



# EUROBODALLA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Inc.

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## The Southern Emu-wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*) – Shaw 1798

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### *Taxonomy, distribution and habitat*

The genus *Stipiturus* includes three small species belonging to the fairy-wren family Maluridae, the emu-wrens. Up to eleven races of Southern Emu-wren have been described, though currently only seven are accepted. The species has a distribution that encompasses south-eastern Queensland, the NSW coastland, Victoria, the entirety of Tasmania, south-eastern South Australia and south-western Western Australia.

Though the habitat and floristic assemblages vary across the species range, the habitat structure of all areas occupied is the same: dense ground cover that becomes less dense as it increases in height. The species is sedentary and is an extremely poor flier, rarely dispersing more than 1-2 km away from the natal area.

### *Identification and behaviour*

If it weren't for their ten centimetre long, emu-feather-like tails, Southern Emu-wrens would be the smallest Australian bird as the body only measures six centimetres from beak-tip to the base of the tail. The colouration is rufous overall, with the upper-parts densely streaked brownish black. Males can readily be distinguished from females due to the male's blue throat and streak-free bright rufous crown. Thus, their small size and rufous colouration makes it unlikely for them to be confused with other wren species. It is more likely for them to be confused with small mammals or large insects.

As for vocalisation, the species possesses an oratory that is quite similar to that of the Superb Fairy-wren (*Malurus cyaneus*). However, the calls are of a lower pitch, are softer and lack the squeaking elements of the Superb Fairy-wren. Lastly, the contact call of the species is more drawn out and somewhat slower than that of the Superb Fairy-wren.



Southern Emu-wren

Photo: D. Bertzeletos

The species is extremely shy and is therefore likely to be seen only when flushed. Even then it will try to cling to cover for as long as possible, scurrying through thick vegetation like a mouse and flying feebly low over cover whilst giving alarm calls. The species is social, forming small parties outside of the breeding season. They will loosely associate with other small passerines in mixed aggregations, particularly those of other fairy-wrens. They will not follow, however, if the flock decides to move long distances.

### *Diet and breeding*

As is typical with other members of the fairy-wren family, Southern Emu-wrens often utilise cooperative breeding where juvenile males stay in their parents' territory to help raise their younger siblings. However, unlike their highly promiscuous relatives it appears that this species does not engage in extra pair coupling. In temperate Australia the breeding season is from August to January, when males will defend a territory to

attract a female. All members of the group help build the dome nest into which the female will lay a clutch of two to four eggs which are incubated by the group for an average of 19 days.

The Southern Emu-wren is strictly insectivorous and the abundance of prey in a territory greatly influences breeding success and survival. Nest failure in the species is high and in one study only 6% of the observed nests produced nestlings and of these only 63% reached the fledging stage. Snakes were the primary predators. Adult survival is also low, with up to half the adults vanishing, presumably perishing, during the non-breeding season.

#### *Conservation status and distribution in the Eurobodalla*

The species' high mortality rate and poor locomotion make it extremely vulnerable to fires and habitat loss. Though the species as a whole remains of least concern, many local populations are threatened with extinction or have vanished altogether.

In the Eurobodalla, the species is rarely recorded away from a few well-known localities, including Cullendulla Creek. However, given that it is sedentary, it is likely that many areas where it has been recorded in the past still harbour the species so long as the habitat requirements are met. It is probably worth surveying for the species as the urban development on the south coast has negatively impacted the species without anyone noticing. Dimitris Bertzeletos

### What's coming up...

**Saturday July 11, 2pm: Reedy Creek Road, Eurobodalla.** Meet opposite the Bodalla Police Station. A walk down a quiet road. Farmland and bush birds with the possibility of Flame and Scarlet Robins.

**Sunday July 26, 9am Moruya Heads/Pedro Point.** Meet at the corner of Elizabeth Road and Coronation Drive, Moruya Heads South. Walk along a forest track to view the flowering orchids. White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Grey Goshawk, Crested Shrike-tit, Red-browed Treecreeper.

**Saturday August 8, 2pm: Old Mill Road, Turlinjah.** Meet at the Tuross turnoff, intersection of the Princes Highway and Hector McWilliam Drive. Walk along forest tracks. Superb Lyrebird, Rose Robin, Golden Whistler, Spotted Quail-thrush, and a variety of honeyeaters and perhaps Swift Parrot.

**Sunday August 23, 9am: Spotted Gum Road, Durras north.** Meet at the intersection of the Princes Highway and Mount Agony Road. Walk down a forest track. Square-tailed Kite, Rose Robin, Crested Shrike-tit, Red-browed Treecreeper, Large-billed Scrubwren and possibly Swift Parrot.

**Saturday September 12, 2pm: Ringlands Rainforest.** Meet at the end of Flying Fox Road, Ringlands Estate, Narooma. Rainforest. Topknot Pigeon, Brown Gerygone, Superb Lyrebird, Large-billed Scrubwren, Wonga Pigeon, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Powerful Owl.

**Sunday September 27, 9am: Mystery Bay.** Meet at the entrance to the camping ground on Mystery Bay Road. Walk through Spotted Gum forest, then along the beaches, finishing with a picnic lunch at the rotunda.

