# The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



# **April 2014 - Issue #214**

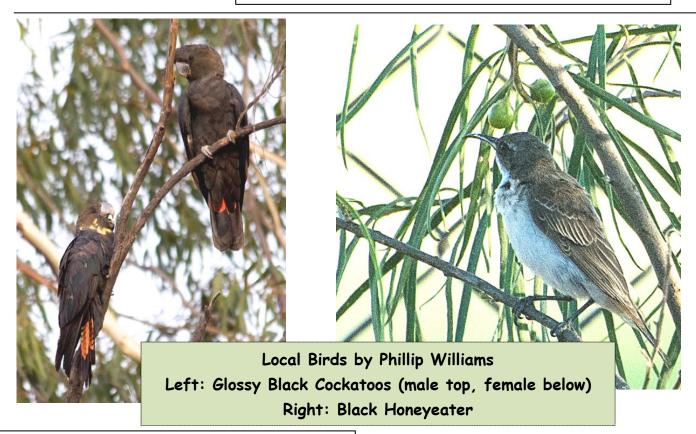
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#### Objects of the Club

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



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# **CONTRIBUTIONS**

For the next issue by Wednesday 30 April To Rowena Whiting

Email ericwhiting4@bigpond.com

Phone 6953 2612

# This month -

Easter Campout at Shepherd's Hill Survey for Holly Grevillea

## Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

President:	Max O'Sullivan	6953 4726	Editor: Rowens	a Whiting	6953 2612
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Treasurer: Phil Tenison 6953 4869

**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.

#### Membership enquiries:

Leeton	Eric Whiting	6953 2	612 <b>Griff</b>	ith	Johanna Botman	6963 4855
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Annual Subscription	ons: Family	\$45.00	Adult/Single	\$35.00	Journal only/Concession	n \$25.00

Opinions expressed by authors are their own and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

# **Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Draft Plan**

The consultants, Wetlandcare Australia, submitted their draft report for the Adaptive Management Plan at the end of February. As a finalised plan will be crucial to obtaining funding in the next round in the financial year, the time for comments was very short. Nevertheless MFN did manage to get its submission in on time.

The consultants plan did not differ much from the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Advisory committee's thoughts, though putting them down in one document is a great advantage. Basically the report outlined six objectives with management strategies to obtain them and general guidelines for monitoring progress. Some of the strategies were graded in importance time wise. Immediate included repairs to the infrastructure (tracks, hides etc), the installation of a grazing program, and the commencement of a pest and weed program.

The second stage called for commencement within two years from the adoption of a plan for infrastructure updating and site rehabilitation.

The third stage – further enhancement work – was set to start before five years.

On our part there is a proposal to restart a 'Friends Group' to promote local involvement, and we were seen as major players in that proposal.

Members may be frustrated by the slow rate of progress, but things are happening. The consultants gave estimates for the costs of implementing the strategies and figures were all in the tens of thousands of dollars all to be funded somehow. A difficult task in today's environment.



Fivebough Flood - March 2012

#### **Eric Whiting**

## **Competition Results for #2 February 2014**

Last month's competition was not won despite several people getting close Nella Smith, Sue Chittick-Dalton and Neil Palframan got 8 of the ten so no Mars Bar will be awarded.

The competition involved giving the correct name to the following birds:

Murray Smoker – Yellow Rosella or Regent Parrot Canvasback – Freckled Duck

Shepherd's Companion – Willie Wagtail

Willie-Willock - Galah

Break-o'-day- boy – Pied Butcherbird

Soldierbird – Noisy Miner

Bush Canary – White-throated Gerygone Happy Families – Apostlebird or Babblers

Whistling Dick – Grey Shrike-Thrush

Green Leek – Superb or Swift Parrot or Musk Lorikeet

# March Meeting held at Griffith - Guest Speaker, David Parker

Our March was held in Griffith and we were pleased to welcome David Parker as our guest speaker for the evening; or perhaps I should say he welcomed us to the National Parks office for our meeting.

