



## NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2014

### **Banyan and Edithvale Wetlands 13 January**

On a fine warm morning six members gathered at Banyan Wetland (Rossiter Road, Carrum), one of our regular birding spots. Bird species numbers were down on previous visits – this time the total count was 40 species, while last year (April 2013) the number was 54. The difference was largely in bush birds – in April Flame Robins were present, as well as Red-rumped Parrots, honeyeaters and a couple more raptors, as well as some waders not seen this time. This time, however, we saw more cormorants, Caspian Terns, numbers of Whiskered Terns perched on nesting boxes, as well as Reed-warblers and Cisticolas. There were numbers of Shelducks, and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes in

the tall pine trees beside the road. Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterels were present on both days.

Afterwards we travelled to the observation platform at Edithvale Wetlands, where we saw a total of 34 species, adding Shovellers (male and female), White-necked Heron, Royal Spoonbill among others. We were also delighted to catch glimpses of Buff-banded Rail and Baillons Crake venturing out of the reeds on the other side of the old hide. Some more bush birds including Red-browed Finch and White-plumed Honeyeater were also seen there. - **Lee Denis**



*Edithvale Wetland – Photo: Lee Denis*

<b>Bird List For Banyan Wetlands 13 January 2014</b>				
Black Swan	Little Black Cormorant	Swamp Harrier	Caspian Tern	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Australian Shelduck	Great Cormorant	Nankeen Kestrel	Whiskered Tern	Australian Magpie
Pacific Black Duck	Australian Pelican	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Spotted Turtle-Dove	European Goldfinch
Grey Teal	White-faced Heron	Black-winged Stilt	Crested Pigeon	Welcome Swallow
Chestnut Teal	Great Egret	Black-fronted Dotterel	Superb Fairy-wren	Clamorous Reed-Warbler
Hardhead	Australian White Ibis	Red-kneed Dotterel	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Golden-headed Cisticola
Hoary-headed Grebe	Straw-necked Ibis	Masked Lapwing	Red Wattlebird	Common Starling
Little Pied Cormorant	Black-shouldered Kite	Silver Gull	Magpie-Lark	Common Myna

Bird List For Edithvale Wetlands 13 January 2014				
Black Swan	Great Cormorant	Buff-banded Rail	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Willie Wagtail
Pacific Black Duck	White-faced Heron	Baillon's Crake	Rainbow Lorikeet	Red-browed Finch
Australasian Shoveler	White-necked Heron	Purple Swamphen	Superb Fairy-wren	Welcome Swallow
Grey Teal	Australian White Ibis	Eurasian Coot	Red Wattlebird	Clamorous Reed-Warbler
Chestnut Teal	Straw-necked Ibis	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Little Wattlebird	Common Starling
Hardhead	Royal Spoonbill	Black-winged Stilt	White-plumed Honeyeater	Common Myna
Little Pied Cormorant	Swamp Harrier	Whiskered Tern	Magpie-Lark	

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### Reef Island 4 February

Reef Island, on the eastern side of Western Port Bay between Corinella and San Remo, is a regular spot to see migratory waders, as well as numbers of other shorebirds. Seven members gathered early enough to take advantage of the 10:50 am low tide exposing the natural causeway to the island. On the walk from the car park to the causeway we observed great numbers of birds feeding on the wide expanse of mudflats, including Black Swans, White Ibis, White-faced Herons, Royal Spoonbills, Masked Lapwings, as well as Grey and Chestnut Teal and Silver Gulls. A few Eastern Curlews were also seen on the mud flats. Further along, closer to the beach, were Red-necked Stint and Red-capped Plovers amongst the gravelly fringe of ferruginised basalt and sandstone that extends along the beach.



*Pacific Golden Plovers – Photo: Yvonne Incigneri*

Reef Island and the adjacent point on the mainland (Kennedy Point) consist of a basement of Older Volcanics basalt overlain by a veneer of Tertiary clayey gravels, sandy gravels and sands. Several gravelly ridges extend seaward from Kennedy Point and a broad ridge of this material

Links Reef Island and the point at low tide. The area is declared a Site of State Geological Interest - “This is a very unusual coastal configuration and the reasons for the accumulation of the gravel fragments in such quantities are not clear. The outcrops and the minor faulting noted above are of importance in determining the extent of the Miocene marine depositional basin in the Westernport region.” ([www.depi.vic.gov.au](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au)).

