

New Manager for the Nanangroe Study

(Mason Crane)

The Nanangroe study has now been running for 16 years and is one of only a few long-term monitoring studies of its kind in the world. The study was originally set up to examine the impacts on wildlife when the landuse of a landscape dramatically changes, in this instance from a pastoral landscape to a pine plantation landscape.

The data collected from this study has and will continue to inform scientists and land managers on biodiversity conservation in production landscapes and deliver a greater understanding of landscape ecology in general.

Since the initial setup of the study there has been a number of different research officers managing this project, Craig Tribolet, Chris MacGregor and myself. As of next year Sachiko Okada will be managing the project and will be the primary contact. I will still be working with Sachiko in the Gundagai office and on the Nanangroe project.

Sachiko has been working on the Nanangroe project since 2008 and is now carrying out further research into bird breeding in that landscape. Her knowledge, experience and energy will be a great benefit to the project.



Planned field surveys for the next 6 months

- **February**—Vegetation surveys for the grazing study
- **April**—Vegetation surveys for the woodland stewardship study
- **June**— Winter bird surveys for the Murray, north-east and Goulburn-Broken studies

Further Information

For any further information or general inquiries, please phone us or drop us an email.

Mason Crane

Phone: 0427770594

E-mail: masoncrane@yahoo.com

Damian Michael

Phone: 0427770595

E-mail: damian.michael@anu.edu.au

Daniel Florance

Phone: 0400682789

E-mail: daniel.florance@anu.edu.au

Sachiko Okada

Phone: 0417451834

E-mail: okada.sachiko@gmail.com

Thanks to



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FOR
OUR
COUNTRY



Greetings from the Editor (Mason Crane)

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G'day all and welcome to the fourteenth issue of 'Welcome to the Wildside'. This newsletter is produced by David Lindenmayer's research team at the Fenner School of Environment and Society, part of the Australian National University. It is our aim to ensure that all our research partners, such as yourselves, are up to date with our work.

Over the last year the team has completed another round of monitoring on the Nanangroe plantation study (now in its 16th year), the SW

Slopes vegetation restoration study (now in its 12th year) and the woodlands grazing study (now in its 3rd).

Across these three studies we have surveyed 320 sites for nocturnal wildlife such as owls and possums and 420 sites for reptiles, birds (repeated twice) and vegetation.

The data collected is currently being entered into our databases. When entered property reports will be sent to all participating landowners. The data analyses carried out by our statisticians will help identify how well wildlife

is going across the region and the reasons behind declines or increases in wildlife populations. The information gained from these studies will give us (land managers, researchers and government agencies) real information to help guide our investments in biodiversity conservation in our production landscapes.

Next year our focus will again be on the Murray and north-east and Goulburn Broken studies and the Woodland stewardship study.

From all the team have a great Christmas and New Year.

Special points of interest:

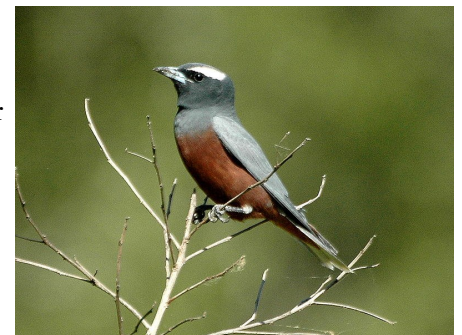
- Inland refugees hit the slopes.
- A new reptile for the Nanangroe study
- Results from new artificial bark study
- New manager for Nanangroe study

Critter Files: White-Browed Woodswallow (Mason Crane)

The white-browed woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus* is a bird more commonly associated with inland Australia, however when conditions deteriorate in the dry interior they will move large distances, often on mass to the 'greener pastures' of the slopes and tablelands, and sometimes as far as the coast. This species

eats mostly flying insects, but will also feed on nectar and grasshoppers.

The species can breed prolifically in often large congregations when conditions are right. They will nest almost anywhere including on tractors, rain gauges and posts in vineyards,



but more commonly in branch forks, behind loose bark and in semi-developed hollows of trees.

Second year of the bird breeding success and nest predation study at Nanangroe (Sachiko Okada)

The 2nd year of field work for bird breeding success and nest predation studies has nearly finished. This breeding season seems much better than last year. More species and larger number of birds attempted to breed this year. Most noticeably nests of the White-browed Woodswallow and White-winged Triller were recorded everywhere in remnants on farms.