David's topic was the **Plains-wanderer**, a species he has been monitoring over a number of years; starting in 1999 when he was with Greening Australia in Deniliquin.

Described by John Gould in 1840 it has since been determined that its closest relative is to South American Seedsnipe and now has its own family: Pedionomidae. It is often confused with a quail (Stubble or Little Button); a couple of distinguishing features are it's flight, fluttering like a butterfly not a quail, and its hind toe which is like that of a wader. The male and female are similar though it is the latter that is larger and more colourful; sporting a white spotted collar and a rufous breast patch.

It is sometimes termed a specialist in that it is most particular about its habitat and requires its grassland to be just right. It needs this to be comprised of 60% bare ground, 40% grasses/forbs and 10% litter and any grass tussocks 10-20 cm apart and up to 30cm high to give some shelter.

Oolambeyan National Park and Terrick Terrick National Park (west of Echuca) both have specific and active management programs for the conservation of the Plains-wanderer, with periodic and ongoing light grazing by sheep used to help maintain a suitable grassland structure. Many are found on private land.

David gave us some of the survey results – the population in the Riverina is quite variable with seasonal conditions. However overall it is declining with 0.3 birds per square kilometre in the 1980s to 0.1 in 2007. The last 3 years has seen too much rain with the vegetation to thick and tall. Quails are also recording smaller numbers – maybe due to lack of food. Currently the habitat is good so we hope that continues.

Our thanks go to David for a very informative presentation.

It was also an opportunity for our Griffith members to take part in the monthly meeting and many did so.







Photos by David Parker
Plains-wanderer female (top)
Plains-wanderer male (middle)
Habitat – sparse grassland (bottom)

#### **Rowena Whiting**

This Month's Competition #3 is a Riddle:

Five little brothers in one house Two have beards, two have none, And only half a beard has one.? Please send your answer to Eric

Phone: 6953 2612

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com

**Clue: Think gardens** 

Found in the Whirrakee, newsletter of the Bendigo Field Nats - May 1986, contributed by Eric Whiting

# **Glossy Black Cockatoo Count**

An air of excitement and expectation filled us on the evening of the count.

We all know that no result is still a result. These counts hinge on the weather, if it's been dry the birds will come and drink. If it's hot they come in early and you could miss them, and how do you know which dam to sit at??? We also concern ourselves about dam sitters getting lost in the dark on farm tracks. Parcels of land in the Narrandera and Brobenah Hills change hands so we have to find out where they went.

Well, we tried to redo what we'd done in the past.

13 Glossy Black Cockatoo were sighted in total, and we know of three more that appeared elsewhere not until the next evening, too late for the census.

My conclusion is that the Brobenah Hills are still their stronghold, it also seems to be better for other bush birds as well.

I reckon September or October when the birds have finished nesting and the youngsters have fledged might be a better time. We should know by now. We need to get as opportunistic as the birds are, and do a count when it's best not when it suits us.

#### **Nella Smith**

#### Bird of the Month

#### GLOSSY BLACK COCKATOO

Calyptorhynchus lathami (hidden bill)

We are very fortunate to have this fairly scarce bird living in our area as there is little known about them despite the many enthusiasts wishing to know more.

Their natural habitat is the eastern side of Australia along the coastal forests, ridges and inland woodlands wherever casuarinas are plentiful. Even though the casuarinas nut is favoured, they have been known to eat acacia seeds and pine cones plus a few larvae of the wood-borer. They are not a timid bird, and if disturbed while eating will fly to another branch or nearby tree and continue their repast.

They do not have a crest like many other cockies and the female is more colourful than the male with her yellow neck patches. The juvenile has many yellow spots on its wings.

The nest is in a high tree hollow and a single white egg is laid on soft decayed wood stuff between March and August. The female alone hatches the egg while the male is in constant attendance for her feeding. Both parents nurture the single chick.

Other names; Leach's black cockatoo, Leach's red-tailed cockatoo, casuarina cockatoo, Latham's cockatoo.

Size: 450-500mm.