The west side of the island is rocky, while between this area and the point on the mainland there are vegetated sand dunes (*Myoporum insulare*, *Rhagodia* spp, *Dianella* sp, *Atriplex cinerea*) fringed by salt marsh (*Tecticornia arbuscula*, *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*), and mangroves (*Avicennia marina*). The sediments of the lower ridges are generally coarse and are evidently subject to a great deal of movement under wave attack. There is some African Boxtorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*) on the island.

Wader numbers were generally low, the most abundant being Red-necked Stint. Pacific Golden Plovers (about half a dozen seen) and Ruddy Turnstone (in similar numbers) on the rocky area to the west. White-fronted Chats were seen in the vegetation. - **Lee Denis**

Bird List For Reef Island 4 February 2014	
Black Swan	Red-necked Stint
Grey Teal	Pacific Golden Plover
Chestnut Teal	Red-capped Plover
Little Pied Cormorant	Masked Lapwing
Pied Cormorant	Pacific Gull
White-faced Heron	Silver Gull
Great Egret	Caspian Tern
Australian White Ibis	Crested Tern
Royal Spoonbill	White-fronted Chat
Eastern Curlew	Skylark
Ruddy Turnstone	

**Heather Ducat**  
**Wild Kenya and Tanzania**  
**February 12**

*Heather and husband Robert travelled in Kenya and Tanzania for 2 ½ weeks in August 2009 with a guide, driver and 15 fellow campers.*

East Africa is rightly famous for its wildlife but geological features are spectacular and interesting. The landscape is dominated by the Great Rift Valley which stretches 4200 km from Ethiopia to Mozambique. This is part of a massive crack in the Earth's crust, created by rising convection currents in the molten mantle. A bulge and tension formed in the overlying crust, creating a triple-junction rift. One arm of the rift is filled by the Red Sea and extends north through Lebanon, another arm forms the Gulf of Aden, and the third runs south through East Africa as far as Mozambique.

supports a flower-growing industry and tea and coffee plantations. The highlight of Lake Naivasha was visiting "Elsamere House", the property of George & Joy Adamson. Joy wrote the famous "Born Free", about rearing and returning to the wild a young lion. They were killed by poachers in the 1980s and the house is now a conservation centre.

Reserves and parks visited in Kenya and Northern Tanzania included Amboseli, Masai Mara, Serengeti and the enormous Ngorongoro Caldera. In Masai Mara thousands of wildebeest, zebras, antelope and buffalo were starting to arrive on their annual migration from Serengeti, further south in Tanzania; the animals complete a loop of more than 1000k, following rain and good grazing.



*The escarpment of the rift valley – Photo: Heather Ducat*

In Northern Kenya the rift divides, one branch to the west of Lake Victoria, the other to the east; both valleys have numerous lakes. A deep rift valley forms when huge chunks subside between parallel faults as the crust is torn apart. The rift in Kenya formed about 20 million years ago and is 50k wide. The walls of the escarpment are 600m high; the rift continues to widen with ongoing volcanic activity. The line of the eastern rift is marked by a string of salt and soda lakes.

Being close to the Equator, intense sunlight produces massive amounts of blue-green algae and brine shrimp, food for up to 2 million greater and lesser flamingos that are a feature of Lake Nakura.

One of 2 freshwater lakes and at an altitude of 1900m, Lake Naivasha has a mild climate and the rich volcanic soil

Gliding silently above the landscape in a hot-air balloon gave a wonderful view of long dark ribbons of animals curving to the horizon. Numerous species feed together for mutual protection eg ostrich have good eyesight, zebras have excellent hearing, antelope and wildebeest have an acute sense of smell, giraffe can see approaching predators. As they eat different types of grass, they don't compete for food.

The Masai people are one of 40 tribes in Kenya and they live in small clan villages. Their culture is centred on cattle; milk and blood are the main food sources and the cattle are rarely killed for meat. Grazing is allowed in Masai Mara Game Reserve, but the cattle are herded into thorn-ringed enclosures each night, protection from lions and hyena.

Amboseli National Park is on the floor of the Rift Valley with sparse acacia scrub, tall Euphorbia trees and palm thickets. It is usually an ideal location to see Mt Kilimanjaro, the highest free-standing mountain in the world at 5895m. This dormant volcano formed about 750,000 years ago and the valley floor is pimpled with small eruptive basalt blisters and larger scoria cones, evidence of continuing volcanic activity. Snow melt from a permanent icecap feeds swamps throughout the year, providing habitat for hippo, elephant, buffalo, giraffe, zebra and lion.

