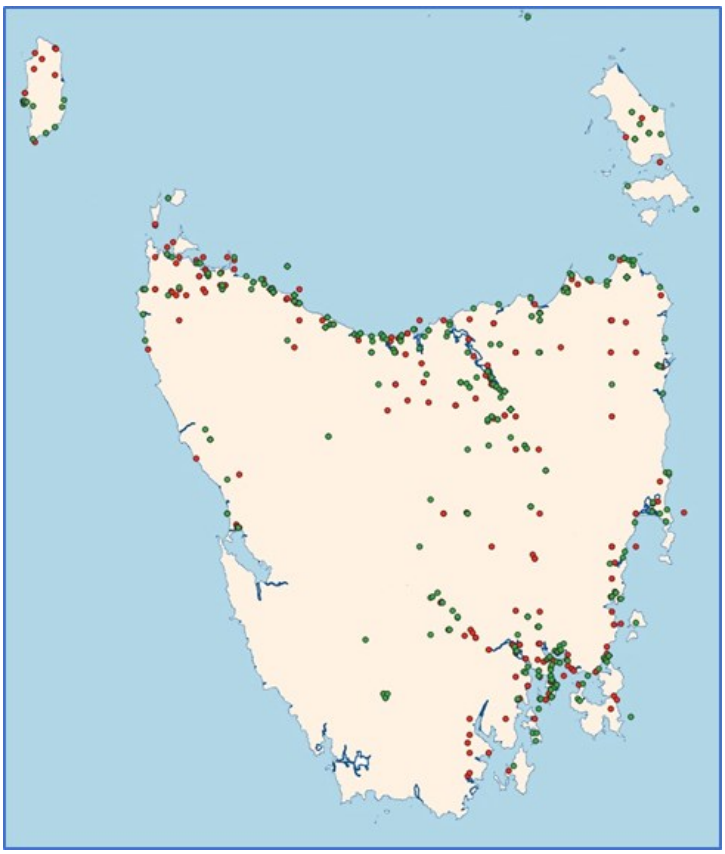
A number of reports have been received over the last few weeks of observations of over-wintering Welcome Swallows around Tasmania, including the south-east of the state. The BirdLife Tasmania database shows more than 900 records for the months of June and July for the period 1901–2017, inclusive.



Welcome Swallow: Photo by Alan Fletcher

The plot of Welcome Swallow records (above) from Tasmania for the months of June and July per decade (1901–1910, 1911–1920 etc). Note that there are just 7 years of data for the final decade (2011–2017, inclusive).

The map showing records of Welcome Swallows in Tasmania, 1901–2017 for the months of June (red) and July (green). The records are distributed throughout the state, but are clearly biased to the distribution of the human population in the state and associated road infrastructure.



There appears to be a rapid increase since the early 20th century of the number of records for June and July on a decadal basis. At least some of this increase is due to the growth of the human population in Tasmania. The increased surveying and reporting associated with Atlas 1 (late 1970s), Atlas 2 (late 1990s) and ongoing Atlas (now Birdata) also contributed to the increased reporting of winter swallow observations. Welcome Swallows are insectivorous, so their presence in Tasmania over the winter months – and their increase over time – suggests that there are more insects around than in the past. It is quite likely that climate change is also contributing to the observed increase, with an increase in the frequency of milder winters.

To assist in future analyses, please ensure your observations are entered into Birdata (https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/)

Birdata Update

BY MIKE NEWMAN AND WARREN JONES

During the 2019–20 fiscal year Birdata participation continued to grow strongly, with 4964 surveys submitted compared with 3833 the previous year. There was little change in the number of species recorded (198 compared with 195) and a moderate increase in the number of participants (120 compared with 108). Thank you to everyone who contributed to this outstanding effort. The use of standard surveys (2-ha and 500-m) is critical to measuring changes in the abundance of birds. It is encouraging that the numbers of both types of surveys increased in 2019–20, by 11 and 35% respectively. With nearly 600 surveys in the first six weeks of this year we seem to be still driving upwards. If you have any surveys to enter please do so now, as an exciting phase of data analysis and learning about what is happening to our birds is imminent.

Members have recently received the 2019 *Tasmanian Bird Report,* which contained our third 'State of Tasmania's Birds' report (SoTB), in which we use Birdata to highlight what is happening to our bird populations: seldom good news. By documenting these changes and drawing attention to the underlying causes, our intent is to identify priorities for future research and hopefully provide the catalyst for implementing remedial measures.

In the fourth SoTB we intend to decrease the delay between data collection, evaluation and reporting to members by assessing two years' data, with results up to June 2019 published in the next *Tasmanian Bird Report*. A first-pass analysis of the data has been done, but we are currently waiting for the national office to complete an import of selected eBird records from the past 5 years into Birdata. This will increase the size of the database, but will change the statistics that have been used in recent years. Similar eBird data was previously imported up to 2015.

Birdata provides two critical pieces of information: changes in abundance and distributions of bird species. This information informs environmental decision-making and conservation policy relating to Australian birds. Both these measures are used in the *Action Plan for Australian Birds* which applies the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red-list criteria to determine the threat status of our birds. This assessment is revised every ten years and the latest revision (2020), which is near completion, has relied heavily on the Tasmanian Birdata. We expect several new species to be listed in the revision. On the mainland, Birdata has been used to assess the impact of last summer's wildfires on the ranges of threatened species as part of this process.

In Tasmania, our primary objective is to generate reliable trends which reflect changes in the size of bird populations. Extracting these trends from Birdata is challenging because of the often-random nature of data collection by the birding community. BirdLife Australia's research team is about to evaluate the Tasmanian Birdata using methods which address these difficulties. It will be exciting to see these results and compare them with those we have published in SoTB. Sadly, the expectation is that the results will confirm that the alarming decreases we have seen at individual sites are widespread.

We now know through the work of volunteer data collectors that many of our birds, for example the robins, are in trouble, but we can only draw these conclusions when we have enough records. So, if the Dusky Robin is struggling, what about the Scrubit, which is recorded 6 times less frequently? The embarrassing fact is that we don't have enough information to draw firm conclusions concerning the fate of this uncommon species. To address such deficiencies, we need more survey data and this is one of the reasons that the Ebird data is being added.

Once again, thanks to those who have made a wonderful contribution to our survey effort and ultimately bird conservation; however, we need even more surveys to address challenges like the Scrubtit. We strongly encourage the direct entry of surveys using standard protocols into Birdata to minimise the administrative burden and maximise our conservation effort.

Letter from the Raptor Refuge

BY CRAIG WEBB

Hello Raptor lovers!

I can happily say that the Raptor Refuge is continuing to kick goals. It's been such an extraordinary year with this pandemic changing our lives in many ways.

Here at RR we have had more birds than ever before. I think that people were finding more birds when at home in isolation, as well as the fact that we are more known throughout the state thanks to our 1800RAPTOR hotline (for dead or injured raptors, NOT FOR GENERAL ENQUIRIES), which has enabled our service to reach far and wide.

Our REALLY BIG news is that the eagle flight aviary that has been in the works for 5 years is up and running, and it's a huge success. It has a volume of 16,500 cubic metres, or in layman's terms, is 52m long by 26 m wide and 15 m high – in other words it is bloody huge. It's acting as a great flight training area for these awesome birds: currently there are 6 Wedgies in this flight cell and 2 that are about to go back to where they belong. It was a complex undertaking to get this aviary to fruition, from planning, to having it constructed in Croatia of all places, then shipped out to Tassie via Singapore. Made from Dyneema, an extremely strong yet lightweight material, it is seriously long lasting and UV resistant, so it ticks all the boxes! Thanks must go to Danny at SeaAqua, TasNetworks and Tassal who all made a small contribution towards the cost. It is here for the long term and will most definitely *Help them Soar again.*

January 2020 was our busiest month in 20 years for our private Walk n Talks, which have evolved into a legendary experience. We had countless visitors,from overseas, interstate and locally, all enjoying our beautiful landscaped bush setting, dotted with artwork and an amazing array of Tassie's magnificent raptors. The place was pumping, within the scope of our small, boutique-style appointment system. These guided Walk n Talks are a great way to highlight the importance of these creatures in the Tassie environment and showcase their stunning beauty and superpowers. It also raises funds for Raptor Refuge.

