

Lyrebird Tales

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Birdlife Yarra Valley Newsletter

Two incredible field seasons with female Superb Lyrebirds by Victoria Austin



Female Lyrebird Sherbrooke Forest Photo © Meghan Lindsay

My PhD journey researching female superb lyrebirds and the function of their vocalisations in and around the nest began in 2016 when I joined the Lyrebird Lab at Western Sydney University (see Dalziell and Welbergen 2016, which provides the foundation for my work). I knew from the get-go that this would be extremely challenging. With elusive behaviours and often located in tough, inaccessible terrain, it is fair to say that I was terrified. Sure, female lyrebird nests are huge (I weighed an old one in the field – a ridiculous exercise that revealed more than 9kg of intricately entwined sticks, moss and dirt!), but they are also incredibly camouflaged. Luckily for me, the Sherbrooke Lyrebird Study Group, a dedicated group of citizen scientists who have worked with lyrebirds in the Dandenong ranges for years, were more than willing to help me find my feet.

I first visited Sherbrooke Forest to search for nests in 2018 and hoped to take the nest finding skills I learned back to the Blue Mountains in NSW, my primary field site. I quickly learned that the habitat in Sherbrooke is extremely different to that of the Blue Mountains. In the beautiful, cool temperate rainforest habitat of Sherbrooke, female lyrebirds nest near creeks and in the tops of tree ferns (check out Maisey *et al* 2018 for a detailed description). Finding nests in this environment has its own challenges (never underestimate the damage tripping over a fallen log can do!), and I have certainly walked past a few nests.



Sherbrooke nest

photo © Victoria Austin

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Boulders in The Blue Mountains photo © Matt Austin

In the Blue Mountains however, I had to climb down (and up!) thousands of stairs and walk across dubious cliff edges and boulders to access the deep gullies that females like to nest in. Alex Maisey, convenor of the Sherbrooke Lyrebird Survey Group, once said to me after a long day of working in that terrain that it was more akin to rock climbing than anything else – and I really think this is not far from the truth. The diversity of habitats these birds can occupy was my first surprise. In addition to true rainforest, females occupy eucalypt forests and other dryer habitats - I have even found a nest in scrub underneath a xanthorrhoea – a far cry from the green forest of Sherbrooke! This point is important. Sherbrooke Forest is an extremely valuable resource for our understanding of lyrebird behaviour. However, by only examining lyrebirds in one habitat type, our understanding of their behaviour is incomplete. For example, in the Blue Mountains you are more likely to find a nest perched precariously on a boulder or side of a cliff edge than on the top of a tree fern, even when there are plenty around! And while dry weather affects all lyrebirds regardless of the habitat they live in, one can only think how tough it is for females to sustain themselves and their offspring in dryer sandy soils where invertebrate loads are sure to be lower.

In the breeding seasons of 2018 and 2019 I split my time between Sherbrooke Forest and the sites in the Blue Mountains. In my first field season we had 5 nests being monitored in Sherbrooke and 13 in the Blue Mountains.



Field assistant Benoit Sommervogel taking a break after our climb out of a gully Photo © Victoria Austin



Field assistant Jack Dirck braving the 1000 stairs to the forest floor photo © Victoria Austin



Setting up a camera trap

photo © Matt Austin



Hidden nest

photo © Victoria Austin

It was a really dry year and birds in both areas seemed to be doing it tough. There were some sites in the Blue Mountains that I suspected females skipped the breeding season because it was simply too dry. We found many an old nest (sometimes as many as 20) but no new ones at some sites! Come 2019 the number of nests being monitored jumped from 5 to 25 in Sherbrooke Forest and from 13 to 17 in the Blue Mountains. In addition to a healthy dose of rain, this huge jump in nest monitoring was facilitated in part by a very generous grant from the Wettenhall Environment Trust to the Sherbrooke Lyrebird Survey Group in collaboration with The Lyrebird Lab at Western Sydney University. This allowed us to purchase 20 trail cameras so we could monitor nests un-invasively in Sherbrooke Forest. While we are yet to provide official results from this camera trap study, it is safe to say that the private lives of female lyrebirds are very interesting. Some of the nest predators they have to contend with have sadly been unsurprising (i.e. foxes) and others have brought shrieks of disbelief (I will never look at the beautiful Grey Shrike Thrush in the same way again!). I'm also sad to report that the number of deer captured on some of our cameras in Sherbrooke Forest far exceeds the number of lyrebirds. The damage this invasive animal does to the forest has to be seen to be believed, and I fear for the long-term conservation of this unique habitat unless we act quickly to control deer populations.