Serengeti National Park was established in 1951 and is situated on a sloping plateau to the east of Lake Victoria. With 135 species of animals and 518 species of birds it is an amazing spectacle of wildlife and deserving of its World Heritage status. The habitat is a mix of hilly woodland, wetter areas near Lake Victoria and savannah dotted with granite outcrops. These provide habitat for smaller animals like mongoose, hyrax, ground squirrel, rodents, various reptiles and dik dik, a small antelope. The outcrops are used as lookouts by lions, leopard and eagles. The interaction between animals is fascinating - we watched as a lioness chased away a hyena from her kill.



Photo: Heather Ducat

Hunting behaviour was observed, where a lioness used deep wheel ruts to stay below the level of the grass to stalk closer to a herd of Thomson's gazelles. At a secret signal her 3 cubs crept to the cover of a tree to observe this hunting lesson. After only a short run the lioness concluded the "lesson"; she did not make a kill.

Rain in November and December in the Serengeti and a regular dusting of volcanic ash gives excellent grazing on mineral-rich grass. The vast herds return to give birth in January and February.

The most spectacular landscape is the enormous Ngongoro Crater, a volcanic caldera that erupted 2 million years ago; enclosed by a 600m high unbroken wall, the caldera is 20k diameter. It is home to almost every species, except giraffe, found in East Africa. A permanent population of about 25,000 herbivores and numerous predators live in various habitats, including cloud forest on the wall, acacia woodland, savannah, swamps and salt lakes. A target for most tourists is to see the "Big 5" – lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo; we were fortunate to achieve this. There is an amazing variety of birds, from the tiny blue and purple grenadier finch, colourful lilac-breasted rollers and bee eaters, plus marabou stork, maybe the ugliest bird in the world!



The ugliest bird in the world? - Photo: Heather Ducat

We travelled in a truck and 4WD allowing close observation of the animals. At night the roar of lions is spine-chilling when you are sleeping in a tent!

We concluded this amazing trip with 4 days in Zanzibar, which is a city-state and part of Tanzania. The architecture is an interesting mix of Arab, Portuguese and British Colonial. - **Heather Ducat**

*This was Heather's 11<sup>th</sup> talk on her travels to our Club.*

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### Lysterfield Park 15 February

Lysterfield Lake was the reservoir supplying water to the Mornington Peninsula until Cardinia Reservoir came into operation in 1975. As the surrounding area was fenced to protect the water quality, when the reservoir was decommissioned there was a large area of remnant bushland, as well as considerable area of plantation, which forms the basis of Lysterfield Park today. Together with the adjacent Churchill National Park, the total area is close to

1700 hectares. The chief attraction is the lake itself, which is a popular picnic spot and supports a yacht club as well as swimming beaches and kayak hire. Mountain biking is also popular – the track used in the Melbourne Commonwealth Games is still accessible.

The lake circuit track is about 6 kilometres, through open Eucalypt woodland for the most part. Seven members took

part in the walk, on a fine, mild day. Bush birds were generally quiet, but we did manage to locate a few honeyeaters, Fairy Wrens and several Rufous Whistlers. The bird life on the Lake included Great Crested and Hoary-headed Grebes, Coots, and Musk Duck. Bird total for the day was 31.



Great Crested Grebe – Photo: Lee Denis

Being a Saturday the Lake was very popular with visitors, with yacht races and numerous kayaks on the water. We were amazed to see a Musk Duck swimming, seemingly unconcerned, through the middle of them!

At the end of a long dry summer the vegetation was somewhat subdued. Some of the Eucalypts were flowering, while we noted along the track Yellow Stars (*Hypoxis* sp) and, on the lake edge, a meadow of Swamp Goodenia

(*Goodenia humilis*) in flower. On the western side of the lake the vegetation comprised mainly a plantation of Spotted Gum (*E. maculata*), with little understory. Other plants noted in flower included Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*), Common Cassinia (*Cassinia aculeata*) and Drooping Cassinia (*C. arcuata*). - Lee Denis

Musk Duck	Red Wattlebird
Pacific Black Duck	Noisy Miner
Hoary-headed Grebe	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Great Crested Grebe	White-eared Honeyeater
Little Black Cormorant	Eastern Yellow Robin
White-faced Heron	Rufous Whistler
Australian White Ibis	Grey Shrike-thrush
Purple Swamphen	Magpie-Lark
Eurasian Coot	Grey Fantail
Masked Lapwing	Grey Butcherbird
Silver Gull	Australian Magpie
Crimson Rosella	Pied Currawong
Laughing Kookaburra	Grey Currawong
Superb Fairy-wre	Welcome Swallow
White-browed Scrubwren	Common Blackbird
Brown Thornbill	

