

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



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Objects of the Club

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



Bittern Chicks and Eggs - Matthew Herring

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CONTRIBUTIONS

**For the next issue by
Wednesday 5 March
To Rowena Whiting**

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Please Note:

**Our new meeting place is the
Leeton Library**

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MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND THURSDAY EACH MONTH, EXCEPT JANUARY, AT THE Yellow Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street at 7.30 PM

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

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Welcome to another year and it is off to a great start, the wonderful news of finding Bittern chicks and the success of the club's first outing/camp out for the year are the main items in this issue. Once again a thank you to contributors; however I have had the unenviable task of what to leave out!

Please note that we have had to change our monthly meeting place – Max has organised with the Leeton Library to use the Yellow Room. So see you there this Thursday, 13 February to hear all about Nella's Kakadu / Jabiru experience. **Rowena**

Found! The proverbial needle: a bittern nest in a rice crop

by **Matt Herring** - Posted on: January 27th, 2014 – www.murraywildlife.com.au .

It's with great joy that I share this news. Any niggling doubts I've had about the likelihood of widespread breeding in rice crops have evaporated. There it was – a glowing beacon of bittern reproduction: three chicks and two eggs. After so much effort, I was beginning to worry that someone would find that I'd 'bittern the dust' out in a rice paddock somewhere without having found a single nest!

Since last season, we've known that very significant numbers of the endangered Australasian Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) use rice crops in the NSW Riverina. Many things have pointed toward there being widespread breeding, but until now the [Bitterns in Rice Project](#) had been unable to find an active nest or other conclusive evidence of breeding in rice crops.

The landholders are delighted. Like many rice farmers, they're familiar with this special bird and have a real soft spot for them. There is plenty of time for the chicks to fledge (approx. 55 days) before their crop is harvested. And in a bizarre coincidence, the property is called 'Tarkoori', an Aboriginal word for Australasian Bittern. I presume the 'Tar' is the male sucking air in and the 'koori' is the boom. Go on, try it.

Sure, it's only one nest, but more are bound to follow, and the site is just one of many randomly selected rice farms (with aerially-sown or dry-sown crops) in the Coleambally region where bitterns have been recorded. As of yesterday, across the NSW Riverina rice-growing regions, we passed the 50-individual mark for bitterns confirmed in rice crops this season.

It's clearer than ever that birds don't arrive in the crops until the rice is about 30 cm and in mid-December that meant a smaller proportion of sites supported them because of the late season. From where they came once the crops were tall enough, we can only speculate. It's intriguing. There are already a few sites that now have rice above 80cm and if last season is any indication, the males will quieten by about mid-February, so we only have a couple of weeks of the main survey window remaining.



Stay tuned, as we interrogate the data, comparing bittern and non-bittern sites, so we can continue to develop our bittern-friendly rice-growing tips for interested growers. This really is a wonderful example of how Australian farms can simultaneously produce food and support endangered species.

Summer camp around Tumbarumba – 10 – 12 January 2014

A few general words about the summer camp at Tumbarumba as the following four articles focus on particular aspects. We stayed at Laurel Hill Forest Lodge, a prison farm in a previous life, where we found the accomodation adequate and we all enjoyed the catered meals, appreciating the healthy menu. Our thanks go to Penny for her excellent organisation along with Max, Eric and Neil for their leadership of the walks.

The country around is a mix of plantation and native forests; the former we explored on the Friday afternoon going to the Pilot Hill Arboretum and the Sugar Pines; also returning on the Sunday morning for those who missed out on Friday. On Saturday the morning was spent along the Henry Angel Track to the south of the town; then Paddy's Falls for lunch followed by a visit to Paddy's Dam as related by Neil.

On the Sunday we had a short spell in town to visit the displays of the town's history of mining, logging and timber mills along with the various wars. Some fitted in a visit to the antique shop. We then headed out on the NW side of town to the Mannus dam for lunch; as this was breached by flooding a couple of years ago it is now just a valley. Shade was a bit sparse as we crammed under the only picnic shelter before heading home across the hot plains and another heatwave. We were lucky to have a couple of cooler days for our walks.