Female superb lyrebird nest close up photo © Slater Goodman

In happier news (I think?), we were able to confirm previous anecdotal reports that female lyrebirds destroy the nests of their rivals! In 2018 in Sherbrooke we captured the now infamous female DkGYR, (band No. 18682), destroying the nest of her neighbour! This event was so exciting and the implications for our understanding of lyrebird behaviour so important that we had the paper published in scientific journal *Behaviour* (see Austin *et al* 2019). In sum, to destroy a neighbouring female's nest incurs a huge amount of risk for an individual and as such, we can only assume that the competition between female lyrebirds is extremely high.



Vicky Austin recording photo © Slater Goodman

In turn, this may help us better understand why females evolved whistle song and mimicry. This discovery also showed the importance of long-term bird banding and monitoring programs for understanding bird behaviour. Without those bands, we would have been unable to confirm that the nest was destroyed by a neighbour and not the nest owner herself.



Mum keeping a close eye photo © Benoit Sommervogel



Female lyrebird egg photo © Victoria Austin

Perhaps unsurprising to the readers of this article, I am also pleased to confirm that lyrebirds are universally loved. I have developed close connections with community groups, individuals and businesses in the Blue Mountains – all keen to help as much as possible with my research.



Blue Mountains Chick photo © Victoria Austin

Most notably, Scenic World in the Blue Mountains have been a tremendous support and have facilitated ease of research in their gullies by allowing us to use their rides to access the forest floor. The Sherbrooke Lyrebird Survey Group and Friends of Sassafras Creek have been incredibly supportive of my time in Sherbrooke. Additionally, Parks Victoria and National Parks NSW have been generous in their time and in allowing access to remote locations and I have been hugely supported by scientific organisations such as the The Linnean Society of NSW and the Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment. I have also had the pleasure to meet with and discuss my research with Dr Alan Lill who was one of the first

modern-day scientists to study female lyrebirds and Jan Incoll, the original "Lyrebird Lady". Additionally, I had two international research assistants (one from France and one from the US) give up their comfortable lives to come and brave cliffs and leeches with me (thank you Ben and Jack!). Further to this, in 2019 the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (supported by a Grant from the National Science Foundation) sent a team of enthusiastic undergraduate students to help me with my research in the Blue Mountains. Due to their efforts, we were able to monitor females very closely and the students are working on some interesting papers from the data they helped collect. I am also pleased to report that I received a Fulbright Scholarship and am writing this article from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York. I have my data with me and am in the process of analysing it with the help of international experts. I can't say too much just yet, except I am excited by the early results. Female lyrebirds can mimic an astonishing range of sounds and the way they use this mimicry is quite interesting! The vocalisations they make to communicate with their chicks, are in my opinion, some of the sweetest sounds in the world. It has been so incredible to learn from leading ornithologists and to promote this incredibly unique bird in an international setting. This list of contributors is important because it demonstrates not only the love for and interest in lyrebirds, but the incredible amount of support required by scientists, businesses, organisations, governments and nature enthusiasts to make scientific research happen. Teamwork at its best.



**Myself with the Cornell students_ Eric Hughes_ Kelsie Lopez_ Chloe Mikles and Kevin Macias
photo © Slater Goodman**



Fuzzy chick_Sherbrooke 2019 photo © Victoria Austin



Fuzzy chick_ Sherbrooke 2018 photo © Victoria Austin

With the tragedy of the fires that began shortly after my field season ended, the data we have already collected, and the continued close monitoring of these birds will be even more essential. While much of the Blue Mountains habitat has been decimated, including a number of my field sites, it is my hope that the data will help with future population management of this incredible species. Understanding behaviour is a key step in effective conservation strategies. I am hopeful that upon my return to Australia in April that I will be surprised by pockets of habitat that have escaped the flames. These pockets will be essential for breeding females. My favourite female, affectionately known as Gertrude (yes, the Cornell Students and I named them all), is located in one of the burnt habitats.



Gertude_My Favourite

photo © Victoria Austin

She is an old bird, a fantastic mother with an incredible mimetic repertoire. She even featured in the ABC Off Track podcast by Ann Jones; "Sex, Lyres and Audiotape". I really hope to be able to report that she (and her nesting habitat) made it through.

So, what does 2020 hold? I will once again return to Sherbrooke. It is my hope that the data I collect will help us understand how female lyrebirds learn mimicry. Additionally, I will be trekking to Tasmania to examine female lyrebirds in the introduced lyrebird population there. I hope to see how their vocalisations differ from mainland populations which will further help to answer the question of how and what females learn. It would not be an exaggeration to say that my life is now consumed by all things female lyrebird, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I've been told I'm very biased toward females – and I'm happy to admit that I am. Don't get me wrong, male lyrebirds are pretty cool, but I think females are even better. They build their huge nests, raise their young and defend their territories all by themselves, all while possessing a beautiful voice – what's not to love? I look forward to being able to share my findings about these incredible birds over the next few years.