Hard to believe that it all stopped so suddenly: in March our income was 95% depleted. Thankfully we are back up and operating our guided tours once again and our visitors are from all over Tassie. I guess the fact that we can't leave or have people come into our state has led to this, so if you're looking for some pure enjoyment at a sublime location with the most amazing and captivating birds to get up close and personal with, from eagles to owls and falcons and hawks, please visit www.raptorrefuge.com.au.

So, until next *Yellow Throat*, happy raptoring and stay safe.

Oh, PS: there will be the most stunning calendar (our 15th consecutive) in all the usual locations and now it will be in 31 Woolworths stores statewide, WOOHOO!

Photos by Craig Webb

Crown Land on Biralee Road — a case for conservation

BY SARAH LLOYD

Masked Owl: Photo by Sarah Lloyd

The proposed site of the planned northern prison is 70 hectares of grassy woodland adjacent to Birralee Road. It was purchased in 1999 with Federal Government funds for the Private Forest Reserve Program because the vegetation was classified *Eucalyptus amygdalina* forest and woodland on Cainozoic deposits, a threatened vegetation community. It was later reclassified *E. amygdalina* forest and woodland on dolerite, a non-threatened community that was not required by the government to fulfil its Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) obligations. Nevertheless, it was deemed to have high conservation values and was being transferred to the Tasmanian Land Conservancy and intended for resale after being covenanted. Negotiations stalled in 2016.

Over the decades there has been timber harvesting, firewood collecting, livestock grazing and gravel mining. However, it retains valuable habitat for fauna with numerous hollow-bearing eucalypts, scattered logs, coarse woody debris and patches of dense native vegetation especially along Brushy Rivulet, where animals have safe access to permanent water. The site is significantly more intact than anything in the surrounding landscape.

The surrounding landscape

The land is on the southern end of mostly forested land that extends from Brushy Rivulet Forest Reserve to the coast. These forests are known as a 'wood production zone', and in the past thirty years vast hectares have been cleared, burnt and replanted with Shining Gum (*Eucalyptus nitens*), a species not native to Tasmania. East of the Crown land is mostly cleared farmland that extends to the outskirts of Launceston and south to the Northern Midlands. There are scattered patches of remnant vegetation, but most have been grazed, burnt or 'tidied up', thus eliminating understorey and creating perfect habitat for Noisy Miner and the associated depauperate bird fauna.

The Regional Forest Agreement and emphasis on vegetation communities

The focus on vegetation communities to assess parcels of land exemplifies the inadequacies of private land conservation in Tasmania. For instance, two conservation covenants were placed on our properties at Birralee because of threatened plant communities and two rare plant species. Fauna was not considered.

Dusky Woodswallow at nest: Photo by Sarah Lloyd

This emphasis is further illustrated at a 17,000-hectare grazing and cropping property south of Cressy where I have conducted bird surveys since 2006. There are extensive areas of woodland, some of which are protected based on the dominant tree species and substrate. It is extremely worrying that the most bird-rich areas have no legal protection in the form of a covenant, but are heavily grazed by introduced and native herbivores, which has no doubt contributed to the bird declines I have documented. However, even covenanted land may not be adequately managed: the vegetation at a covenanted site that was regenerating well in 2006 no longer has fences adequate to exclude feral deer. The area resembles a tree graveyard with very little understorey, and it is dominated by Noisy Miners.

Bird life at this property was relatively healthy in 2006 with three species of robin, all four cuckoos, lots of evidence of breeding and aerial feeding insectivores including Dusky Woodswallow, Tree Martin and Welcome Swallow 'in abundance' according to my first report. By 2015 these species had declined or were absent, a worrying trend given that Tasmania was in drought when the surveys began and there was an expectation that the situation would improve. Even more concerning is the absence of Black-headed and Yellow-throated Honeyeater on the farm and the absence since 2013 of Grey Shrike-thrush.

The farm has changed considerably since 2006. Numerous hollow-bearing paddocks trees, many with multiple nest sites, were removed during the construction of two large dams and to establish a plantation of *Eucalyptus nitens*. Increased water availability has increased the hectares devoted to irrigated agriculture, not just on this property but throughout the region. The extensive Meander Dam Irrigation scheme started operating in 2008, followed by schemes at Whitemore (2012) and Lower South Esk (2013). More irrigation has inevitably led to the loss of paddock trees and patches of remnant bush to make way for pivot irrigators.

Considerable funds and effort are expended by the government on refencing projects. In some instances, the focus is on reducing pollutants and preventing erosion, but revegetation is a desirable outcome and presumably the ultimate aim is to recreate something akin to the original vegetation. It therefore seems contradictory and outrageous that land that can be a source of recruitment of species that have declined elsewhere (twenty-four bird species were recorded acoustically at the Crown land during a 25-minute recording on 17 November 2008), is destined to be cleared.

Impacts of 24-hour lighting

The government's claim of a 15± hectares prison footprint is contradicted by a map supplied by the Department of Justice that has a 'development zone' of 16± hectares plus a 100-metre bushfire buffer around the perimeter, increasing the area to be cleared to about 32 hectares. If this wasn't bad enough, consider the impact of placing a large, permanently lit building on the site.

The Dawn Chorus

It was only during a yearlong study of the dawn chorus at Birralee that I fully appreciated the close correlation of dawn singing with light intensity.

Golden Whistler: Photo by Sarah Lloyd

The dawn chorus is closely related to a bird's reproductive cycle and hormone levels, which is why it is especially noticeable in late winter and early spring. In August 2005 when I started my study, the Bassian Thrush started singing at 6:05 followed by Forest Raven, Tasmanian Scrubwren, Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Strong-billed Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill and Pink Robin.

This sequence remained almost constant for several weeks, and if I documented the dawn singing on consecutive days, species would start singing at exactly the same minute each morning.

In a US study about the impact of artificial night lights on dawn song, researchers compared the behaviour of birds living in a forest to those living close to roads with streetlights. Males of several species near streetlights started singing significantly earlier than those in the forest. Early dawn singing is known to indicate a bird's quality to father offspring, so earlier singing because of artificial light falsely indicates a bird's fitness for breeding and may falsely advertise an inferior bird. Females of another species started laying earlier in the season, possibly resulting in chicks being ready for food before it is available, i.e. too early for invertebrates, nectar, seeds or fruits.

Another concern is the impact of 24-hour lighting on nocturnal and migratory birds. Well-lit buildings such as lighthouses and high-rise buildings are known to attract, confuse and/or kill birds, and 24-hour lighting can have more subtle effects such as interfering with natural timing patterns on which all life depends.

Conclusion

The Crown land has numerous eucalypts with cavities, a disappearing resource critical for the survival of hollow-dependent fauna. It provides important habitat not only for legally protected species such as Grey Goshawk, Masked Owl and Wedge-tailed Eagle, but also for endemic and migratory species that are known to be declining. It's Noisy-Miner-free status means it is an important source of recruitment for bird species that are declining or are now locally extinct in the region.

Brown Goshawk: Photo by Sarah Lloyd

Reference: Department of Physics, Florida Atlantic University, FAU Observatory (no date): Light Pollution Kills Birds in the Environment, http://cescos.fau.edu/observatory/lightpol-Birds.html#:~:text=Some%20effects%20of%20light%20pollution,that%20a%20species%20depends%20on. (accessed 16 August 2020)

Why all surveys are important

BY GEOFF SHANNON

All survey data is important, but we tend to concentrate on 'species of interest'. Here in Tasmania we may be less interested in introduced species than our native ones. The bushfires of last summer brought out some interesting insights. Both Laughing Kookaburras and Superb Lyrebirds were mentioned as birds which were badly affected, and comments were made as to the populations in Tasmania being of importance. And the Superb Lyrebird was introduced to Tasmania in the 1930s as a safety population!

Canaries are not native to coal mines … so maybe introduced birds might tell us something about our environment. Recently there has been some discussion from mainlanders about changes in Common Starling distribution. As this was happening, I was observing a flock of over 1000 feeding on 'my patch' in NW Tasmania. It brought to mind something I had read about starlings in their homeland. Following this up I found figures of 80% reduction in the UK population over the last 40 years. This was coupled with significant reductions in the Republic of Ireland and on mainland Western Europe.

What is driving these changes in Europe? The British Trust for Ornithology website, which showed the reduction in numbers, also showed that the fledging rate per nest had increased. So something is happening in the environment outside the breeding period to cause the population decline.