Happy prisoners at Laurel Hill - Neil Palframan

Rowena Whiting

LAUREL HILL EXCURSION - VEGETATION

At Pilot Hill Arboretum one is overwhelmed by the massive *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, the Big Tree of Central California, planted in 1925. According to Encyclodaedia Botanica it will grow to 100 metres with a 7 metre spread. More than 50 species of trees from all over the world were planted at the Arboretum in the 1920s and 1930s and now at nearly 100 years of age they are a splendid sight, the conifers take on a different dimension to what one is accustomed in Australia as the deep soils of the Bago Plateau, high rainfall and cool climate show them close to their potential in their native habitat.



Above: Walking through the Alpine Ash forest - Rowena Whiting

Top right: Potato Orchid - Rowena Whiting

Right: Nan and Margaret at the start of the Ash Walk - Penny Williams

Another trail in Bago Forest took us through a forest of magnificent *Eucalyptus delegatensis* Alpine Ash, last logged here in 1989, half of the tree is rough-barked, almost stringy, and above is smooth white bark with scribbles. We have to believe the experts on this as that was way too far up for any to be seen, as the tree will grow to 90 metres. There was a diverse understorey as the medium crowns of the regrowth trees still have a long way to go

before closing the forest and shading it out. Before long Nella spotted an orchid *Gastrodea sesamoides* Potato Orchid which is self-pollinating with edible tubers.



And further along Andrew ensured all had a chew of the leaf of *Tasmannia xerophila* Alpine Pepper (family Winteraceae), very sharp and peppery full of oil glands. This fascinating plant is an ancient



Gondwanan. *Stylidium graminifolium* Grass Trigger Plant were all along the trail with pale pink flowers, whereas later near Paddy's Dam I think, they were a much darker rich pink. *Prostanthera lasianthos* Victorian Christmas Bush and *Coprosma hirtella* Rough-leaf Currant-bush were found on the shorter track which was very moist. Another orchid found later was *Dipodium roseum* Pink Hyacinth Orchid of wetter eucalypt forests; this is also found on Mount Canobolas.

Eucalyptus stellulata Black Sallee was the dominant tree on the Hume and Hovell track at Henry Angel Trackhead. Parallel veins and bright yellow buds in clusters up to 20 help to identify the Black Sallee which is a small tree of the sub-alps and tablelands above 800m, often on poorly drained flats of alluvial soils such as along this creek. John Wilkinson knew this was fertile soil by the presence of Phalaris and Cocksfoot, but the variety of native grasses was also

impressive. *Acacia melanoxylon* Blackwood and *A. dealbata* were wattles enjoying the streamsides as well.

All through the areas that had been disturbed, among the young pines, along roadsides, a bright yellow carpet of St John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum* was to be seen. In other parts of the state it is a declared noxious weed (signs around Orange warn 'Have you sprayed your St Johns Wort yet') but in the high country it is out of control and apparently considered naturalised.



Sugar Pine Walk sounded a bit dull until we arrived there. The planting over many acres of *Pinus lambertiana* Sugar Pine is spectacular, and that is an understatement. A cathedral-like space has been created by removing the central row of pines the depth of the plantation, drawing one on to the furthest end and a view over the mountains beyond. Native to the west coast of USA and the tallest and largest of the pines, it was called 'the most princely of the genus' by its discoverer David Douglas in 1826.