Victoria Austin PhD Candidate, Western Sydney University

Twitter @avianbehaviour

Further reading

- Dalziell, A. H., & Welbergen, J. A. (2016). Elaborate mimetic vocal displays by female Superb Lyrebirds. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, 4, 34.
- Maisey, A. C., Nimmo, D. G., & Bennett, A. F. (2019). Habitat selection by the Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*), an iconic ecosystem engineer in forests of south - eastern Australia. *Austral Ecology*, 44(3), 503-513.
- Austin, V. I., Welbergen, J. A., Maisey, A. C., Lindsay, M. G., & Dalziell, A. H. (2019). Destruction of a conspecific nest by a female Superb Lyrebird: evidence for reproductive suppression in a bird with female-only parental care. *Behaviour*, 1-11.

Link to podcast:

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/lyre-3a.jpg/11235052>

Birdlife Yarra Valley Branch Meetings

Meetings have been reduced to 5 per year; to be held on the second Tuesdays of February, April, June, August and October.

Meetings are held in the Badger Creek Hall Meeting Room at 7.45 p.m. Badger Creek Rd. Badger Creek (next to CFA). Melway Edn 39 278 F8.

BirdLife Australia Yarra Valley Branch

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Committee

Convener: Warren Cousins

Deputy-Convener: Manfred Hennig

Secretary: Alma Mitchell

Treasurer: Michael Feller

Conservation Officer: Michael Feller

Other Members: Jan Llewelyn. Doug Pocock

Notice of Annual General Meeting 2020

The AGM of BirdLife Yarra Valley will be held on Tuesday 9 June at 7.45 pm. in the Badger Creek Hall Meeting Room. Nominations will be received for all positions on the Committee before or at the meeting.

Agenda: To confirm the Minutes of the 2019 A.G.M.; Reports from the Convener and Treasurer; Election of Committee for 2020-2021. Any other business for which 14 days' notice is required.

What Bird is That?



Answer on page 12

A Few Days Exploring Victoria

by Doug Pocock and Jan Llewelyn

It always amazes me how many parts of Victoria that I haven't been to. One place was Mount Skene, a peak that was often included in long bushwalks before the days of 4WD vehicles and the subsequent building of roads through the bush. Jan and I found a few non committed days in December and planned a trip, even though there were already some bushfires burning in east Gippsland. We didn't have a fixed idea (apart from Mt Skene) but thought we would see where we wound up.

Our first destination was Toorong Falls. We started by driving to McMahons Creek and then taking Muddy Creek Rd, this was a new road for us. We saw lots of Pied Currawongs and Lyrebirds as we drove along. Noticing a small bird landing on a road marker stake we stopped and checked it out with binoculars, very pleasing to see a Rose Robin. Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were also there. Down to Noojee where we had a break for morning tea. We saw Wood Ducks, Black Duck and Masked Lapwings in a nearby park and Spotted Pardalote, Brown Thornbills and Red Wattlebirds in the trees along the creek.

We travelled on the Mt Baw Baw road and turned off to Toorong Falls. There is a pleasant camp ground there but it was closed for renovations. It was a pleasant walk on a good track to visit the falls, Superb Blue Wrens and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were our companions on the track. Leaving the falls we took the Thompson Valley Road, which was a bit rough and slippery in places, and then went to the Mt St Gwinear carpark to camp the night. We walked to an overgrown lookout and were pleased to see Olive Whistler, Crescent and White-eared Honeyeaters. There was still some snow on the ground from the snowfall a couple of days previously.

Next day we went to the Thompson River Dam. At the picnic spot on the dam wall there were lots of Fairy Martins and Welcome Swallows darting over the water, while Crimson Rosellas fed in the planted callistemons. At the end of the wall we had morning tea at another picnic ground, watching Eastern Spinebills and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters working the flowering trees. We were excited to see a pair of Spotted Quail-thrush wander across the picnic ground taking no notice of us. Our next stop was Walhalla - we had been there before but only for brief visits. This is a beautiful destination to admire the unspoiled streetscapes. In the largely exotic trees were Yellow-tailed Black and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, also King Parrots. While waiting for a mine tour to start we enjoyed many Golden Whistlers and Grey Fantails.

Leaving Walhalla we took the back road, where there were plenty of historical markers to interest us. This was a very narrow rough road and luckily we met no other traffic. We found a lovely camp spot on the Aberfeldy River, slightly spoiled by rubbish left by other campers. I have never understood the mentality of people leaving rubbish behind. There were no other people here and we enjoyed the quiet to

look at White-throated Tree-creepers, Satin Flycatcher, Little Raven, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Brown Thornbills, while an Eastern Whipbird called but didn't show itself.