According to readily available data for Australia, the starling population here is not stable. Between the late 1970s (original Atlas) and late 1990s (new Atlas) there was a 20% reduction and Birdata suggests there is a continual decline.

This brings me back to the canaries in coal mines. What is driving this reduction in Australia? Could it be climate change? Could it be change in agricultural practices? Wintering flocks feed on open grassland. If this habitat is deteriorating could it lead to reduced populations of native species or increased competition with birds like pipits and both Masked and Banded Lapwing, to name some Tasmanian species?

A reminder not to forget that even introduced species may have something to tell us and to record everything.

Beak and Feather Disease (BFD) – request for reports

BirdLife Tasmania has been collaborating with a number of veterinary clinics around Tasmania collating reports of Beak and Feather Disease (BFD) in wild birds. The image shows an example in a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, with feather loss and beak deformation. Reports have been received from urban, peri-urban and rural settings. if you see any parrots or cockatoos with BFD, please record details of species, numbers and any other information, and obtain a photograph if possible, and send through to Dr Eric Woehler c/- tasmania@birdlife.org.au. All contributors will be acknowledged in reports and syntheses.

Wild Sulphur-crested Cockatoo showing extensive feather loss and bill deformity: Photo ©Eric J Woehler.

2020 BirdLife SE Tasmania Winter Gull Count

BY ERIC WOEHLER

The 2020 BirdLife Tasmania Winter Gull Count (WGC) was held on Sunday 7th June. Weather conditions on the morning were a tad brisk, with air temperatures around 4°C with a cool north-westerly wind; in some areas, there had been a frost overnight. Sunny conditions throughout much of south-east Tasmania in the morning provided counters with good conditions for the count.

There was an enthusiastic response to the initial call for counters that coincided with the easing of some restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtually all count zones had been allocated to counters almost a month before the count – a welcome situation for the coordinator!

More than 65 counters were involved in the count – comprising BirdLife Tasmania members and their families and friends, UTas higher-degree students, PWS rangers and staff from Tassal and Huon Aquaculture. All gulls in coastal and near-coastal areas from Southport, throughout the d'Entrecasteaux Channel and Bruny Island foreshores, the Derwent Estuary to Hobart, up-river to New Norfolk, eastward to the South Arm Peninsula, Sorell, Marion Bay and the Forestier and Tasman Peninsulas were counted.

However, the easing of COVID-19 restrictions also resulted in high levels of human recreational activities on beaches and foreshores – with numerous WGC participants reporting above-average numbers of people, dogs and vehicles on beaches, and above-average numbers of water craft in use around the coast.

Hobart, Glenorchy and Kingborough Councils permitted counters access to McRobies Gully, Glenorchy and Margate Waste Disposal Sites, respectively.

Kelp and Pacific Gull counts commenced in 1980 by members of BOAT (*Bird Observers' Association of Tasmania*, later *Birds Tasmania* and now *BirdLife Tasmania*) under the initial coordination of Dr Bill Wakefield. Silver Gulls were incorporated in WGCs in 1983. No WGCs were conducted in 1991–1994 inclusive, and the 2020 WGC was the 37th for south-east Tasmania. It is believed that this is the longest time series for gull populations in Australia.

Results

The regional (south-east Tasmania) populations of all three species remain higher than their respective initial counts in the 1980s.

a. Silver Gull

The 2020 Silver Gull count was the third-highest count since 1983, with more than 16,000 individuals reported. All counts since 2012 to present (n = 9) have exceeded 10,000 individuals, with 3 of these 9 counts exceeding 16,000 individuals. The current regional (south-east Tasmania) population of Silver Gulls is approximately 60% higher than the initial estimates from the 1980s. Figure 1 shows the annual Silver Gull count data expressed as a 4-year running mean (green). A large flock was present on Bruny Island feeding on beach-washed krill (possibly *Nyctiphanes* spp.) and there were more than 9000 Silver Gulls associated with marine-farm infrastructure.

Silver Gull: Photo ©Eric J Woehler

b. Kelp Gull

Kelp Gulls: Photo ©Eric J Woehler

The 2020 Kelp Gull count of more than 8000 individuals was the highest count for this species since 1980, suggesting the regional population may be continuing to increase following its establishment in the 1960s as a breeding species in south-east Tasmania. Kelp Gulls are expanding their range around Tasmania and have been recently reported from Macquarie Harbour on the west coast (EJ Woehler, unpubl. data). The 2020 count was significantly higher than the 2019 count. Figure 1 shows the annual Kelp Gull count data expressed as a 4-year running mean (blue). There were almost 3000 Kelp Gulls associated with marine-farm infrastructure, and a large flock of more than 1500 birds was encountered at South Arm.

c. Pacific Gull

The 2020 Pacific Gull count of more than 600 individuals was the fifth-highest total for the species since 1980. The current regional (south-east Tasmania) population of Pacific Gulls is more than double the initial counts from the 1980s. Four counts since the 2013 WGC have reported more than 700 Pacific Gulls in south-east Tasmania, with the peak count exceeding 1300 individuals (approximately 4x the initial counts for this species from the 1980s). There is no evidence of any adverse effect from Kelp Gulls in south-east Tasmania on this species or on Silver Gulls. Figure 1 shows the annual Pacific Gull count data expressed as a 4-year running mean (red). There were more than 300 Pacific Gulls associated with marine-farm infrastructure, approximately 50% of the regional (south-east Tasmania) population.

Pacific Gull: Photo ©Eric J Woehler

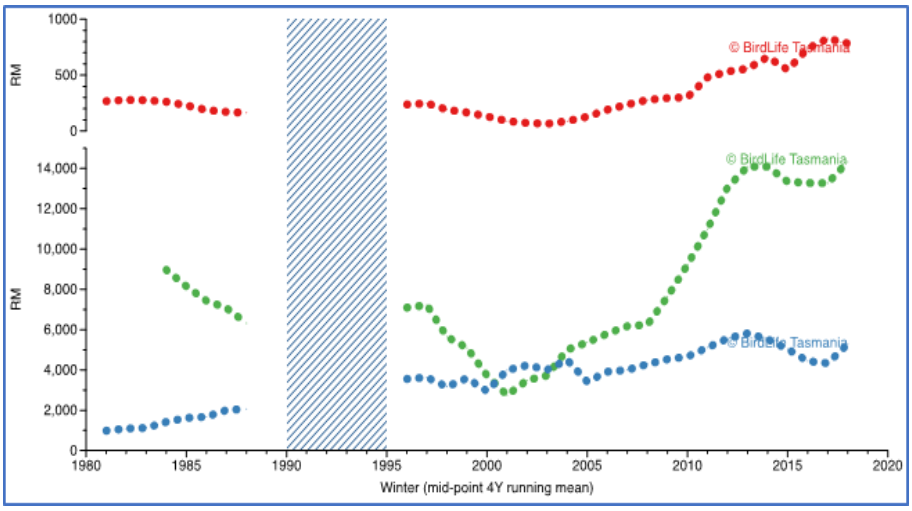


Figure 1. *Plot showing 4-year running means of Pacific (red), Silver (green) and Kelp (blue) Gull data, SE Tasmania calculated from Winter Gull Counts 1980–2020. No counts were undertaken in 1991–1994, inclusive. Graph © Eric J Woehler, BirdLife Tasmania, may not be reproduced without permission from the author.*