Male body dark brown, undertail brown black, bright red band near end of tail.

Female has similar colour but has yellow neck patches and the red tail band has yellow was through it.

Immatures: similar to female with yellow spots on wings.

Voice mainly grating caws or guttural alarm calls.

**Sue Chittick-Dalton** 

Glossy Black Cockatoos
- male above, female below.
Photos: Phillip Williams





## **Barren Box Outing 30 March 2014**

Seven members made the trip to Barren Box. It was a beautiful clear day and the water in the various water storage cells was like glass great for atmospheric photographs. First stop was the overflow dam just in from the entrance where numbers of White Ibis were roosting in the dead trees. Other birds seen were Welcome Swallows and Tree Martins on the power lines and a distant perched raptor was scoped to be a Little Eagle.

The next stop was at the start of the swamp itself. A brief search located a family of Whitewinged Fairy-wrens with a male bird giving brief views to those quick enough to get their binoculars onto it. Some unfortunately missed seeing the male, sorry Melanie, but everyone

saw the female birds which don't seem to be as shy as the

The drive along the wall was good for sightings of ducks, herons, egrets, cormorants, pelicans and a perched White-bellied Sea Eagle. Whistling Kite and another Little Eagle were sighted further along. The ladies in Sue's vehicle saw a number of emus - totally missed by us! A morning tea break at the two small dams provided Melanie with the opportunity of spotting a pair of nesting budgies. This was the first time I had seen any

> Budgerigars for well over a year so thanks Melanie.

A drive along the southern bank

Group on the levy bank Dead Barn Owl Photos: Nella Smith

didn't produce anything new - we were hoping for some chats but there wasn't any indication that they were about. The only other find was a dead Barn Owl that had got itself caught on a barbed wire fence – poor thing.



View across Barren Box, MFN

Campbell's Swamp for a quick look before heading back to Sue's place for tea and scones!!

We then decided to head for Lake Wyangan picnic area for lunch before going to

Below is the list of birds seen on the outing – all but the pardalote were seen at Barren Box.

Emu
Little Egret
White-necked Heron
Black Swan
Grey Teal
Little Eagle
Eurasian Coot
Black-winged Stilt
Cockatiel
Barn Owl (dead)
Grey Fantail
White-winged Fairy-wren
House Sparrow
Magpie

Hoary-headed Grebe Intermediate Egret Royal Spoonbill **Wood Duck** Swamp Harrier Brown Falcon Purple Swamphen Red-necked Avocet **Red-rumped Parrot** Welcome Swallow Little Grassbird Yellow-throated Miner Starling Little Raven

Australasian Grebe **Great Egret** Straw-necked Ibis Hardhead Whistling Kite Kestrel Masked Lapwing Silver Gull Budgerigar Tree Martin Aust. Reed Warbler Zebra Finch Magpie-Lark Striated Pardalote

White-faced Heron Australian White Ibis Black Duck White-bellied Sea-Eagle Black-shouldered Kite Sharp-tailed Sandpiper **Crested Pigeon** Laughing Kookaburra Willie Wagtail Variegated Fairy-wren White-plumed Honeyeater Pied Butcherbird

#### Max O'Sullivan

# Bird Activity in the Eremophila near the Leeton Skate Park!

Why preserve those scruffy bushes? Don't be so quick to condemn them for they contain a variety of birds enjoying a feed from the flowering Eremophila.

Max and Nella first noticed the activity. A group of Black Honeyeaters and other birds feeding on the Eremophila bushes close to the Leeton Skate Park in February. Then a couple of days later Phillip and I stopped by. The list we saw included the Black Honeyeaters, Spinycheeked Honeyeaters, Little Friarbird, Long-billed Corella, White-plumed Honeyeater, Willie Wagtail and Magpie Lark. Yes there were sparrows and the starlings there as well.

Groups of Eremophila bushes can be seen on many of the local rural roadsides. Where there are several of them together they also attract groups of honeyeaters. The birds tend to head to the

same trees each year. As part of the Twitchathon our team heads to the same groups of bushes each year looking for native species to add to our list.