Travelling on next day we followed the Walhalla Rd to Matlock and on to Woods Point. There is a very nice camping spot just beyond Woods Point where we had lunch and were entertained by Satin Bowerbirds. We followed the Woods Point - Mansfield Road to Jamieson. This runs alongside the Goulburn River for much of its length and there are plenty of camping grounds along there. We ignored those and continued to Jamieson to pick up some fuel and supplies. We left on the Licola Road and called in to a camping spot on the Jamieson River. This was full of people, many already boozing, so we left immediately. A few kms further on we noticed a rough track to the side. We explored along there and found a nice flat spot, just big enough for our van. It was a peaceful place with Lyrebirds calling in the valley and a Southern Boobook called at night. There was a bit of rubbish which we cleaned up.

The road gradually climbed next day and led to Mt Skene with lots of stunted Snow Gums and snow grass clearings. We walked along a deeply rutted track towards the Jamieson Ski Club hut but found it had been destroyed by fire. Typically there were many Flame Robins in the snow gums, also Rufous Whistlers. Australian Pipits were feeding in the snow grass and a Kestrel circled overhead. Heading south we got to Mt Useful with extensive views from the top. The road was gradually losing height but there were still plenty of historical sites marked, as this was one of the old gold miners' tracks. At one site we visited the air was filled with Grey Shrike-thrush calls. We saw plenty of the GSTs (Grey Shrike Thrush) and saw White-browed Scrubwrens and a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo. That night we camped at a small spot at Murderers Hill. Very peaceful with no shrieks or groans from ghostly apparitions!

On our way next day we had a break at a Forests Commission picnic ground where we saw Common Bronzewing and a Wonga Pigeon. Soon we were back to civilization at Heyfield, where we had a lovely coffee at a very pleasant café before making our way home.



Wonga Pigeon

photo © Valerie Fowler

Bird Survey at Haining Farm on 15/11/19

Haining Farm sits on 59 hectares of land, located near Launching Place and nestled between the Don River and the Yarra River. Its location makes a perfect place to deliver and restore prime habitat to benefit wetland-loving but critically endangered, Lowland Leadbeater's Possum and Helmeted Honeyeater.

The Haining Farm project aims to restore and create habitat for these animals, whilst also providing an opportunity for visitors to engage with nature and experience native wildlife in their natural habitat.

BirdLife Yarra Valley branch has been involved in assisting Greening Australia and Parks Victoria undertake bird surveys since February 2019. Our last outing was in November 2019 where we had a good morning of bird watching, plus also meeting up with Andrew Silcocks from BirdLife head office. On the day my total bird species was 50, bringing the cumulative to date now up to 66.

Andrew Silcocks is attempting to undertake regular ongoing surveys, and a number of our members have undertaken to assist, though not necessarily on a monthly basis. Now that there is access to water flows off the Don River to help fill the wetland cells on the north-western portion of the farm, no doubt an increasing bird diversity will be forthcoming.

Interesting Sightings

26/9/19 White-throated Needletails (3 or 4) - Badger Creek, Graeme George

27/9/19 Wedge-tailed Eagle nest with 2 young - Seville, Doug Pocock/ Jan Llewelyn

30/9/19 Crimson Chats approx 30 - Coopers Lake (Birdlife Camp) Doug Pocock/Jan Llewelyn

2/10/19 Eastern Koel - Lillydale Lake, Graeme George

3/10/19 Eastern Koel - Lilydale near Council Chambers, Graeme George

6/10/19 Little Grassbird & Reed Warbler - Lillydale Lake, Warren Cousins

30/10/19 Satin Flycatcher, first for season - Badger Creek, Graeme George

3/11/19 Rose Robin - Wirra Willa Track, Dace Fitton

3/11/19 Bassian Thrush - Wirra Willa Track, Dace Fitton

Nov 2019 Satin Bowerbirds in loquat tree (not often seen) - St Andrews, Dace Fitton

7/11/19 Cicadabird, first for season - Badger Creek, Graeme George

9/11/19 Pink-eared Duck - Coranderrk Bushland, Warren Cousins

4/2/20 Swamp Harrier - Coldstream, Valerie/Peter Fowler

9/2/20 White-throated Needletails (25-30) - Healesville, Valerie/Peter Fowler

Reports of Meetings and Outings

September 25th outing to Plenty Gorge

This wonderful location was a revelation to me, as a total newbie to this park. Although a good drive for most of us Yarra Valley members, it proved to be well and truly worth it. This was despite the major difficulty most of us had getting access due to major roadworks and road closures along Plenty Road. Enough said that quite a few phone calls and U-turns were needed to find the magical entry point. This delayed the start of the walk by 30 minutes, but none of the 11 participants begrudged this.