At Paddy's River Falls *E. dives* Broad leaved Peppermint indicated change to a shallower soil above a basalt plateau although many *E. viminalis* grew near the car park area. Eric will be explaining this. *Daviesia latifolia* Hop Bitter-pea and *Arthropodium milleflorum* Pale Vanilla Lily were only a few of so many species. Along a trail following the river at Paddys River Dam other Snow Gum plants included *Derwentia derwentiana* Derwent Speedwell, *Psoralea (Cullen in Victoria) adscendens* a Scurf-pea, *Epilobium gunnianum*, *Bossiaea foliosa*, *Ranunculus* sp., *Bulbine bulbosa* (*B. glauca* is found among rocks), *Craspedia* sp. Billy Buttons, *Choretrum pauciflorum* Dwarf Sour-bush. Many of the same or similar plants are found on Mount Canobolas, sub-alpine vegetation with snow gums.

Jane Paul

Reference: Fraser, I. and McJannett, M. *Wildflowers of the Snow Country* Vertago Press 1998

Editor's note: Jane lives in Orange hence her references to Mt Canobolas a valuable asset to plant identification on this trip – thank you Jane.

Top: Alpine Pepper – Neil Palframan
 Sugar Pine canopy – Neil Palframan
 Sugar Pine walk – Eric Whiting
 Hyacinth Orchid – Eric Whiting

Paddy's River Dam

11 January 2014

The drive in convoy down to Henry Angel track head along the sealed road was simple, but was it a miracle or what that we all got back through the unsignposted dusty forest roads to Paddy's River Dam? The map and my GPS were in total disagreement so it was down to navigating by guesswork and the sun. It certainly helped that Elené and Mick were very professional in rounding up the rabble. You would never have thought that they had so much difficulty navigating to Laurel Hill the day before – or were we not supposed to mention that again?

Paddy's River Dam is a delightful spot, still showing some greenery despite the long dry. At around 1200m it will be cooler in summer and can be frigid in winter and sometimes snows – I have a memory of cycling in sleet here. It is great for picnics and camping, an oasis of unlogged alpine ash forest in a vast area of pine plantation, but with two provisos, it can be busy and noisy in season, and the brumbies like leaving their dung on the same tracks we like to walk along.

The area has a gold mining history and the lake has been created and drained at different times, and at one time an aqueduct was constructed that diverted water to as far as Tumbarumba. This aqueduct is now the southbound section of the Hume and Hovell Track, and our group headed off in this direction, out and back, with a turn around at the call of "Enough".

The track is an easy contour thanks to it being an ex-aqueduct, there were plants still in full bloom [see Jane's article], enough flapping to keep the birdos from complaining, a babbling brook, and plenty of fresh forest to breath in. There were Fantailed Cuckoos calling from every direction although we saw not one.

If you have more time, this section of the track gets better as you go. There are also plenty of other walk / ride / drive options in the area.

Neil Palframan



Above: Grub colony - Neil Palframan
Below left: Paddy's Dam - Rowena Whiting
Right: Along the track - Penny Williams
Bottom left: Vanilla Lily - Rowena Whiting
Right: President Max relieves the Hume & Hovell - Neil Palframan



Tumbarumba Weekend January 2014 - Birdlist



The Club outing weekend at Tumbarumba was good from the point of view of the bird list below. Certainly there were more birds seen this year than when we had previous outings higher up into the mountains in the past. However, the alpine plants were sadly missed because of the area and the large amount of commercial pine plantations made it difficult to find birds. The recent bout of hot weather after we left saw a large amount of the pine forests had been severely affected in the bushfires around Tumut in recent weeks.

The birds were great at the Henry Angel section of the Hume and Hovell Walking Track but not so plentiful elsewhere at the Pilot Hill Arboretum, Paddys River Falls and Paddys River Dam. However, these areas were



Great Cormorant - Penny Williams
Bird Id-ing consultation – Rowena Whiting

excellent for bush walking generally.

Everyone was pleased to see the beautiful Gang-gang Cockatoo and it was unexpected to get the flycatchers and White-throated Gerygone at the Henry Angel camping site.