From infra-red cameras (see below) we again found that the



Australian Magpie and Raven were the dominate predators. The Grey Shrike-thrush was also one of the major predators. The Australian Raven is the only species that could open up the artificial finch nests to take quail eggs from inside the nests. This time, the Black rat and the Common Brush-tailed Possum were identified as predators by their teeth marks left on fake plasticine eggs installed in artificial nests. Cameras also showed that small birds such as thornbills, and fantails, constantly came back to the same artificial nests to steal nesting materials for building their own nests, this action helped predatory birds to locate artificial nests.



Above **Mistletoebird** nest, below **raven** ripping into artificial finch nest.



SPRING BIRD SURVEYS ACROSS THE SW SLOPES (Mason Crane)

This spring the team completed bird counts across three of our studies in the SW Slopes (Nanangroe, Restoration and Grazing Studies).

The dry conditions further inland saw big numbers of white-browed woodswallows across the slopes and the arrival of other inland

birds seeking refuge in the relatively better conditions on the slopes. The other inland birds included pink cockatoos, crimson chats, painted honeyeater, cockatiels and masked woodswallows.

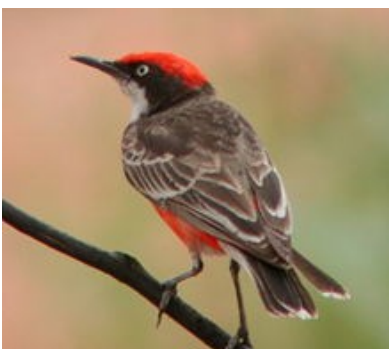
Some small birds such as thornbills seem to be in lower numbers than previous years. This is likely due to the dry 2012 spring and following summer, resulting in a poor breeding season, as identified by Sachiko's research on nesting success at Nanangroe last year.



White-winged Trillers were also in big numbers this year.

Superb parrots seem to be still increasing in numbers, it will be interesting to see if it is a real reflection of the situation, once the data is entered.

Other interesting sightings included a grey falcon and our first record of a common koel.



A few **Crimson Chat** popped up on the slopes this year, enjoying feeding on the Patterson's Curse flowers.

REPTILE SURVEYS ACROSS THE SW SLOPES

(Mason Crane)

As with the bird surveys this spring, the team completed reptile counts across three of our studies in the SW Slopes (Nanangroe, Restoration and Grazing Studies).



Over 23 species of reptiles were detected across our studies this year, the most common were the Boulenger's skink and the rainbow skinks. We also found a new species for the Nanangroe study, Burton's legless lizard.

Numbers of most species seemed lower than usual. This could be due to a number of factors: 1. last years dry spring and summer (resulting long periods of low grass cover); 2. the high numbers of predators such as cats, foxes and brown snakes seen over the previous year; 3. the high grass cover during the survey period, making reptiles harder to find; or 4. combination of factors?

While most species seemed to be down, Dwyer's snakes and blind snakes both were found more regularly than usual.

(left) **Burton's Legless Lizard** found on grazing property in the Nanangroe study (right) **Dwyer's Snake**, unlike baby brown snake that has at least one black band behind the head.



Both (above) **Blackish Blindsnake** and Woodland Blindsnake were found more often this survey, possibly due to some humid warm weather during this period



ARTIFICIAL BARK TRIAL PRODUCING RESULTS

(Dan Florance)

In the last edition of Wildside we reported on a new artificial bark study we recently commenced. This study involves wrapping an artificial bark substrate around the trunks of *Eucalyptus* trees in the woodlands. Checking the artificial bark for the first time this Spring has already revealed the bark to be a success. Marbled geckoes, *Christinus marmoratus* (see picture) have been early adopters of this new habitat. Some trees have hosted several geckoes at a time, including a mix of adult and juvenile liz-

ards. Now things are heating up a bit more out there, we will check artificial bark again soon to see if there has been any further colonisation by reptiles. Ongoing surveys of this artificial bark will help determine if this may provide a novel non-destructive survey technique for increasing the detectability of tree-dwelling reptile species in woodland environments. Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas, and as always a huge thanks is in order for all

your involvement and assistance this year across our various research projects. Looking forward to working with you again next year.