The group was a diverse one, with 6 of our regulars joined by quite a number of new faces. We were lucky that one of these, John, was a member of the "Friends of the Gorge" group and had an intimate local knowledge. Naturally enough we asked him to show us the best route to follow, and we were not disappointed.

The park has stunning landscape views and an abundance of native wildlife. It is also a significant refuge for threatened species and, according to Parks Victoria; it has the greatest diversity of flora and fauna habitats of all parks in the Greater Melbourne area. The 1,350 hectare park extends along the Plenty River from Mernda to Bundoora, and although formerly a rural setting, the park is now surrounded by urban development, with sustained growth predicted over the next 20 years.

We all met at the Red Gum picnic area, and straight away saw numerous Eastern Grey Kangaroos. Further along it was also nice to see a local echidna rambling along. On the birding side we were certainly rewarded with a large number of species. Overall the total was an excellent 56. Most agreed that the bird of the day was a pair of White-winged Trillers, with the male showing stunning breeding plumage. Not far behind were Australasian Shovelers, Reed Warblers, Hardheads, Black-fronted Dotterels, Musk Lorikeet, Red-rumped Parrot, Olive-backed Oriole, and White-winged Choughs. The only disappointment was the lack of any raptors. I'll definitely be back. *Warren Cousins*

PLEASE NOTE: The southern end of Plenty Gorge Park is closed due to recent fire activity. These areas include Yellow Gum Recreation Area, Nioka Bush Camp, Tanunda Wetlands and Janefield South

October 8th Meeting

There was no guest speaker for this meeting. In place of this we had two sessions presented by Warren Cousins and then Ray McMahon.

Warren conducted a 20-question quiz on bird knowledge: Do you know OWLS from ALBATROSSES. Warren had previously done the test himself, and scored 15 points, but with the combined group knowledge, and no hints from Warren, the meeting came up with a very good result of 19 points.

After this Ray showed a collection of his recent photographs, including some great shots from our recent outing to Plenty Gorge. Thanks so much for this Ray.

In general meeting, and with all of our committee members present, it was agreed to reduce the number of future general meetings down to 5 per year; to be held on the second Tuesdays of February, April, June, August and October.

October 11-14th - Camp at Wedderburn

Eleven people came to the camp, arriving and leaving at different times. We were delighted to have all the committee except for our secretary, Alma, who feels her camping days are over. The weather was fine with a cool wind and rain overnight once being all we could complain about. The wildflowers were probably at their peak, the golden pennants being more widespread than we could ever remember – probably because of the earlier rain.

Thursday saw the first campers to arrive. The area was full of White-browed Woodswallows, very noisy and aggressive towards other birds. There were also some Masked Woodswallows amongst them. White-winged Trillers were another bird we only get intermittently. In the background there were always Peaceful Doves and Striated Pardalotes calling, Rufous Songlarks singing and the usual White-browed Babblers. We were very pleased to see some Diamond Firetails which have only recently reappeared on the property.

Friday we drove to another area of the property and stopped at various places, then returned for lunch to find our branch convener, an old friend from another branch and Manfred and Margaret had arrived. We returned to exploring the rest of the property and as highlights saw White-fronted Honeyeaters (a first for the many) and a Shy Heathwren, as well as our more common Singing Honeyeaters.

Saturday we wandered around on foot, lunching in camp. A small dam proved a great attraction to groups of honeyeaters – Yellow-tufted, Yellow-plumed, Brown-headed, White-fronted, White-plumed, Spiny-cheeked, Singing Honeyeaters and Red Wattle Birds.

Sunday we drove to Mount Egbert where we were lucky enough to see the resident Peregrine Falcon and Variegated Fairy-wrens. We also visited the gravel pits up the road and saw Dotterels – Red-kneed and Black-fronted, White-faced and White-necked Herons and Blue-winged Parrots.

Monday we visited the nearby Korong Vale, nearly empty, but saw a Black-fronted Dotterel, and then back to the property where we saw a Restless Flycatcher.

Overnight, campers were hearing Southern Boobooks. Gina and Graeme started birding near dawn before the rest of us and saw and heard a Gilbert's Whistler near our camp most days. The Diamond Firetails also hung around us for the few days, as well as appearing elsewhere, and a Mistletoe Bird and an Owlet Nightjar were seen in camp. We had a Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Gina heard a Southern Scrub-robin (as we all did later elsewhere). She also saw a Pallid Cuckoo and at the small dam a Jacky Winter chasing a Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo. Graeme saw a Crimson Chat – the highlight of the

camp. Also notable were the Black-eared Cuckoos around camp, especially the couple mating overhead.