Birds seen over the weekend:

Eurasian Coot	Great Cormorant	Pelican
White-faced Heron	Straw-necked Ibis	White Ibis
Wood Duck	Black Duck	Brown Goshawk
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Purple Swamphen	Masked Lapwing
Common Bronzewing	Gang-gang Cockatoo	White Cockatoo
Galah	Red-rumped Parrot	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella	Brush Cuckoo	Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo	Kookaburra	Sacred Kingfisher
Welcome Swallow	White-winged Triller	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Scarlet Robin	Eastern Yellow Robin	Jacky Winter
Golden Whistler	Rufous Whistler	Grey Shrike-Thrush
Restless Flycatcher	Satin Flycatcher	Leaden Flycatcher
Grey Fantail	Willie Wagtail	Eastern Whipbird (H)
Superb Wren	White-browed Scrubwren	White-throated Gerygone
Striated Thornbill	Brown Thornbill	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Weebill	White-throated Treecreeper	Red Wattlebird
Noisy Friarbird	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater*
White-plumed Honeyeater*	Fuscous Honeyeater*	Brown-headed Honeyeater*
Eastern Spinebill	Silvereye	Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote	Red-browed Finch	Goldfinch
House Sparrow	Starling	Blackbird
Pee-wee	White-winged Chough	Pied Currawong
Grey Currawong	Magpie	Satin Bowerbird
Superb Lyrebird (H)	Little Raven	Australian Raven
Latham's Snipe		

* indicates birds seen at Mates Creek Reserve on the way home from Tumbarumba.

Max O'Sullivan

Paddy's River and Falls Geologically –



A waterfall makes a spectacular focus to a scenic landscape, especially if there is a good flow in the river cascading over a vertical drop. Paddy's River Falls is one just so, and a lovely spot for us to take our Saturday lunch break over the Tumbarumba weekend.

But waterfalls are more than dramatic scenery. As rivers cut their valleys back into highlands they can carve steep gorges, revealing sections into the geology of the country. The upper part of Paddy's River flow over a basalt lava field, dropping down at the Falls to the lower levels of alluvial plains.

The cliffs around the Falls show at least three distinct lava flows one on top of the other. They also show the columnar jointing that basalt typically produces when slowly cooled. Each of the columns is generally six-sided reflecting the crystal form of basalt.

The eruption point of the lava is unknown – it would have oozed out of one or more vents or fissures and spread over the then flattish countryside. I cannot find much on the dating except that it was sometime around the Late Cretaceous – Early Tertiary times. roughly 60 million years ago. This is the period when dinosaurs were ending their long reign and giving way to the rise of mammals. At the same time flowering plants began to replace conifers as the dominant flora. It was also the time when the Great Dividing Range began to rise, as a result of increased pressure from the Pacific Tectonic Plate. Australia had already separated from Antarctica and was heading northwards against the eastward spreading Pacific Plate.

I said the lava flowed out over virtually flat ground. For hundreds of millions of years the whole area had been eroded down to wide open plain like most of inland Australia is today. In the area east of a Batlow – Tumbarumba line, the land surface had worn down to expose a large granite intrusion that formed some 400 million years ago. Granite intrusions do not reach the surface and this one is believed to have pushed several thousand metres of sediments up into a dome of highlands.

Gold is often associated with granite intrusions. Some mining for it has occurred in the area – Tumbarumba was a mining town. The long erosional history has probably meant that most of the gold has been washed far away, leaving random pockets in the alluvium. Burra Creek is one such area, rich enough for sluice mining (using high pressure water jets to wash out the heavy gold particles) to be used for several decades. Sluicing greatly modifies the landscape as we saw on our walk up the creek from the Henry Angel Trackhead.

Eric Whiting

OVERHEARD at Tumba

Quote of the trip I think was Nella's reply to 'How would you describe an uncommon bird - Answer: it's a bird that one sees quite often occasionally'. And an award for most modern and advanced town goes to Leeton where Phillip and Penny's son was to arrive by boat.