I am learning that some of the little clumps of native vegetation that may otherwise look unexciting and easily overlooked, or removed from roadsides are a favourite feeding spot of a number of native birds.

**Penny Williams** 



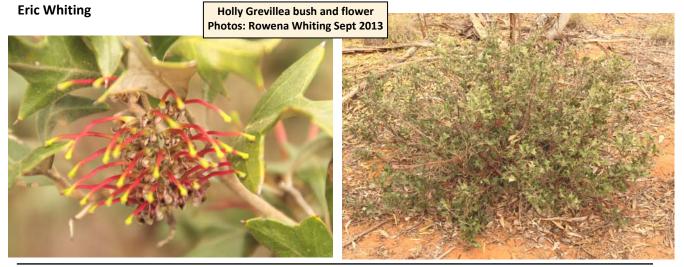
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (above)
Little Friarbird (left)
Black Honeyeater (below)
Photos: Phillip Williams



# **Holly Grevillea**

In the early 1990s only six plants of *Grevillea ilicifolia* were recorded at Nombinnie, plus one at Nericon. No other plants were known throughout NSW. The Nericon plant died and since 1998 only three plants have been seen in Nombinnie.

Therefore there is a major effort to find other populations before this attractive plant becomes extinct. We have been asked to help in this search by National Parks and will joined at our Easter camp by Allan McLean. See coming events for details of the campout.



#### A visit to Willandra National Park 7-9 March 2014

When Allan McLean, a Ranger with the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service advertised a Tagalong to Willandra on the NSW Parks and Wildlife website, I was interested.

Willandra boasts a restored homestead and other buildings which are left from its era as a Merino Stud. The national Park is described as having "expansive horizons of the Riverine Plain, interrupted only by vegetation of the Willandra and black box depressions" NSW Parks and Wildlife Service, 2012). Well worth a visit, I thought.

A small group headed to Willandra National Park for 2 nights and others, escorted by Allan, for one night. I arrived on

Friday night at about dusk and ready for tea to be greeted by Nella, Max and Johanna who had enjoyed drinks and nibbles looking over the Willandra Creek near the homestead. We stayed at the Men's Quarters which has a kitchen sleeping quarters and bathroom facilities.

Just before sunrise the crowd was up some off birding and others to check out the buildings and to take photos of the homestead and creek which has been

dammed to create a lagoon. The homestead was built in about 1918 and then restored between 1999 and 2001. Interesting to look at its U shaped design and see how people on the property would have lived. The homestead includes a cellar and school house. The gardens were frequented by kangaroos contentedly grazing and not worried by us.

Allan with 3 more people, Peter, Virginia and Ellené, arrived at Willandra during the afternoon. We were treated to a BBQ tea that evening by Allan and Peter who had also come out with Allan. We enjoyed dinner in the dining room of the homestead which was very pleasant.

Driving around the National Park we visited the black box depressions

where wedge-tailed eagles were observed. The black box areas were the only areas of trees on the plains apart from those around the Willandra Creek and we found kangaroos sheltering there and other birds. Allan pointed out some bare patches of ground (scalds) that had aboriginal artefacts on them — baked termite mound material used as heat retainers. We also visited the Merton Outstation Precinct situated on the side of the Willandra Creek which is now ruins but was used to house more of the people and their families employed on the property earlier in its history.

Flowers were scarce at this time of the year but the Wilcannia Lily (*Calostemma purpureum*) was found flowering profusely in some parts of the park.

Willandra National Park is well worth a visit to inspect its buildings and look at its ecosystem. Thanks Allan it was fantastic

to have you to show us around, which meant we saw places we otherwise might not have noticed. We did enjoy a look at the historic buildings such as the homestead, rams' shed and the shearing precinct (shearing shed and shearers quarters.)



Penny's photos from top: Willandra Homestead, U shape of the verandah, scalds with aboriginal relics, weir on Willandra Creek, the woolshed.