In large numbers were the Woodswallows (very few Dusks), Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters (very few Fuscous), Spiny-cheeked and Singing Honeyeaters, Peaceful Doves and the usual Choughs and White-browed Babblers. Quite a few people got an unusually good look at Brush Bronzings, usually so shy, but the Common Bronzings were not around in the usual numbers. Sadly Hooded and Red-capped Robins have become rather scarce. Raptors seen on the property were the Little Eagle and Wedge-tailed Eagle. We were also pleased to see some Varied Sitellas.

We woke up on the last day of the camp to see a huge flock of several hundred White-browed and Masked Woodswallows in the trees – a dramatic sight.

In all we saw 78 species on the block and an extra 9 outside, bringing our total for the camp to 87 species. *Jan and Doug*



White-browed Woodswallow photo © Peter Fowler

October 23rd - Outing to Silvan Reservoir Park

A lovely spring day with temperatures to reach 28 degrees; virtually no wind, no clouds, and a park almost empty for all 9 of us to enjoy.

We got off to a great start with a good sighting of a White-bellied Sea Eagle in flight and then roosting for 10+ minutes on a buoy moored within a reasonable distance for viewing purposes. An adjacent water-mounted tower also yielded a number of Cormorants, comprising Great, Little Pied and Little Blacks. The reservoir itself was otherwise almost empty although on our later return we did see Black Ducks and White-faced Herons.

From the first (upper) car park, we headed N/W along the Grey Gum track, and were amply rewarded with lots of bush birds including Golden Whistlers, Eastern Whipbirds, both Rosellas, King Parrots, both Pardalotes, Grey Fantails, Yellow Robins, Superb Fairy-wrens, White-browed Scrubwren, Red-browed Finches, Common Bronzings, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Grey Shrike-thrush, Fantail Cuckoo, and White-throated Treecreepers. It's always terrific to see our beautiful Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos and we weren't disappointed here.

We then crossed Olinda Creek and headed south on track 11 to later rejoin the main Stonyford Rd for return to the parking areas. Before our stop for lunch we got a few more good birds such as Silvereyes, New Holland and Lewin's Honeyeaters, and Eastern Spinebills.

After a pleasant lunch in a pretty shaded area, we did bird call with a final Australian Raven concluding the count at a creditable 42 species. A lovely outing which all thoroughly enjoyed. *Warren Cousins*

November 9th - Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve

After quite some days of cold and very wet weather, I fielded several last minute member queries with trepidation; "IS THE CORANDERRK OUTING STILL GOING AHEAD". With admittedly not a great deal of confidence, I stated, YES of course. In hindsight, I need not have worried as we were blessed with a dry even though coolish day. The weather held off until we were pretty well finished with lunch at the Bush Hut, so in all the 15 attendees had been blessed by the rain-gods.

We had a few new faces which is always nice. These included Alan Crawford, President of the BirdLife Melbourne branch. We also welcomed Jeanette and Peter Birtles, hopefully soon to become new BirdLife members. Ross Williamson had tendered his apologies as he was otherwise engaged for the weekend in South Gippsland. People numbers overall were a bit down on past experience, but no doubt some were definitely scared off by the weather trends.

The birding seemed overall to be a bit slower than what we usually get during our November surveys. Populations on balance were lighter with an approx count of 360 birds; the average over the previous 5 November surveys had been 430 birds. I suspect the coolish weather had quite a few birds tucked away and out of sight. The actual species count came in at exactly 60, not too far short of the past average of 65 species.

Good birds recorded included :- a couple of Pink-eared Ducks which had not been recorded here since last seen in May 2010, a solo Australasian Shoveller, again not commonly seen here, a solo Gang-Gang Cockatoo, seen only once before over the last 5 years, a pair of Eastern Whipbirds, only heard here twice in the last 5 years (heard but not seen, as is so common for this elusive bird), several White-winged Trillers, again seen here only once in the last 5 years.

One brief highlight was an aerial duel between what was believed to be a Swamp Harrier being harassed by a considerably smaller Brown Goshawk.