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### Jam Jerrup- Stockyard Point 3 March

Stockyard Point, to the south of Jam Jerrup, is a well-known spot for migratory, nomadic and resident wading birds including Red-necked Stint, Great Knot, Red-necked Avocet, Pied Oystercatcher, Red-capped Plover, among others. Our trip unfortunately coincided with low tide, so that there were vast areas of mudflats for the waders to disperse upon, consequently few were seen. Larger birds such as White Ibis, White-faced Heron, Pelican, Pied Cormorant and Great Egret were easily seen, but apart from an Eastern Curlew that flew across, no waders were spotted.

With bird sightings being at a premium, interest (at least for some) turned to botany. An interesting feature at Stockyard Point is a salt marsh meadow primarily of Beaded Glasswort, *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*, in which there is a liberal scattering of the declared rare plant *Limonium australe*, or Coast Lavender.

This plant is not often seen on the Peninsula side of Western Port Bay, but is quite abundant here, flowering profusely in low-lying meadows behind sand bars, where the strand-line showed that only occasional high tides penetrate.



*Limonium australe*  
Photo: Lee Denis

At lunch we were entertained by a New Holland Honeyeater calling from the nearby trees, while afterwards we drove to the other end of the town and walked along the

path that leads over the top of the bluff to Lang Lang. Almost immediately we startled up a bird of prey that sat in a tree close by for some time. Unfortunately the good view did not help with identification, with one observer declaring it a Brown Goshawk based on tail features, and another thinking it a Collared Sparrowhawk based on eye shape. By

the time a camera was produced the bird had flown.

Further on we were treated to close views of a little flock of Yellow-rumped Thornbills in the shelter belt trees, whilst Grey Fantails, Fairy-wrens and Yellow Robin brought our days tally to a somewhat mediocre 26 species. - **Lee Denis**

<b>Bird List For Jam Jerrup 3 March 2014</b>			
Pied Cormorant	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Crested Tern	Grey Fantail
Australian Pelican	Eastern Curlew	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Australian Magpie
White-faced Heron	Pied Oystercatcher	Superb Fairy-wren	Pied Currawong
Great Egret	Masked Lapwing	Brown Thornbill	Little Raven
Australian White Ibis	Pacific Gull	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Welcome Swallow
Swamp Harrier	Silver Gull	New Holland Honeyeater	
Collared Sparrowhawk/ Brown Goshawk	Caspian Tern	Eastern Yellow Robin	

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**Pat Bingham**  
**Changing Bird Population of Melbourne over past 150 years**  
**12 March**

Pat migrated from the UK in 1972, joined the Bird Observers Club soon after, and is a long term member of the Friends of Coolart. Her topic was how and why the bird population of Melbourne changed from early white settlement until now.

She started with quotes from early reports, such as from the 1803 attempted settlement at Sorrento, that there were lots of emus, corellas, water and bush birds, mosquitoes and flies. Her favourite quotes are from Horace Wheelwright's "Bush Wanderings of a Naturalist" of 1861. Horace Wheelwright supplied the Melbourne markets with meat from native animals and birds, and wrote a detailed description of the wildlife of Melbourne. Horace Wheelwright and others described flocks of magpie geese on the West Melbourne Swamp (now railway yards), brush turkeys on the volcanic plains west of Melbourne and emus so plentiful that settlers had trouble keeping them out of their tents.

Baron von Mueller as director of the Botanic Gardens compiled a list of 114 birds there including sooty owls, spotted harrier, bittern, snipe, brolga, crested bellbird, southern emu wren, quail and beautiful firetails, none of which have been seen near the Gardens for many years.

What happened to change this abundance? Many were shot out – early settlers and then the gold miners needed meat, and emus were uncommon by the 1850s for that reason. Horace Wheelwright listed many common birds as part of his supply to the markets, and described red wattletails as the best eating. Other birds were shot for being agricultural pests – long billed corellas raided grain, rainbow lorikeets ate orchard fruit.