"I'm going nuts"

"At my age I don't play tootsie"



Photos by Rowena Whiting
Paddy's Falls, rock formations;
basalt columns below



Bird of the Month

AUSTRALIAN PRATINCOLE *Stiltia iabella*



Photo: Phillip Williams

The status of the Australian Pratincole is 'common', but not so in our Riverina area and not at all in the south-west of Australia and Tasmania. Penny and Phillip Williams saw one in a paddock recently, and Max O'Sullivan recorded seeing them at Barren Box. My only sighting was in Gibber country where it was chasing an insect on its long legs and stopping and starting as though activated by a remote control.

The bird prefers open plains, bare flood plains, gibberplains and claypans. Almost always near water, and eats mainly insects, nests on the ground usually surrounding it with pebbles and small sticks. The bird lays 2-3 blotched creamy eggs. The unfledged and well



Photo: Penny Williams

camouflaged chicks are lead to a shady spot and left there for feeding. New Guinea for the winter months then return to our mainland for breeding.

Other names are Grasshopper-bird, Australian Courser, Road-runner, and Swallow plover.

Size is 19-24cm, slender body, long legs, pointed swallow-like wings which extend beyond the tail tip, and erect posture when standing.

Its main colour is cinnamon with buff underparts and broad chestnut lower breast band, black flight feathers and white rump.

The voice is a variety of loud whistles.

Sue Chittick-Dalton

Tasmania's Endemic Birds

On our recent trip to Tasmania Nella and I were keen to see the 12 endemic species along with some of the mainland's rarer birds such as **Ground Parrot**, **Beautiful Firetail** and **Orange-bellied Parrot**. These birds are difficult to see as the Ground Parrot is only found on the coastal heathlands and are elusive in most known spots. The Beautiful Firetail is likewise difficult and you get the odd bird or pairs but finding them is difficult. They too like the coastal heath and Barren Grounds NP in the Kangaroo Valley area of the southern tablelands is probably the best place to look for them in NSW. The Orange-bellied Parrot is highly endangered and it is believed that there are less than 40 to 70 pairs left in the wild – some even suggest just 50 wild birds! Most of you will know they are a migratory parrot and breed in the far south-west corner of Tasmania around Melaleuca – a place only accessible by plane or boat. The birds migrate to the mainland and feed along the coastal strip of Victoria and into South Australia – an area heavily populated by both people and industrial development so their winter feeding grounds are severely diminished – hence their parlous state in the wild.

The 12 endemic species for the Apple Isle are:

Tasmanian Native-hen

Green Rosella

Dusky Robin

Scrubtit

Tasmanian Thornbill

Yellow Wattlebird

Black-headed Honeyeater

Strong-billed Honeyeater

Yellow-throated Honeyeater

Forty-spotted Pardalote

Tasmanian Scrubwren

Black Currawong

The 12 birds can be found within the vicinity of Hobart itself and a reserve called Peter Murrell Reserve is the best place to look. It is about 15km from the Hobart CBD so is easily accessible near Kingston in the south. The first bird seen was the Yellow-throated Honeyeater followed by the Black-headed Honeyeater

that was feeding a juvenile Pallid Cuckoo more than 6 times its size! Next the Strong-billed Honeyeater appeared and then the Scrubtit. At a swamp in the reserve we encountered the Native-hen and then in the pond there was a platypus frolicking. And this was late in the morning. The Dusky Robin and Green Rosella were easy to pick but the thornbill proved tricky as there were many mixed flocks of both Brown and Tasmanian Thornbills but we were able to pick the Tasmanian one eventually. Yellow Wattlebirds were everywhere with their bizzare long dangling wattles - it's a wonder they don't get hooked on a spikey bush sometimes. They reminded me of the ear lobes of the Maasai men in Tanzania who stretch their ear lobes sometimes touching their shoulders when they walk! They too have to be careful of not catching them on something with painful consequences!