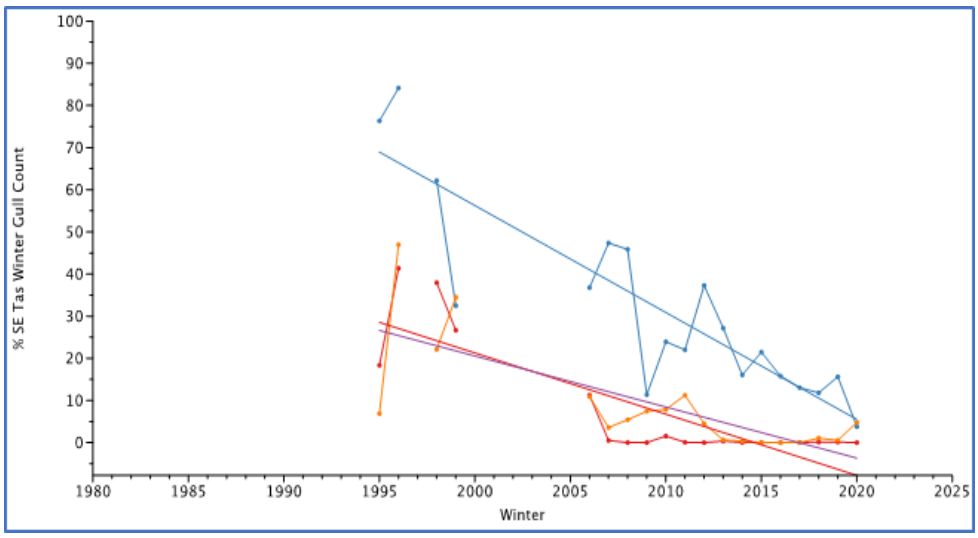


Figure 2. *Plot showing percentages of Pacific (orange), Silver (red) and Kelp (blue) Gulls counted at Hobart, Glenorchy and Margate Tips for 1995–2020, calculated from Winter Gull Counts 1980--2020. Graph © Eric J Woehler, BirdLife Tasmania, may not be reproduced without permission from the author.*

d. Decreased utilisation of tips by gulls in southeast Tasmania

Figure 2 shows the percentages of the three species of gulls counted at Hobart, Glenorchy and Margate Tips for the period 1995–2020. The data for the 1990s are relatively limited (n = 4 counts) but merit some examination here. Kelp Gull counts at the tips in the 1990s indicated more than 80% of the regional population was present during WGCs, but this has decreased to approximately 10%. Similarly, the percentages of Silver and Pacific Gulls at tips have decreased from the 1990s to under 10% of their contemporary regional populations (Figure 2). This decreased utilisation of tips by all three species reflect the general increase in gulls' attendances at marine-farm infrastructure in the southeast.

This report was prepared for counters, PWS, Councils, land managers and aquaculture companies

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to all participants for their efforts. Thanks to Tassal and Huon Aquaculture for allowing their staff to participate, and to Hobart, Glenorchy and Kingborough Councils for access to their facilities.

Gull signs at Bellerive

Following a series of reports of a Kelp Gull swooping people at Bellerive, Clarence Council has placed a number of signs discouraging people from feeding gulls. While swooping people is something commonly seen in Silver Gulls, these were the first reports of this behaviour in Kelp Gulls. BirdLife Tasmania congratulates Clarence City Council and encourages everyone to not feed gulls or other wild birds.

Photos ©Jason Graham

A short report on a Coordinated Count of Australian Pied Oystercatchers *Haemotopus longirostris* in the Rubicon Estuary KBA 7th July 2020

BY HAZEL BRITTON

Ed: This report was first produced in the Rubicon KBA Newsletter and is reproduced here with permission from the author. The full newsletter can be accessed: *https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org.au/news/2020/8/27/rubicon-estuary-kba-newsletter-july-2020*

Pied Oystercatchers: Photo by Faye Beswick

We are continuing our monitoring program once a year in winter using the same survey method as for the previous four years.

High tide on 7th July 1920 was 3.35 m at 13:20 hrs. The weather was cool, sunny with a southerly breeze, giving excellent viewing conditions. This tide was slightly higher than last year.

Roost 1. Counters in North-east Arm at Narawntapu National Park were also doing the North-west Tasmania Winter Shorebird Count. Counters were situated at each end of the roost area and were in position from 12:30 to 2pm.

Roost 2. Counters were present at the boat ramp and the corner of Mary Creek. Only 20 birds were present at the roost area and 2 pairs were located outside the roost.

Roost 3. The birds at this roost were present throughout the count period with no disturbance or movements noted.

Results

	2020	2019	2018	2017
Roost 1 – Springlawn /NE Arm	115	213	214	155
Roost 2 – Boat Ramp	24	11	93	48
Roost 3- South of Squeaking Point	118	125	96	126
Birds within KBA that did not go to a roost	36	31	n/c	71
TOTAL =	**293**	**380**	**403**	**400**

Discussion

This year our count was way down on previous years. Last year we attributed a decline of around 20 birds from the estimated population in the estuary of 400 to the loss of the roost at the Boat Ramp. However, this year the count in the NE Arm at Narawntapu NP was also low.

The human population on the eastern side of the Rubicon Estuary has increased considerably in the last few years. The boat ramp is a busy site particularly in summer, but also when the weather is fine in winter. The number of birds using this roost has been seriously depleted by disturbance, in particular from off-leash dogs harassing roosting birds.

The Latrobe Council decided to leave the area around the boat ramp as a dog beach area, despite various submissions. Even if dogs were prohibited it is likely that many would still use it, as it is convenient for elderly owners who are not able to walk far on the other dog beaches. The pressures on this site are many and will only increase. The proximity to NE Arm is likely to be the future salvation for those Australian Pied Oystercatchers that have previously roosted here.

Volunteers participating were: **Springlawn Roost –** Geoff Shannon, Bob Read, Mark Temple-Smith, Tony Britz and Alison Parks; **Boat Ramp Roost –** Greg and June Hilder, Janie Black; **South of Squeaking Point** – Julie Serafin, Libby Prescott and Denise Press; Mike Serafin and Hazel Britton **in the boat.**

Australian Pied Oystercatchers in the Mersey Estuary

During the ten years we were monitoring resident shorebirds between Stanley and Narawntapu NP we took the opportunity to investigate roosting Pied Oystercatchers in the Mersey Estuary. We eventually managed to get comprehensive counts during the last two years (2018 and 2019). (Resident Shorebird Monitoring Programme, Stanley to Narawntapu NP. January 2010 to December 2019. Count Area 10 A p.89 (link below)).

Having worked out a reliable strategy it seemed a good idea to continue monitoring this area at the same time as we were conducting our coordinated count in the Rubicon Estuary.

John Coombes and Jane Bouchard checked out all sites in the Mersey Estuary on 7th July starting at 13:20 hrs (high tide).

Results

	2020
Wharf Area	9
Count Site 1	76
TS Mersey Navel Cadets (Roost Site 4)	Nil
Between Ambleside and Pig Island	2
TOTAL =	**87**

It is intended to continue doing counts of Australian Pied Oystercatchers in the Mersey Estuary at the same time as the counts in the Rubicon Estuary.

Many thanks to John and Jane for undertaking this count which will continue to add to our knowledge of this species in our region.

Resident Shorebird Monitoring Programme, Stanley to Narawntapu National Park.

At the end of 2019, a 10-year community project came to an end. This project was coordinated by Hazel Britton and supported by Cradle Coast NRM. The project monitored the number of resident shorebirds on beaches from Stanley to Narawntapu. Biannual counts were undertaken at 45 beaches in the Cradle Coast region, with the focus on the following four species: Red-capped Plover, Hooded Plover, Pied Oystercatcher and Sooty Oystercatcher. More than 173 people took part over the 10 years with 20 people who started with the project actually finishing the monitoring at the end. The report includes an outline of the project, workshops held, flyers and posters developed as well as an account of the 45 beaches monitored in detail. Hazel is to be congratulated on her amazing effort and tenacity coordinating the project over 10 years.

The report can be viewed on the Cradle Coast Authority website under **Project Publications**:

https://www.cradlecoast.com/cca/natural-resource-management/our-portal/

The Peter Murrell 'patch' in 2019

BY WARREN and SUE JONES

We have been visiting the Peter Murrell Reserves, about two km south of Kingston, for many years. Now retired, we get our exercise walking (and birding) in the reserve every two or three days. Since 2014, together with fellow Friends of the Peter Murrell Reserves, Peter Jarman and Tas Boskell, we have been keeping a monthly list of sightings. In 2016 we started doing Birdata surveys, and now have five 2ha, 20 minute sites which we survey monthly and five defined zones in which we carry out 500m area searches two or three times a month.

There are four main habitats in the reserve: black peppermint with a heath understorey; white gums along the major creeks; a large grassy area that was once grazed; and two small dams. Combined, these provide the chance of spotting quite a diverse range of birds from robins and fieldwrens to ducks and grebes.