**Penny Williams** 

# **Sparrow Research Request**

Amanda Griffith, a biologist, at Macquarie University in Sydney has sent the email below in the hope of gaining our help in their research into House Sparrows in our area.

I am working for Assoc. Professor Simon Griffith who is embarking on a new research project looking at invasiveness in House Sparrows across their range (which includes catching them to collect blood for genetic analysis), and we are in need of some local knowledge of where we might reliably find sparrows in the Griffith area and of a decent population size.

Do you know of any good populations of this species in this area and/or where they might be breeding? or if not, would you know of anyone, any other local birders who might?

The initial stage of the project is to gather population level data on the distribution and abundance of the species and also collect blood samples to study population genetics.

We will be travelling out that way on a field trip in April and would ideally like to locate and catch some then. If you could point me in the direction of someone who is willing to help that would be great!



I have since been in contact with Amanda, and have spoken to her about there being plenty of sparrows in the Leeton area alone. She and some other helpers will be either mist netting or trapping the birds in order to take blood samples before putting rings on their legs and then releasing them — they do not plan to dispose of what most of us see as a pest species.

They would ideally prefer to go to people's backyards so that they draw as little attention to their capture methods as possible.

Firstly, Amanda and her team want a number of properties where the birds are likely to be in reasonable numbers which makes it easier to catch

them. Secondly, for those people who have reasonable numbers of birds, they want us to feed the birds daily with commercial birdseed a week prior to their attempting to catch them. This ensures the birds will be present when they come to people's backyards.

The group plan to be in our area from 28 April for 4 days. The group is leaving this weekend for Broken Hill and then moving on to Mildura and then Hay gathering blood samples before coming to our area.

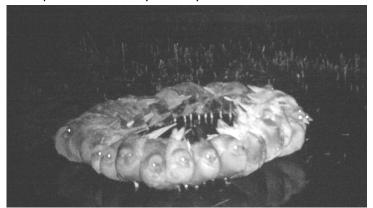
So could people with sparrows in numbers at their place please contact me so I can coordinate the different addresses for the group to visit. Ideally they want 100 blood samples from here in order to make it a worthwhile sample.

Please phone me on 69534726 or 0434923766 if you are willing to take part in this exercise and I will explain the ideal place to put seed out daily.

#### Max O'Sullivan

# **Black-tailed Native-hens roosting:**

The accompanying photo was offered on Birding-aus to anyone interested. I felt it was worth a look and was quite fascinated by the way the hens roosted in a circle. I am not sure if this method is common or has been



reported before but it is intriguing why they roost in such a way. Possibly for protection and if disturbed they can escape instantly without running into each other or whether it was just coincidence that they ended up that way on that particular evening.

There has been no further comment made by 'the experts' on the birdline so either they didn't bother getting the photo or else they weren't all that interested.

Max O'Sullivan

# MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Magpie Goose [13]	Riverina Beef, Yanco	07/03/14	Ben Kschenka
Straw-necked Ibis [2-300]	Riverina Beef, Yanco	07/03/14	Ben Kschenka
Plumed Whistling-Duck	Riverina Beef, Yanco	07/03/14	Ben Kschenka

Ben reports that the ducks spend the day in the cattle pens and not at the dam as before.

Rainbow Lorikeet	McNabb Cres, Griffith	Daily	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Little Eagle	Lake Ballyrogan	10/03/14	Nella Smith
Variegated Wren	Petersham Rd, Leeton	10/03/14	Penny Williams
Grey-crowned Babbler	McNabb Cres, Griffith	12/03/14	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Hobby	McNabb Cres, Griffith	12/03/14	Sue Chittick-Dalton
White-plumed Honeyeater	Karri Rd, Leeton	13/03/14	Barry Allen
Plumed Whistling-Duck [100]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
Wandering Whistling-Duck [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
Pink-eared Duck [100+]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
Chestnut Teal [50+]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
Hardhead [100+]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
<b>Grey Teal</b> [1000+]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
Black Duck [500+]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
Freckled Duck [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
<b>Great Cormorant</b> [40]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/14	Max O'Sullivan

The above birds were seen on the settling ponds both from the hide and from the sewerage works side. It was such an incredible number of birds considering that just a month before there were hardly any ducks there.