The remaining 3 birds were nowhere to be found that day but the scrubwren and currawong were found the next day at Ferntree a suburb of Hobart at the base of Mt Wellington. The elusive one was the pardalote and we went to Tinderbox in the south to look for it as I had found some there in 1994, the last time I had been in Tasmania. Whilst straining to search the tops of the eucalypts for this tiny bird a young guy pulled up beside us and assumed what we were looking for and said we were in the wrong place. It turns out he was doing a PhD on the bird and told us where his study area was so we high-tailed it to the spot and found the birds almost immediately – thanks to our



young student's directions. Certainly no confusion once seen with the many Striated and Spotted Pardalotes that were also present. As Nella's sister Lorna said before we left Narrandera "If you're not sure then it's definitely not a 40-spotted but once seen you know it is". And that was certainly true in our case as we tried to make some of the juvenile birds we saw at Tinderbox into 40-spottedds! On close inspection, they all turned out to be juvenile Spotted or Striated birds.

Other highlights were a three day trip to Strahan on the west coast, Cradle Mountain and Dove Lake Walk further north and back to Hobart followed the next day by a flight to the wilderness area in the south-west to Melaleuca to see the Orange-bellied Parrot in its breeding area. The parrots didn't appear until about 4pm when the plane was about to leave for the flight back to Hobart but we managed with the pilot to see three.

The major surprise for the trip was our visit to Hobart's new **Museum of New and Old Art (MONA)**. It was an amazing experience and the history of the gallery and its inspiring founder and financial backer was incredible in itself but the gallery was unbelievable. No static displays here, there was so much sound and movement that you didn't know where to look next. We were there for 3 hours and wouldn't have seen half the exhibits. It is shocking and surprising – some of the displays you hate but some are quite remarkable and there is always something to please. It was an experience to visit and one that Hobart should be proud to have in their city. It is now the biggest single tourist attraction in Tasmania – more than Cradle Mountain and Freycinet National Parks. I would even go so far as to say that MONA alone would be the reason for a return visit to Tasmania in the near future – a truly remarkable experience.

Bird photos included in the article are with kind permission of Graeme Chapman and his website at www.graemechapman.com.au is well worth a visit to see his photographic collection.

Max O'Sullivan

Photos: This page: Black-headed Honeyeater (left), Orange-bellied Parrot
 Next page Forty-spotted Pardalote (left), Yellow Wattlebird
 Photos are very low resolution, taken from Graeme Chapman's website



MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Mistletoebird	Karri Rd, Leeton	08/12/13	Barry Allen
Tawny Frogmouth [4]	Griffith Golf Course	12/12/13	Max O'Sullivan

The resident pair successfully raised 2 juveniles this season and all were perched together near the car park.

Black Kite [20+]	Euroly via Leeton	14/12/13	Kath Mahy
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Kath reported numbers not far from her house at Euroly and since then large numbers have been seen everywhere about the MIA over the past few months. They are also being reported in most areas in the eastern states of late.

Major Mitchell Cockatoo [13]	Nericon	15/12/13	Neil Palframan
Red-capped Plover	Fivebough Wetlands	21/12/13	Max O'Sullivan

These plovers have successfully bred in the wetlands as there were numbers of juvenile birds amongst the group congregating in the little open water still present.

Australian Reed Warbler [1]	Pendula St, Leeton	22/12/13	Max O'Sullivan
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I was baffled by a bird calling in the shrubbery at the back of my house and was amazed to find it was a Reed Warbler. It stayed all day singing its head off and spent most of the day in the vicinity of my bird bath.

Superb Parrot [40+]	'The Winery' site Binya State Forest	26/12/13	Rae Lister
Painted Honeyeater [2]	'The Winery' site Binya State Forest	26/12/13	Rae Lister
Brown Honeyeater	'The Winery' site Binya State Forest	26/12/13	Rae Lister

Australian Pratincole [5 plus chick]	Rice Farm, Willbriggie	26/12/13	Max O'Sullivan
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Banded Lapwing [15]	Rice Farm, Willbriggie	26/12/13	Rae Lister
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Australasian Bittern [3]	Rice Farm, Willbriggie	26/12/13	Rae Lister
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Rae drove up from Sydney on Boxing Day especially to see the bitterns at Andrew Cameron's place at Willbriggie and wasn't disappointed as not only did we see the birds poking their heads above the rice, two actually flew from one rice bay to another giving excellent views of the whole bird in flight.