Our branch has now been collecting records for The Coranderrk since at least 1992 so we have 27 years of solid data. Overall we have seen 140 bird species going back over this entire period. However, and of concern, the last 5 years has only shown up with 104 species. Some of the shortfalls are readily explainable; eg Emus no longer are seen, whereas in earlier times they were probably just releases out of the Sanctuary. However there are many birds that no longer

appear such as:- Musk Duck, Shelduck, Great-crested Grebe, Brush Bronzewing, White-necked Heron, Eastern Great Egret, Royal Spoonbill, Black-shouldered Kite, Australian Hobby, Buff-banded Rail, Black-fronted Dotterel, Pallid Cuckoo, Brush Cuckoo, Varied Sittella, Red-browed Treecreeper, Pilotbird, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Little Wattlebirds, Olive Whistler, Rufous Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Leaden Flycatcher, Jacky Winter, Rose Robin, and Bassian Thrush. Conversely, there are no birds that have re-appeared in the Coranderrk that weren't there over the previous decades. *Warren Cousins*



Yellow Robin at nest

photo © Peter Birtles



Yellow Robin

photo © Peter Birtles



Red-browed Finch

photo © Peter Birtles



Purple Swamphen

photo © Peter Birtles

November 27th - Outing to Healesville RACV Golf Club

The weather was sunny, perfect for an outdoor stroll. Fourteen Birdlife members including visitors from Birdlife Melbourne Club met at the car park and we started our walk in an anti-clockwise direction (because then we can see golfers approaching, rather than have them behind us).

On the pond to the left was a little bit of activity – some Wood Ducks, Chestnut Teals, quite a few Pacific Black Ducks and a couple of Hardhead Ducks (easy to identify by their white eyes). We strolled to the upper dam and saw a pair of Australasian Grebes with three fluffy babies.

A couple of Crested Pigeons were seen on a dead tree, and a Common Bronzewing was flushed out of the scrub. Australian White Ibis and some Straw-necked Ibis were flying over, circling. Two Masked Lapwings were in their usual territory.

A Gang Gang Cockatoo was heard, and numerous Galahs flew around us. With their distinctive, quavering falsetto call, two Long-billed Corellas also did a fly-by.

We saw only one Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, and to our surprise no Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. On the previous day as I played golf here, I saw King Parrots, Yellow-tailed

Black Cockatoos, Olive-backed Oriole and a Sacred Kingfisher but they were in hiding today. Some Rainbow Lorikeets were seen in the flowering gum. Crimson Rosellas were plentiful, and so were Eastern Rosellas.

Laughing Kookaburras zoomed from tree to tree, and in the scrub near the seventh green we saw Superb Fairy Wrens, a White-browed Scrubwren, Striated Thornbill, Brown Thornbill, Golden Whistler – a great hot spot for birding.

Striated and Spotted Pardalotes were heard all around the golf course. The only Honeyeater seen was a Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Noisy Miners were plentiful, and lived up to their name. A few Red Wattle Birds were spotted as well as one Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.

A couple of Grey Butcherbirds were sighted, and plenty of Magpies (they are used to being fed by some golfers). There were a few Pied Currawongs, many Grey Fantails, but only one Willie Wagtail. There were a couple of Little Ravens, and we could hear the metallic “peewee-peewee” call of the Magpie Lark.

We watched approximately thirty Welcome Swallows, who frequently targeted a small patch (10 square metres) of grass for a short rest. A Silveryeye was sighted, and common birds such as Blackbirds, Starlings and Common Mynahs noted.

Descending to the lower Short Course area, we found a couple of Red-browed Finches. On the pond was one Little Black Cormorant and two White-faced Herons. A couple of Purple Swamphens scuttled about, as well as Eurasian Coots.

At Bird Call we saw a Wedge-tailed Eagle being harassed by a small attacker. The total number of species sighted was 51. *Manfred Hennig.*

December 14th - Outing to Badger Weir Park

Our Xmas outing to this lovely park had 20 attendees, a good number. The weather was mild but a bit drizzly for a fair portion of the walk. It was never too heavy however to upset our stroll through this wonderful park. What a pity it was closed for so long (2+ years), following a big storm.

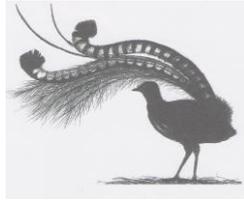
The group split up into a couple of groups due to different walking abilities. The bigger group headed up the main track, past the strongly flowing aqueduct, and back to the picnic area via the Slip Track. Maybe the wet weather dampened not only us, but also the quantity of bird life seen. Total species for the day was only 25. No raptors at all were seen, maybe not surprising as a large portion of the walking was through heavily-wooded areas. It was nice to see / hear Gang Gang Cockatoos and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. No ducks, water birds, cuckoos, whistlers, pigeons or doves were seen, and only a couple of Honeyeater species.

We returned to the picnic area for an early lunch; by that time quite a number of other park visitors had arrived. Christmas greetings were exchanged and after bird call we all decamped by 1.00pm. *Warren Cousins*

Birdlife Yarra Valley

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Meetings are held in the Badger Creek Hall Meeting Room at 7.45 p.m. Badger Creek Rd. Badger Creek (next to CFA). Melway Edn 39 278 F8.