Wood Sandpiper [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	23/03/14	Keith Hutton
Brolga [3]	Fivebough Wetlands	26/03/14	Max O'Sullivan

The birds flew in and were observed from the hide – there was an adult pair and a juvenile bird with no red markings on its head. I wonder if the birds nested locally?

Australian Shelduck [42]Fivebough Wetlands26/03/14Max O'SullivanPied Cormorant [1]Fivebough Wetlands26/03/14 Max O'Sullivan

Some Plumed Whistling-Duck and Freckled Duck were still present on 26<sup>th</sup> March and there were 4 Brolgas as well.

Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [36]	Campbell's Swamp, Griffith	27/03/14	Max O'Sullivan
Budgerigar [3]	Barren Box Swamp	30/03/14	MFN group
Little Eagle [2]	Barren Box Swamp	30/03/14	MFN group
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Barren Box Swamp	30/03/14	MFN group
Common Dunnart	'Yarrabimbi' Collinroobie Rd, Leeton	30/03/14	James Hutton
Brolga [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/04/14	Nella Smith
Freckled Duck [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/04/14	Nella Smith
Plumed Whistling-Duck [30]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/04/14	Nella Smith
Wood Sandpiper [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/04/14	Nella Smith
Tawny Frogmouth	Griffith Golf Course	30/03/14	Virginia O'Brien



#### Common Dunnart Sminthopsis murina

'mouse-like (animal)'.

Size is ~160mm – tail is approx the same as the head and body. It is most commonly found in woodland, open forest and heathland in SE Australia and NE Queensland.

A nocturnal species. It is insectivorous, feeding on beetles, roaches, cricket larvae and spiders.

Locally distribution is patchy and is often found in areas that have been burnt in the previous 2-4 years.

Photo by James Hutton.

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

10 April Thursday Monthly Meeting the Yellow Room at Leeton Library,

Sycamore St., Leeton, commencing at 7:30pm

**Topic: Cassowaries - DVD** 

Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

18-21 April Easter Friday to Monday

Campout at Shepherd's Hill adjacent to Round Hill.

This is a bush camp – you will need to bring every thing you need

including water. Other accommodation is available at Lake

Cargelligo for those who don't want to camp. Come for all or part of

the time.

The plan is to search for threatened Holly Grevillea, as well as our usual activities. Allan McLean from National Parks will supervise

the search on Easter Saturday

Contact Max if you intending to come for details and the

directions to campsite on 6953 4726

28 April Monday Sparrow Research team arrive:

See article on page 8 for details.

**30 April Wednesday** Copy for the May newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena –

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

8 May Thursday Monthly Meeting the Yellow Room at Leeton Library,

Sycamore St., Leeton, commencing at 7:30pm

**Topic: TBA** 

Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

11 May Sunday Barry Hehir's property

Meet at the Leeton Post Office at 8:30am

Bring morning tea and lunch.

Contact: Max O'Sullivan if intending to come on 6953 4726

18 May Sunday Annual Koala Count at Narrandera Common

Meet there at 9:00am where you will be assigned to a team Follow the signs from Lake Talbot canal bridge (just before the

swimming complex).

Concludes about 12:00 noon. Barbeque lunch available.

Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or Betty Bradney 6959 2901

25 May Sunday Rocky Point, Binya State Forest

Meet at the Whitton Stock Route / Burley Griffin Highway

crossroads at 8.30am

Bring morning tea and lunch.

Contact: Eric Whiting if intending to come on 6953 2612

Other events:

10 April Thursday "Interplay" art exhibition by Melanie Baulch in the Frame Gallery,

500 Banna Ave, Griffith. Opening at 6pm.

Gallery Hours: Monday to Friday 9-5pm. Contact: 6964 0104