A subsequent visit on 02/01/14 by Penny and Phillip Williams, Philip Tenison, Nella Smith and I got the pratincoles and lapwings but missed the bitterns who seem to have disappeared from Andrew's place.

Freckled Duck [20]	Fivebough Wetlands	01/01/14	Max O'Sullivan
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The ducks seem to have returned after an absence of a few months. Some were still present on 26/01/14.

Greenshank [1]	McCracken Rd Dam via Leeton	01/01/14	Max O'Sullivan
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Black Honeyeater [8]	Fivebough Rd near Quodling Rd	01/01/14	Keith Hutton
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Some birds, mostly females, were still at the same spot on 06/02/14 as well as near the skating rink area at the start of Almond Rd Leeton.

Little Bittern	Rocky Waterholes, Narrandera	03/01/14	Nella Smith
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Glossy Black Cockatoo [9]	Bogalong Hills via Narrandera	04/01/14	Nella Smith
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Andrew Thompson reported 11 Glossies at his place the next day which is very encouraging.

Dollarbird [4] Pendula St, Leeton flying overhead 09/01/14 Max O'Sullivan

Nella Smith reports that there are several Dollarbirds at Rocky Waterholes in late January.

Australasian Bittern [2] Walla Ave, Griffith 19/01/14 Neil Palframan

Neil reported seeing the bitterns in the rice near the Gum Creek Rd intersection with Walla Ave. He saw them on the succeeding days when out riding and Nella and I saw one at 1pm on 26/01/14 close to the road.

Spotted Harrier [1] Fivebough Wetlands 25/01/14 Max O'Sullivan

Latham's Snipe [1] Five Mile via Narrandera 25/01/14 Nella Smith

Cockatiel [100s] Irrigation Way past the Whitton turnoff 26/01/14 Nella Smith

The birds were all along the road sitting on power lines and feeding on the side of the road.

Plumed Whistling Duck [6+] Campbell's Swamp, Griffith 26/01/14 Nella Smith

It was quite a surprise to see these ducks when the water level was so low and there wasn't any other duck to be seen. Yet on the Thursday before, Neil saw many ducks on the swamp including Pink-eared and Shoveller – strange that possibly the rain on Friday caused most of the ducks to move elsewhere.

The Whistling Ducks are certainly resident it seems about the area with 1000s resident in the ponds at the Yanco Feedlot and at the new feedlot on Evans Smyles Road. Neil also reported seeing numbers on the water storage dam at Coleambally after Xmas and there are reports of a large flock near Morundah. Keith Hutton also found 16 when he did his quarterly bird count at the Basin Dam and Tuckerbil on 27/01/14.

Below is a selection of Keith's quarterly bird count for January 2014 and a comparison with January 2013.

Fivebough			Fivebough			Tuckerbil including The Basin		
Species	28/01/13	26/01/14	Species	28/01/13	26/01/14	Species	29/01/13	27/01/14
Freckled Duck	250	9	Great Egret	136	3	Grey Teal	1502	262
Pink-eared Duck	454	224	Glossy Ibis	239	60	Black Duck	4	181
Grey Teal	4519	402	Royal Spoonbill	25	0	Hardhead	0	41
Chestnut Teal	50	20	B-t Native-hen	273	9	Pelican	6	2
Black Duck	158	52	E. Coot	299	2	B-T Native-hen	13	19
Hardhead	84	15	B-w Stilt	303	4	B-w Stilt	8	30
Hoary-h Grebe	161	28	Red-n Avocet	20	0	Red-k Dotterel	73	13
Great Cormorant	80	12	Sharp-t S-piper	202	16			
Aust. Pelican	537	11	Whiskered Tern	542	0			
Great Egret	136	3	Silver Gull	233	0			
Glossy Ibis	239	60						