Black-headed Honeyeater: Photo by Alan Fletcher

Of course, it's not just our 'patch'. The reserve's diversity, the chance of some 'nice' birds and its proximity to Hobart make it popular with many local birders as well as interstate and overseas visitors. No doubt many of you reading this account have birded there. Every month or so we meet like-minded souls with binoculars strung around their necks. Often, having read a 'Where to find' guide, they are looking for Forty-spotted Pardalotes: once easy, but now very hard to find. However, there are seven other endemics to search out.

In 2019 our group of Friends recorded a total of 78 species in the reserve, a couple less than in the previous 2 years. Our cumulative total for the reserve since we began keeping monthly lists in 2014 is now 95 species, although eBird lists a few more that we haven't come across yet.

From our Birdata surveys we can calculate the proportion of surveys in which a particular species is recorded. This gives us an indication of the abundance (and 'recordability') of each bird and can help detect changes in the populations of birds in the reserve. In 2019 the Yellow-throated Honeyeater was recorded in 83% of our 199 surveys, making it the most commonly recorded bird. Other species in the 'top five' were the Forest Raven, Brown Thornbill, Superb Fairy-wren and Grey Fantail. At the other end of the scale we recorded Beautiful Firetails in only 3.5 % of our surveys and Brown Quail just twice (1%).

Perhaps the most notable result from the Birdata surveys in 2019 was a probable decrease in the abundance of many species, including several of the more common birds, when compared with 2018. We recorded a similar number of surveys in both years (185 in 2018 and 199 in 2019) across all parts of the reserve. For example, Golden Whistlers were recorded in 37% of surveys in 2019, but 53% of surveys in 2018 and Black-headed Honeyeaters were seen or heard during 38% of surveys in 2019, down from 50% in 2018. Other species which we encountered noticeably less often in 2019 included the Grey Fantail (63% vs 74%), Grey Shrike-thrush (50% vs 60%) and Common Bronzewing (18% vs 29%). Even Common Blackbirds, the most frequently recorded introduced species in the reserve, appeared to be less numerous in 2019 (51% vs 58%). The apparent reduction in the number of so many species seems most likely to be associated with 2019 being a very dry year; it was the second driest in our 40 years of records in Kingston. This probably meant fewer insects, flowers and berries for birds to feed on. In spring the reserve suffered an explosion of cup-moth caterpillars which defoliated quite large patches of black peppermints in several areas.

Rainbow Lorikeets: Photo by Sue Jones

We thought that this might have contributed to the lower numbers of birds seen, but when pre- and post-cup-moth surveys were compared, the downward trend seemed to be well established before the cup moths hit. On the plus side, several species including Silvereyes and a Fan-tailed Cuckoo were seen enjoying cup-moth caterpillars.

In 2019 the ponds supported small numbers, but quite a variety, of waterbirds. The numbers recovered from 2018, when the major flood in May discoloured the water in the ponds for many months, and many birds left, presumably in search of cleaner water.

For example, Eurasian Coot were recorded in only 13% of surveys around the ponds in 2018 (and only once after May), but this rose to 53% in 2019.

In 2019 Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal and Australian Wood Duck were the most frequently recorded ducks. Hardheads and Australasian Shovelers continued to be occasional visitors, while a family of Black Swans moved onto Heron Pond (where White-faced Herons are rarely seen!) for a while in the second half of the year. A single Australasian Grebe has hung out on Penrhyn Pond in late autumn and winter for the last few years and was there again from May to August in 2019; we are guessing it might be the same individual returning each year.

A species of particular interest has been the invasive Rainbow Lorikeet, which was recorded a little more often in 2019 than in 2018 (21% of surveys vs 18%). Most of the time we see and/or hear them flying over, although they can occasionally be found in the white gums around Penrhyn Pond and near the Howden entrance to the reserve. Although seen investigating nest hollows in spring (photo above), as far as we could determine they have not bred in the reserve (yet!).

In terms of threatened species, we did not record Forty-spotted Pardalotes in the reserve during 2019, although there were several records of this species by observers using eBird. There was one Birdata (not ours) and two eBird records of Swift Parrots moving through the reserve. The Tinderbox Wedge-tailed Eagles occasionally drifted over the reserve and we had two sightings of White-bellied Sea Eagles.

A pair of Tawny Frogmouths has nested and raised young in the reserve for at least the past 5 years, but we were unable to locate a nest in 2019. For much of the year they could be found roosting in an area near Heron Pond and appeared there again during December (and into 2020), so they are still about and perhaps fancied a change of scenery for their nest site in 2019.

Satin Flycatcher: Photo by Sue Jones

A nice end to the birding year was finding a pair of Satin Flycatchers building a nest in a small tree right alongside one of the tracks in the south-east corner of the Reserve – very convenient for photography, but we wondered whether it was a wise choice as the nest was quite exposed to the likes of currawongs and shrike-thrushes, which were often heard nearby. They were still sitting on 21 December, but the nest had disappeared when we next visited in early January. You can make up your own ending to this story...

White-throated Needletail (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) Report for 2019/20 Season

Mike Tarburton

This season there were 4681 reports of White-throated Needletail (WTNT) sightings sent in or published where I could find them. This is significantly more than last year, even after I have gone through and deleted the many duplicate reports that it appears to be fashionable to make! Unfortunately, the number of reports not giving counts or estimates was up from 30 to 111. It appears that the large areas burnt out by bushfires forced the birds to concentrate more in the remaining unburnt areas. This included many more sightings in Melbourne than we have experienced in recent years. Some WTNT were seen in Torres Strait in early March, feeding low over Boigu and Saibai Islands and even going across to Papua New Guinea. Were they escaping the burnt-out forests? For the previous two years, the largest flock reported was 2000 birds but this year there were two flocks larger than this. Daniel Weller reported 2600 WTNT near Orbost in Vic, while Eric Vanderduys reported 2500 at Smiths Lake in NSW – though he thought there were probably many more than that in the flock. There were three reports of about 1,000 birds. These were from Mungo Brush (John Connors), Black Mountain Gold Coast (Aaron Bean), Taree to Harrington (Ian Benson).

In the season (starting in June 2019), there were six records for June, two for July and none for August. These sightings were made in Qld, NSW, ACT, Vic and Tas. Of the five sightings made in September, three were from Qld and two from NSW, and probably represent new arrivals. There were 301 sightings for October. The first Victorian sightings were made by me in East Gippsland near the Thurra River Rest Area on 27 October. The first ACT sightings were made by Viv Rolland on 31 October – much earlier than normal for the ACT. Lachlan Read also saw 30 in the ACT on 15 November – still much earlier than usual. There were 7 sightings on Norfolk Island in November, and another one on Norfolk and several in the ACT in December. The first WA sighting that I have is of 3 birds seen on Cocos Island by Jennifer Spry on 30 November.

White-throated Needletail: Photo ©Eric J Woehler

The first sighting from Tasmania was of 2 birds seen on 17 December at Devonport by Ramit Singal. The first of 16 South Australian sightings was made at Meningie on 31 December when Sean Nolan and Tina Rider saw just one bird. Another two were seen at Canundra National Park in South Australia on 3 January by Pip Unney-Barber.

The average flock size this season was 28. This compares with 26, 32 and 30 for the three previous years. Each of these figures is significantly lower than the mean of 52 for the decade 2000–2010. So, even though younger birds are likely to have clumped more with experienced birds to beat the drought and the bushfires, the decrease is, sadly, still evident.

Thanks again to all those who have taken the trouble to send me your sightings. It does not matter whether you sent in one report or more than 100, they are all useful in helping determine the WTNT population status and defining other aspects of their behaviour. A big thank you is due to local bird club officials who have forwarded sightings from their members – very much appreciated.

Thank you and happy swift watching in the coming season.

Nectar feeding in Grey Currawongs

Sue and Warren Jones

While walking at the Peter Murrell Reserves on 20th July 2020, we noticed a small group of Grey Currawongs feeding on the ground in a mown firebreak. They were extracting elongated creamy-coloured items that we initially thought might be large grubs. The birds flew away before we could take a photo of them. However, when we inspected the area where they had been feeding, we found many torn-off flowers of Golden Heath (*Styphelia adscendens*). A close-up of some of these flowers (photo 1) showed that each flower tube had been 'pinched' at its distal end, presumably so the bird could extract the nectar. (The left-hand flower in the photo is one I pulled from the bush myself for comparison).

We paid a second visit to the area, hoping to photograph the currawongs in action, but this time, we found Green Rosellas engaged in the same practice. We wonder if any Golden Heath flowers in the area survived the avian onslaught (photo 2).