Meetings and Outings automatically cancelled on days of Total Fire Ban in the Central and North-central Fire Districts. (Central unless notified otherwise)

Calendar March to June 2020

March

Sat 14 - Doongalla Forest Park, Dandenong Ranges National Park. Meet at 9:30 am at the first picnic area. Melway Edition 46 Map 66 D 5. Followed by Liverpool Retarding Basin Melway Edition 46 Map 65 G5. Meet at entrance carpark. Leaders: Doug Pocock and Jan Llewelyn.

Wed 25 - Toorourrong Reservoir Meet 9:30am at first car park. From Whittlesea take Kinglake West Road, look for Jack's Creek Road on your left, and the Toorourrong Sign. Melway Edition 46 Map X910 N11 Followed by Yan Yean Reservoir. Park first picnic area off Reservoir Rd Melway Edition 46 Map X910 M11.

April

Tuesday 14 – Meeting. Speaker and Subject TBA

Saturday 18 - Outing to One Tree Hill, Christmas Hills. Meet at 9:30am. The entrance to One Tree Hill from Eltham- Yarra Glen Road is hard to see. Coming from Eltham it is almost opposite driveway with white stones on your right. Look for Yarra Valley Birdlife sign. Melway Edition 46 Map 265 C12. Followed by Sugarloaf Reservoir Melway Edition 46 Map 265 A11 (turn left on to Simpson Road)

Wednesday 22 – Outing to Mt Donna Buang. Meet 9:30am at Lookout Tower car park. Melway Edition 46 Map X 912 S2 or follow sign from Warburton. (Possible extension of outing to Acheron Gap Road)

May

Saturday 9 - Outing to Coranderrk Bushland, Badger Creek Meet 9.30am sharp at Gate 1 (opposite Fleay Rd) Badger Avenue, Badger Creek. Gate will be locked after entry. Melway Edition 46 Map 278 F10. Leader: Warren Cousins.

Wednesday 27- Outing to Warburton Trail, Wandin to Mt. Evelyn (bring lunch) Parking is near Warburton Highway and Railway Parade, Wandin North. Melway Edition 46 Map 119 B10. Leaders: Doug Pocock and Jan Llewelyn.

Answer to what Bird is That?

Yellow-faced Honeyeater.

June

Tuesday 9 – **AGM** and Meeting. Speaker and Subject TBA

Saturday 13 - Outing to Pound Bend, Warrandyte State Park. Meet 9:30am First car park on left. Melway Edition 46 Map 23 A11. Leader: Michael Feller.

Wednesday 24 – Outing to Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne. From the South Gippsland Highway turn right into Ballarto Road. Melway Edition 46 Map 134 A10. Meet in the Stringybark Picnic Area at 9.30 Melway Edition 46 Map 133 K12. Leader: Warren Cousins.

Calendar July to September 2020

Basic dates only. Check next newsletter or Birdlife Yarra Valley website for further details.

July

Saturday 11-Outing to Haining Farm, Don Valley. Meet 9:30 at gate. When coming from Lilydale Follow Warburton Hwy to Launching Place turn left opposite the Home Hotel on to Healesville Road. Approx. 1 km on left is Haining Farm sign and Gate. Melway Edition 46 Map 287 H2

Wednesday 22 - Outing to Lillydale Lake, Lilydale. Meet 9:30 at main carpark near toilet block. Melway Edition 46 Map 38 G7

August

Saturday 8 – Outing to Maroondah Reservoir Park, Healesville. Meet 9:30 lower (main) car park. Melway Edition 46 Map 270 J5.

Tuesday 11 – Meeting. Speaker and Subject TBA.

Wednesday 26 - Outing to Jehosaphat Gully, Kinglake National Park. Meet 9:30 at first car park. Melway Edition 46 Map 380 H 12 Followed by Wombelano Falls, KNP From Whittlesea-Kinglake Road, turn right (north) into Extons Road just after Kinglake Memorial Reserve. Follow this road then turn right into Captains Creek Road, to Wombelano Falls carpark. (Dry weather road only).

September

Saturday 12 - Outing to Warramate Nature Conservation Reserve, Gruyere. Meet 9:30 Park at end of Yarra Loch Way at entrance to Reserve. Melway Edition 46 Map 285 G1.

Wednesday 23 - Outing to Yea Wetlands and Picnic Area, Yea. Meet 9:30 at picnic area car park, just off Melba Hwy beyond Yea. Melway Edition 46 Map X910 Q 8 Followed by Gobur Nature Conservation Reserve, Rowans Rd Gobur, via Yarck (car pool Yea Wetlands and/or convoy). Melway Edition 46 Map X910 R 6. **N/Central fire district** Leader: Warren Cousins