The Victorian Acclimatisation Society was active from 1861 to 1873, introducing many birds (as well as the well known foxes, hares and rabbits) – blackbirds, canaries, turtledoves, mynahs, English sparrows, Java sparrows, starling, quail, English robins. Some were introduced to make Australia more like Home (England), others to help with agriculture. Not all survived but those that did soon flourished. In Kyneton, 18 years after English sparrows were introduced, the Agricultural Society was looking for ways to control the estimated 1500 sparrows there. Indian Mynahs were introduced to Melbourne and Queensland to remove pests from market gardens and cane fields, and they have been spreading via highways and townships along the East Coast ever since. There have been attempts at eradication by Singapore, the Gold Coast and Canberra, (where 35,000 have been caught in recent years) but none have been successful so far.

Introduced birds out-compete indigenous birds for food and nesting spaces, and another threat is inter-breeding. The introduced Mallard duck interbreeds with the local Pacific Black Duck, creating hybrids. In New Zealand there are almost no pure-bred local Black Duck left, all are hybrids. (Patrick-Jean Guay spoke on this subject to us 14/9/2011).

Habitat changes such as woodland clearing (80% of our woodlands have been cleared or degraded) favour some birds over others. Bird counts at Wattle Park in Burwood since 1932 show white plumed honeyeaters, once the most common birds there, being displaced by noisy miners from the 1940s, and they are now the most common birds there. The last yellow rumped thornbills, wood swallows, blue wrens and crested shrike tits disappeared in the 1940s and 1950s.

“New” birds arrive too, encouraged by our changing garden fashions. Grevilleas, banksias, and non-indigenous Eucalypts, planted in the 1970s native garden boom, encouraged red and little wattlebirds, and rainbow lorikeets. The current fashion for low-maintenance gardens of succulents and yuccas provide habitat for turtledoves but no other birds. On the other hand, new housing developments have wetlands created as part of stormwater management, and 170 bird species have been counted at 11 new wetlands.

“People pressure” is a factor too – some birds adapt to human company and traffic noise, such as magpies, noisy miners and pied currawongs. The latter used to be winter visitors only, and are now resident all year round, breeding and predated on smaller birds. Crested pigeons used to only be found in the arid inland, and are now resident in

Melbourne, especially on sporting fields. Most surprisingly, Powerful Owls are now living closer to Melbourne CBD, breeding along the Yarra, because of the abundance of brush tailed possums. Corellas have made a comeback to Melbourne from the inland.

Another adaptable bird is the Cattle Egret, native to Southern Europe, Africa and Eurasia. In recent decades it has increased its range to South America, USA, Australia and now New Zealand.

Pat’s final quote was “The grass may be greener for larger, more aggressive, more adaptable birds, but for most little birds, more people needing more of their space may be a final death knell.” - **Judy Smart**

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### Ricketts Point 15 March

Our March excursion was to Ricketts Point, Beaumaris, primarily to look at geological features and intertidal life. The area from high tide level to about 450 metres offshore is part of the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary. Since our visit did not coincide with low tide we had only limited access to the shore platform.



Photo: Lee Denis

The cliffs provide an opportunity to view the underlying strata that influence the shape of this section of the Port

Phillip Bay shoreline. Two broad layers can be seen: a softer yellowish-orange upper layer, called Red Bluff Sandstone, and a lower, darker, harder layer called Black Rock Sandstone, which also extends to the shore platform. The shape of the coastline is the result of folding of these formations – where the fold results in the Black Rock Sandstone being below sea level (synclines) the softer Red Bluff Sandstone is eroded, resulting in embayments, and where the more resistant Black Rock Sandstone rises above sea level (anticlines), promontories are formed.

The cliff-top vegetation mainly comprises Coast Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*), Coast Tea-tree (*Leptospermum laevigatum*) and Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*). An unusual plant found at the cliff base is a variety of Sea Celery, *Apium prostratum* subs *prostratum* var *filiforme*, which although it is found in all states is listed only for Ricketts Point in the Melbourne area.

Since the tide was relatively high we were unable to see much of the marine life, although we were able to see some examples such as the purple sea urchin *Heliocidaris erythrogramma*.

Bird life was surprisingly abundant, and included Black Swans, Chestnut Teal, Little Pied, Pied and Little Black Cormorants, Australian Pelican, White-faced Heron, and Australian White Ibis. A notable sight was a large flock of Little Ravens roosting on the emerged reef together with the Silver Gulls and Crested Terns.

Although rain was forecast it held off until after lunch (even then didn't come to much) so an enjoyable and informative, mainly geological, excursion was completed. **Lee Denis**

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**Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc**

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Activities can be found at our website.

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