Green Rosellas are known to include nectar in their diet. However, I could not find any reference to Grey Currawongs feeding on flowers. HANZAB (Vol.7, p. 569) states that they feed on invertebrates and small vertebrates, also fruit, but there is no mention of flowers as a potential dietary item. A scan of available scientific literature also failed to bring up any mention of flower-feeding in currawongs. Maybe our birds had discovered a novel food source.

Both Photos are by Sue Jones

Individual flowers of Golden Heath (Styphelia adscendens)

Golden Heath (Styphelia adscendens)

Australia's oldest known Pied Oystercatcher, 25 July 2020: Photo ©Eric J Woehler

Australia's oldest known Pied Oystercatcher resighted

Eric J Woehler and Laura B Smith

Australia's oldest known Pied Oystercatcher was resighted at Marion Bay Spit during the recent South-east Tasmania Winter Wader Count on 25 July 2020. The bird, carrying 3 colour bands and a metal band, was banded as a pullus (nestling) at Pipeclay Lagoon in Dec 1984, making the bird 35 years and 7 months old when resighted. The bird's history was detailed in an earlier article (Newman M, Woehler EJ 2017). Tracking extreme longevity in the Australian Pied Oystercatcher. *The Stilt* 71, 9 -13). Whether the individual is on a breeding territory will be investigated during the 2020/21 season.

BirdLife Tasmania news and views

Proposed Westbury prison site home to multiple endangered species

From Birdlife Tasmania media release 25th August 2020

The release today of a confidential departmental assessment of the natural values for the proposed Westbury prison site has shown that a number of endangered species are present on the site, and that the area meets IUCN criteria for habitat conservation.

The 2016 DPIPWE report highlighted the presence of a Wedge-tailed Eagle nest on the property boundary, and observations of Masked Owl and Tasmanian Devil; all three species are listed as endangered under Tasmanian legislation.

The report recommended the permanent protection of the site, based on IUCN criteria for the conservation of important habitat for threatened species.

'Clearly, this area is utterly unsuitable for the proposed Westbury Prison,' Dr Eric Woehler, Convenor of BirdLife Tasmania said today on seeing the report.

'The loss of critical habitat for three endangered species cannot be considered for the construction of a prison,' he added.

'Prisons and their surrounds must be particularly well lit at night, and this extensive illumination will have a devastating impact on all the nocturnal birds and mammals in the area. The illumination will be extensive and will alienate the illuminated woodland, preventing birds and mammals from feeding, breeding and resting in the area.

'So the loss of habitat is far greater than the area to be cleared for the prison and fire break etc, with the illumination surrounding the prison creating a massive environmental footprint,' Dr Woehler added.

'It is clear that other sites that are less environmentally sensitive must be considered as the proposed site cannot be destroyed in light of the values present,' Dr Woehler said.

'Prisons can be built anywhere. Habitat for three endangered species is a precious resource that we need to protect with the highest priority,' Dr Woehler concluded.

Donations to BirdLife Tasmania

Sincere thanks to two recent donors to BirdLife Tasmania for their generous support. All donations to BirdLife Tasmania help support our research, conservation and advocacy efforts statewide. Both donors have indicated a wish to be anonymous, but are gratefully acknowledged here for their generosity. If you wish to make a donation to BirdLife Tasmania, please contact our Treasurer, Dr Cathy Bulman c/- tasmania@birdlife.org.au in the first instance.

Can you guess the identity of these birds?

Photo by Alan Fletcher

Something different: Photo by Karen Dick

Identity of bird photos from the June edition:

Bassian Thrush: Photo by Caroline Osborne

Goldfinch: Photo by Ian MacFarlane

Willie Wagtail: Photo by Bob Fletcher

Photo by Michael White

Bird Photographers—yes you!

Do you have some great photographs of birds you would like to share in *Yellow Throat* or the e-bulletin? Then please send them to:

yellowthroateditor@gmail.com

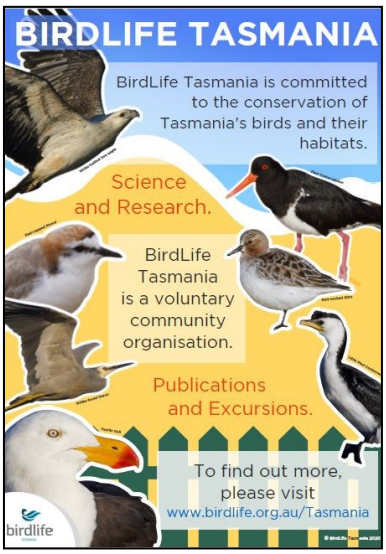
Partial albinism in native hens

Geoff Shannon

This photo, which was taken at the Tasmanian Arboretum at Eugenana by Elizabeth Latham and first presented on the Facebook Group Tasmanian Bird Sightings and Photographs, shows a Tasmanian Native Hen with many white feathers where they would normally be brown. There is a large population of native hens at the Arboretum, possibly because it is well fenced, and this may also mean that this is an isolated population. There have also been reports of Masked Lapwing at the Arboretum with partial albinism. Why this is happening at this particular place is (currently) a mystery.

Tasmanian Native Hen, Tasmanian Arboretum: Photo by Elizabeth Latham

Kingston Library BirdLife Display



BirdLife Tasmania has mounted a display in the Kingston Library for the month of September titled Birds of Kingborough. The display exhibits the themes of Bush Birds, Shorebirds and Backyard Birds – all habitats well represented in the Kingborough municipality. It focuses on the values that our native birds provide us, whether it's through science, or recreation, or just by the enjoyment in seeing our birdlife. The display highlights the need for protection of our birds and their habitats and gives some examples of the threats that are facing our birds. The display also provides some information about BirdLife Tasmania and our role in birdlife conservation. Special thanks go to Andrea Magnusson for providing her artistic flair as well as much hard work.

Birdlife Tasmania wishes thank the anonymous person who donated their photographs to the posters.

A cautionary tale

Sharon Moore

A poor little male Superb Fairy-wren lost his beautiful tail yesterday. Even more tragically, his foot was mangled.

A solution? Photo by Sharon Moore

We park our car outside our house; recently we've noticed a male fairy-wren flitting up against the side-mirrors, wrestling with an apparent opponent perhaps. We've seen this behaviour many times, and thought nothing of it. But yesterday, he didn't leave when I approached the car and I saw that one of his feet was trapped and he was frantically trying to pull it out. I held him cupped in both hands and called out for help, which came in the form of a pair of hands and a screwdriver which was used to gently lever the mirror away from the outside casing so I could free the little fellow. As I opened my hands enough to check on him, he flew away. I saw him later hobbling around on the lawn in the company of a female, but he was a very sad sight. I can only hope that his foot heals enough so that he can survive, and his tail grows back.

Since then, we've tied opaque plastic bags around the car 's side-mirror whenever it's parked outside our house, and folded them inwards when parked in town. Please, if you notice birds flitting in front of your car side-mirrors, cover them or fold them against the car if you can, when not driving of course.

Outing Report: Coningham Reserve Saturday 29th August 2020

Karen Dick

Seventeen people met up at Coningham Recreation Reserve on Saturday morning for a walk in the dry Eucalypt forest and heathland. The weather was kind – warm and calm and the birds were active and noisy. We headed initially past some mature Eucalypts and an area of newly planted trees where Yellow-throated Honeyeaters were calling all around us with their various vocalisations, and a group of Black-headed Honeyeaters posed nicely at the top of a dead tree, giving good views.

At a dam full of croaking frogs, a duck up a tree caused interest among the group. Initially a male Australian Wood Duck gave good views, followed by two females, prospecting for nest hollows in the tree. A couple of Welcome Swallows, returned from their winter stay on the mainland, whizzed around joyfully and Grey Fantails flitted about, hawking for insects around the trees. As we left the dam, a single Strong-billed Honeyeater dashed away. Superb Fairy-wrens could be heard calling every couple of hundred metres and occasionally one would come out of hiding. Males were showing clean, new breeding plumage and looked great in the sunlight.

On our completion of the first part of our figure 8 loop, a calling Scarlet Robin caught our attention and was glimpsed as it darted away through the trees. Down the firebreak, a couple of Common Bronzewings were located, feeding in the low heath.