Total numbers: For Fivebough: 8565 2252 For Tuckerbil: 1606 554

The count shows a significant decline in bird numbers which reflects the dry conditions this year. In 2012, the heavy rains in March ensured plenty of water remained in Fivebough through last Summer. However, the dry year since has seen a slow deterioration of the water levels and hence in January 2014, the resultant drop in bird numbers is pretty significant – a three to fourfold drop. The 2013 season though produced an excellent year for shorebirds and 20 species were recorded in the Spring and early Summer. The emergence of large areas of mudflats during the Spring saw the appearance of shorebirds such as Black-tailed Godwit, Little Curlew and Pacific Golden Plover – birds not seen at Fivebough for many years.

The situation now is a question of management of the wetlands and it has been decided by the present management to allow the major part of the area to dry out completely. This is more a reflection of the natural cycle of a wetland in the drier parts of Inland Australia and it will restore a more natural cycle of wet and dry. Environmental water is available but it has been decided to withhold it until the independent assessment of the future of the wetlands is released sometime soon.

Max O'Sullivan

MFN Monthly Competition February 2014

Australia is home to 4 flightless birds, two are Endemic, one is native and exists naturally elsewhere and one is introduced. Can you name them – prize (a Mars Bar or equivalent!) for the first correct entry: via phone; 69534726, SMS: 0434923766 or email: maxosul@hotmail.com

Name:

ENDEMIC:

1)

2)

NATIVE:

3)

INTRODUCED:

4)

**** COMING EVENTS ****

- 13 February Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** the Yellow Room at **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton, commencing at 7:30pm
Topic: Kakadu - Nella Smith
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 16 February Sunday** **Narrandera Common**
Meet at 4pm at the bridge at Rocky Waterholes and walk into the common and return to the bridge for nibbles around 6pm.
Directions: Drive along Old Wagga Rd for 3km to the sign to Rocky Waterholes and go down the dirt road to the new bridge.
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 6953 4726
- 2 March Sunday** **Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest**
Meet at 4pm at the junction of Whitton Stock Route Rd and Burley Griffin Way nr Yenda then make our way to Wattle Dam if it still has water otherwise to Galah Dam for nibbles.
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 6953 4726
- 5 March Wednesday** **Copy for the March newsletter is due.** Please send to Rowena –
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 13 March Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** at 7:30pm in the Yellow Room at Leeton Library or at a venue in Griffith to be decided.
Topic: Plains Wanderer – David Parker
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
- 16 March Sunday** **Glossy Black Cockatoo count**
Participants will be allotted a dam to go to at various properties in the Brobenah and Narrandera hills and Binya Forest. Timing will be from 5pm until the birds come in (or not) - say by 7.30pm.
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210
- 30 March Sunday** **Barren Box:** Meet at the Griffith Tourist Info. car park at 8.30am. Bring morning tea and lunch.
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 6953 4726
- 18-21 April Easter weekend** **A campout is proposed to Round Hill.**
More details in the March newsletter.
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 6953 4726
- Other events:**
- 8-9 March** **Overnight Tag-along Tour**
Saturday / Sunday Head to Willandra National Park when you join us for an experience where nature and heritage collide. Wildlife, landscape and history, it's all here.
More information call 02 6966 8100 (Griffith National Parks office) or visit <http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/Whats-On/western/come-back-to-the-park>
- 17-24 October** **Australian Naturalists Network 2014 Get-together in Tasmania**
A chance to meet like-minded naturalists from around Australia, along with local knowledge and double up with a holiday in Tasmania.
More Information: <http://tasfieldnats.weebly.com/australian-naturalists-network.html>

Note new location