As we set off on the second loop, a juvenile Grey Shrike thrush was unperturbed by our presence as it fossicked around on the woodland floor, looking for a snack. It provided plenty of photo opportunities for those with cameras. From around us, the sounds of Laughing Kookaburras and Forest Ravens added to the lovely atmosphere. In a gully with tall, mature trees a Golden Whistler called to us from a hidden perch and the Striated Pardalotes were calling all around us.

Australian Wood Duck: Photo by Michael White

As we looped back, another Golden Whistler call nearby got everyone looking and a lovely male was found by one of the participants, which everyone managed to see. A female along with the male was great to see as well.

Bird List

Australian Wood Duck

Pacific Black Duck

Pacific Black Duck/Northern Mallard – hybrid

Common Bronzewing

Shining Bronze-cuckoo – summer migrant

Tasmanian Native-hen – endemic

Kelp Gull

Brown Goshawk

Laughing Kookaburra – introduced

Brown Falcon

Galah - introduced

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo - introduced

Green Rosella – endemic

Superb Fairy-wren

Eastern Spinebill

Little Wattlebird

Yellow Wattlebird – endemic

New Holland Honeyeater

Yellow-throated Honeyeater – endemic

Black-headed Honeyeater – endemic

Strong-billed Honeyeater – endemic

Spotted Pardalote

Striated Pardalote – summer migrant

Brown Thornbill

Grey Shrike-thrush

Golden Whistler

Grey Butcherbird

Australian Magpie

Grey Fantail

Forest Raven

Scarlet Robin

Welcome Swallow – summer migrant

Common Starling – introduced

Common Blackbird – introduced

House Sparrow – introduced

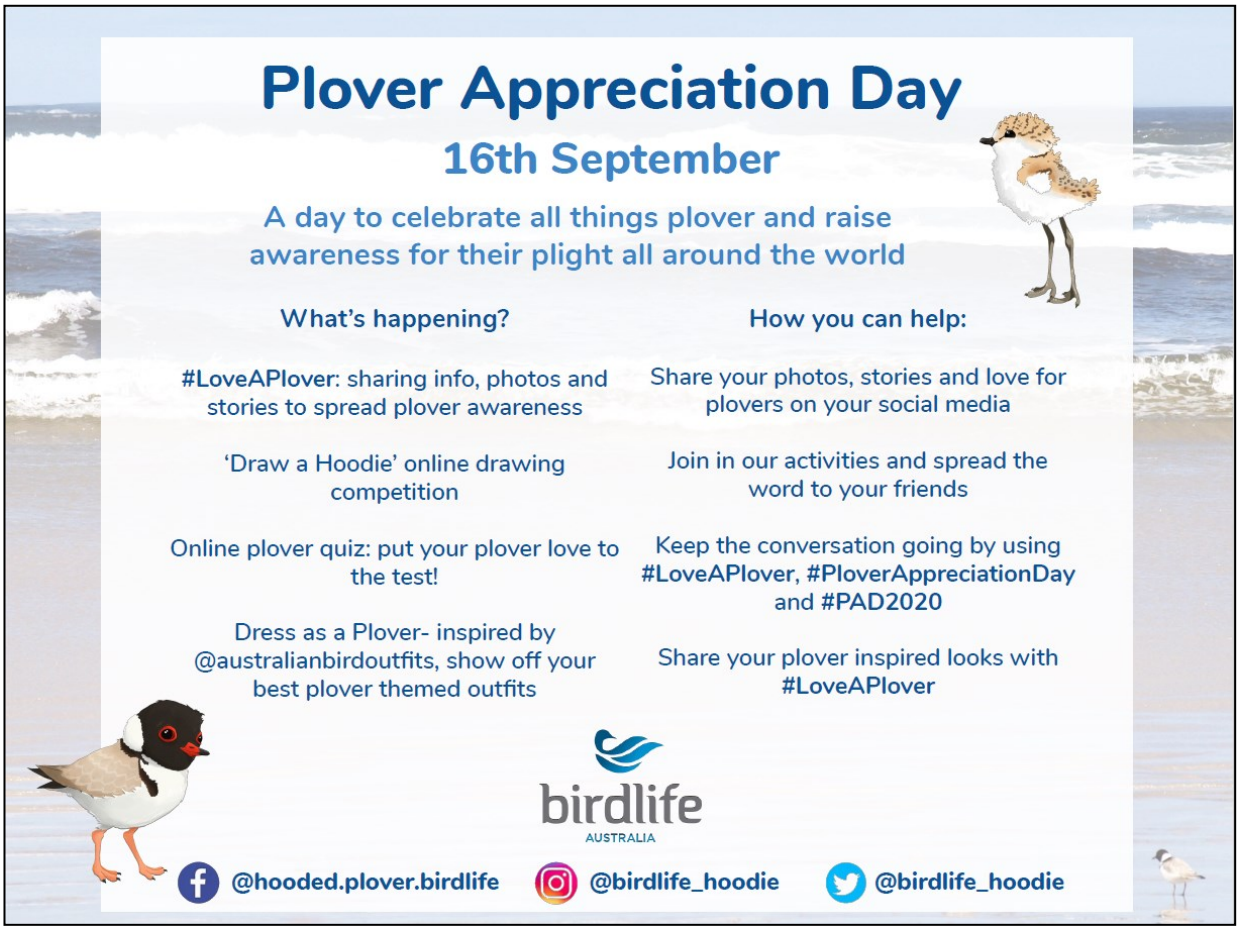
While we were watching the whistler, a Brown Falcon sneaked past, only seen by a lucky few. As we headed back along the forest track a pair of Spotted Pardalotes gave good views, low in some she-oaks near an earth bank that looked like a likely nesting spot.

Coningham outing group: Photo by Karen Dick

While some members of the party were admiring some lovely Green-hood orchids next to the track, alarm calls from the birds alerted us to a potential raptor nearby and a Brown Goshawk glided silently over our heads.

Just before we reached the car park, we located the nest of a Grey Fantail on the ground, that looked like it had been blown out of the trees in the previous night's storm winds. The delicate structure, with carefully woven eucalypt outer shell and lined with wallaby fur was immaculate and looked like it hadn't even been used yet. Luckily, it is still early in the season and hopefully the birds will have a chance to build another.

Although it felt quieter than we were expecting, in terms of diversity, we recorded a total of 35 species in our two-and-a-half-hour ramble over about 4km. We finished the outing with a coffee and catch up, where we finalised the bird list and talked about the best bits of the day. The full bird list is given.



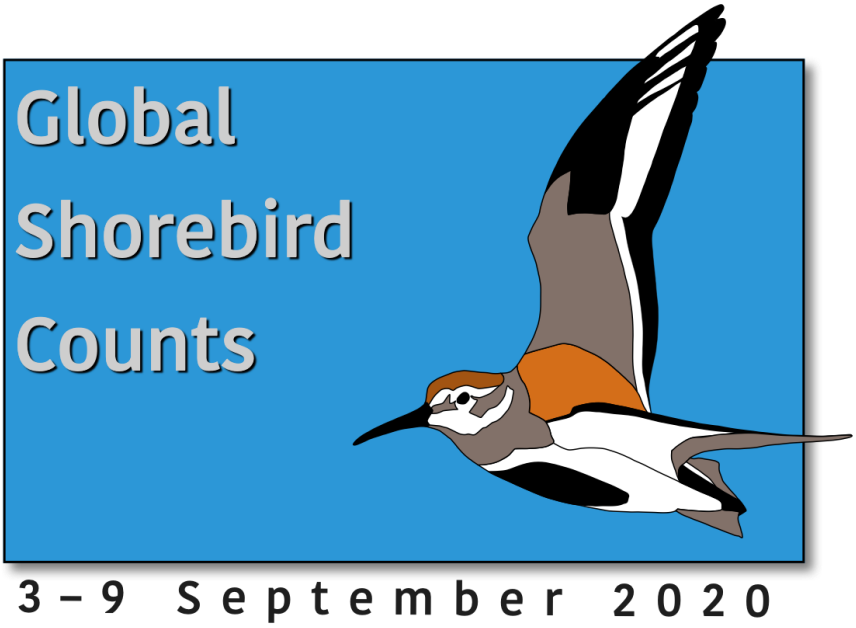
BirdLife Tasmania outings September 2020 to November 2020

Outings are available in the south, north-west and north-east. To register for any outing listed here, or to receive further details, you will need to email the organiser at tasmania.outings@birdlife.org.au. **Pre-registration is required for all outings to comply with COVID-safe planning.**

To allow arrangements to be made, please be sure to register at least 7 days in advance of any outing, unless indicated otherwise in the notes.

REGION	DATE	LOCATION	NOTES
South	**Sunday 20th September** **8.00am** **WATERWORKS RESERVE, HOBART**	Join us at one of our favourite reserves in the foothills of Mount Wellington above Hobart. Spring will be in full swing and the birds should be very active. This will be an easy walk, taking in the waterbirds in the dams and the bush birds in the surrounding forest.	We will reserve a picnic site from 10am, so feel free to bring morning tea and enjoy a bit of a social afterwards.
North-west	**Monday 21st September** **9.00am** **PORT SORELL CONSERVATION AREA**	Walk at Port Sorrell Conservation area, looking for summer migrants. Geoff Shannon will lead this walk, which will be at a gentle pace and last about two hours. Joint BirdLife/U3A outing.	This walk begins at Squeaking Point.
North-east	**Wednesday 7th October** **8.15am** **CANHAMS ROAD** **ST HELENS**	This outing will leave from Bayside Car Park in St Helens.	
North-west	**Monday 19th October** **9am** **TASMANIAN ARBORETUM, EUGENANA**	Join Geoff Shannon for an amble around the Arboretum, which is great for a variety of birds, and usually a platypus or two. Joint BirdLife/U3A outing.	Car-pooling from Devonport is possible for this trip.
South	**Sunday 25th October** **8.00am** **PALLID CUCKOO SURVEY – SOUTH ARM**	This is an opportunity to be part of a real survey in a small team, looking and listening for Pallid Cuckoos. Several separate teams will survey in different areas, in a bid to understand the current population. This will be a longer walk, but predominantly on flattish ground. Access to facilities will be limited and numbers are limited for this outing.	When registering for this outing, please give an idea of your level of experience, so that participants can be allocated to teams with a full range of experience. This allows new people to learn about surveying and how to log a survey with Birdata.

REGION	DATE	LOCATION	NOTES
North-east	**Wednesday 4th November** **9.00am** **CHAIN OF LAGOONS**	Enjoy a visit to this east coast reserve between Bicheno and Scamander where a mixture of beach and bush birds should await you.	Car-pooling from St Helens will be possible for this outing.
North-west	**Monday 16th November** **9.00am** **NARAWNTAPU NATIONAL PARK**	This walk takes in a variety of habitats at Narawntapu and also provides the opportunity to encounter forester kangaroos grazing on the extensive lawns. Joint BirdLife/U3A outing.	Car-pooling is possible for this trip.
South	**Sunday 22nd November** **All day outing** **8.30am** **MARIA ISLAND**	This will be the rescheduled trip to Maria Island that was cancelled at the start of the coronavirus restrictions. We will catch the 8.30am ferry from Triabunna and spend most of the day on the island, returning on the 2.30pm ferry. While on the island, we will explore the northern part of the island on foot. Spectacular scenery and close encounters with some of Tasmania's endemic birds are likely as are great views of some of the mammals, including wombats, eastern grey (forester) kangaroos and an outside chance of Tasmanian devil. Overall walking distance will be 4-5km, mainly on good tracks, with occasional hills. Karen Dick will lead this outing.	This is a full-day excursion and you may wish to share transport to Triabunna (around an hour from Hobart). The return ferry will cost $45 per person, but concessions are available. Numbers are limited for this outing so we advise registering early.



The Global Shorebird Counts, held every year around World Shorebirds Day (6 September), is one of the key events of World Shorebirds Day. This program demonstrates the importance of fieldwork, supports observers in improving counting skills, contributes to the increase of the number of birdwatchers and scientists monitoring shorebirds worldwide and pledges new citizen scientists to the world's largest bird database program. More information about this can be found on their website https://www.worldshorebirdsday.org

Please also use **birdata** to record observations as there is the option for shorebird counts.

Letter: The planet is fighting back; too bad no one cares

Al Hamarta, Bozeman, Montana

Nick Mooney has arranged Al's permission to have this letter reprinted here. He assures us Al is a top ecologist and very well published USA expert on Golden Eagles. Eds

As a drafted infantryman in Vietnam in 1967, I was exposed to the travesty of human-caused impacts on birds by reading Rachael Carson's 'Silent Spring'. After being severely wounded, with Rachael's impetus the Veteran's Association helped me eventually receive advanced degrees in wildlife ecology.

Unfortunately, '…one of the penalties of an environmental education' (as Aldo Leopold wrote) I realized I was living '… alone in a world of wounds' - and not just exclusively the military type. Fast-forward to spring-summer 2020 when wounds were never so prominent. During trips to my old haunts in western Montana I was stunned, as were several of my colleagues, by the near total absence of common birds.

First noticed were meadowlarks that were nearly ubiquitous until a few years ago, then the decline in red-winged blackbirds, plus horned larks and other neotropical birds and raptors, especially an ominous, recent decline in golden eagles.

In fact, a biologist/ecologist on an extended float trip on the Lower Yellowstone River recently queried me, 'Why no golden eagles?'. I had to respond '…climate change, wind turbines, lead (from carcasses), no rabbits (leporid haemorragic disease), drought, subdivisions, shooting electrocutions, disturbance, rodenticides, corporate agriculture, on and on..' – all cumulative from too many humans and not just effecting eagles. Three billion continental birds lost since 1970.

Last winter the absence of cotton-tailed rabbits also struck me. This spring, lack of ground squirrel 'road pizza' that used to embellish our highways plus remote squirrel colony vacancies were quite evident. Also, despite extended travel at highway speeds this summer, there was a remarkable absence of insect density smashed on my windshield. Any guess what else may be effecting birds, directly or indirectly?

I suspect the planet is fighting back (COVID, SARS, Ebola etc) but "wounding" is nearing fatal and nobody but the 'penalized' listen or seem to care.

Links—some stories you may not have read

- Can a 2000ft fence save Hawaii's rare native birds from destruction? https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/28/hawaii-native-birds-fence-kauai
- Federal government considers lifting ban on importing parrots 25 years after it was introduced https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/25/federal-government-considers-lifting-ban-on-importing-parrots-25-years-after-it-was-introduced (25th August 2020)
- What this critically endangered bird tells us about Australia's failing environment protection laws https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-25/environment-protection-laws-fail-swift-parrot-conservationists/12574398 (25th August 2020)
- Released captive-bred Regent Honeyeater leads conservationists to wild Hunter Valley flock https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-23/captive-bred-released-regent-honeyeater-leads-conservationists/12580158#:~:text=A%20released%20captive%2Dbred%20regent,boost%20the%20species%20low%20numbers(23rd August)
- Collins Street's famous falcon nest undergoes renovation in time for breeding season https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-22/new-nesting-boxes-for-melbourne-collins-street-falcons/12582620 (22nd August)
- Bird biodiversity is rapidly declining in the U.S. The overall bird population decreased by 29% since 1970, while grassland birds declined by an alarming 53%. https://www.sciencedaily.com/ releaes/2020/08/200814131023.htm (14th August)
- Magpies are not getting their ten hours of sleep a night, research finds, and light pollution's to blame https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-08/research-finds-light-pollution-disrupts-magpies-pigeons-sleep/12537800 (8th August 2020)
- Eastern Hooded Plover numbers on the rise thanks to volunteers, fewer visitors https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-02/hooded-plover-numbers-rising-in-south-australia/12513316 (2nd August 2020)
- Granite Island penguin population in peril prompting specialists to hunt foxes at night https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-30/granite-island-penguins-down-to-just-12-birds-thanks-to-foxes/12507458 (30th July 2020)
- Threatened Carnaby's Black Cockatoo numbers boosted by canola crops https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-14/carnabys-cockatoo-numbers-booosted-by-canola-cropping-link/12452636 (14th July 2020)
- Artificial roosts for migratory birds journeying from the Arctic prove popular in Korea, but not in Australia https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-01/migratory-birds-from-arctic-stopover-on-plastic-roosts-in-korea/12335600 (2nd July 2020)

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Top Yellow–throated honey eater: Photo by Alan Fletcher
Bottom Australian Wood Duck: Photo by Michael White