### OUT OF SHIRE TRIP 2015

#### Lake Cargelligo, Round Hill and Nombinnie, 16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October

Lake Cargelligo is in central New South Wales. It is a popular birding spot and seasonally can provide some special treats at the Sewage Treatment Works. We plan to leave early on the 16<sup>th</sup> and will be returning on the 21<sup>st</sup> October. The trip does not require any strenuous walking though some of the days may be long as we visit Round Hill and Nombinnie. There we will be hopes for sightings of the Red-lored Whistler as well as Gilbert's Whistler. The normal selection of desert birds, including chats, Crested Bellbirds and a variety of honeyeaters will be targeted. A sighting of the Mallefowl would be an extra treat. Accommodation can be in motel, cabin or camping locations within the town itself. We will look to pool cars where needed. Please contact Lyn Burden (0408 183 510) to make any enquiries or to book a spot.

### A warm welcome to new members...

Malcolm and Karin Fyfe, ACT  
Joan George, Moruya

## The Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Eurobodalla Natural History Society was held at the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015 with 19 members in attendance. The minutes from the 2014 AGM were taken as read.

**Chair's Report:** David Kay reported that the Society had had another successful year, and he thanked the committee members for their input and participation, in particular those two members who are not standing for re-election: Peter Haughton and Richard Nipperess. David also paid tribute to the members of the Newsletter team and to all members for their continued support of the Society.

**Secretary's Report:** Julie Morgan detailed the participation of the Society's members in a number of conservation and survey activities, including the BirdLife Australia 2020 Winter Shorebird Survey, Hooded Plover survey, the NPWS Shorebird Recovery Program, Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Surveys and the Mimosa Rocks BioBlitz. She reported on the Society's website which continues to be utilised by members and non-members. Julie thanked David White for his contribution to the website since its inception, and welcomed David Num and Roman Soroka to the website team. Members were encouraged to put forward their suggestions for the 2016 program of field meetings. The newsletter continues to be an important source of information for members and Richard Nipperess was thanked for his contribution over the past year.

**Treasurer's Report:** Malcolm Griggs presented his report and indicated that there has been a small surplus for the year. Income for the year was \$2658.93; expenditure \$2475.88; the bank balance \$4491.35; and the ANZ term deposit \$7169.67.

**Election of Office Bearers:** Office bearers and committee nominees were elected unopposed. Lucy Gibson and Steven Benjamin were welcomed to the committee. For full details of the 2015/16 Committee, please see the table that appears on the last page of the newsletter.

### **General business**

A motion was put to the AGM and passed unanimously:

"The meeting authorises the Committee to allocate up to \$600 in each of the calendar years 2015-2017 to reimburse members for the use of their vehicles for the conduct of threatened species surveys."

Other items included the Out of Shire trip for 2015 to Lake Cargelligo from 16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October; a briefing of the activities of the Deua Rivercare group; thanks to the committee for an interesting program of field trips; and discussion on offering one or two talks each year as part of Society activities. The ERBG was thanked for providing the space for the meeting and for preparing the room. Julie Morgan

## Looking back over autumn

This autumn has been quite a contrast to last year when there was no Spotted Gum in flower and the migration of Red Wattlebird and Yellow-faced Honeyeater was in full swing. This year, Spotted Gum is flowering right across the shire and many of our migrants like the Noisy Friarbird and Scarlet Honeyeater have not departed. Large flocks of Red Wattlebird, White-naped and Yellow-faced Honeyeater fill the forests where trees are flowering and have been joined by Yellow-tufted, Crescent, Fuscous and White-eared Honeyeater. There have been large groups of Musk Lorikeet in the Narooma area with the count on one day at over 3,000 birds. Small groups of Swift Parrot have been located around Narooma and in Benandarah State Forest. The Grey-headed Flying Fox camp in Batemans Bay has built up to over 300,000 and there have been smaller camps reported at Moruya Heads South and Ringlands at Narooma.



Yellow-tufted Honeyeater  
Photo: S. Benjamin

For the second year running, Plumed Whistling-Duck have turned up in the shire. Thirty-one birds were seen at Silo Farm near Mortfield Dairy west of Bodalla in March, and a single bird at Comerang in May. In 2014, Plumed Whistling-Duck were reported at Barlings Swamp and Moruya. It seems that Pink-eared Duck have become a regular in the shire with numbers building up to 150 at Comerang by the end of May.

Timely autumn rains brought out a great variety of fungi and the reds, purples, browns, whites, yellows and orange colours add yet another dimension to a walk in the forest. Something else that the rain brought out was the Southern Boobook. After the April rain, I flushed two birds off the ground from different areas of our property on a walk. After another day of rain, Amanda Marsh and I had one fly across Coondella Road in the Deua. It made me wonder whether the rain had made for a poor night of feeding and this is what led to the activity during the day. When I have seen Southern Boobook during the day, they are usually roosting quietly in a tree. Julie Morgan

### The Talon Quest

On the way home from the field meeting at Potato Point, Mandy Anderson and I witnessed a group of at least six White-bellied Sea-Eagle, (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), some of which were perched in trees by the side of the road, and others flying low overhead. We stopped to watch, as it was an unusually large gathering. It wasn't long before the group flew away; but then I noticed another pair of sea-eagles, their talons locked together, hanging high in a tree several metres from the road. It appeared that the birds had been involved in a mating or aggressive display (see Wikipedia description in the paragraph below). It seemed that unfortunately they had not separated in time, had dropped into the tree and were now tangled together in the branches.

*'The breeding season for White-bellied Sea-Eagles is from June to August in Australia. A pair performs skillful displays of flying before copulation: diving, gliding and chasing each other while calling loudly. They may mirror each other, flying 2–3 m apart and copying each other swooping and swerving. A talon-grappling display has been recorded where the pair will fly high before one flips upside down and tries to grapple the other's talons with its own. If successful, the two then plunge cart-wheeling before separating as they approach the ground. This behaviour has also been recorded as an aggressive display against a Wedge-tailed Eagle.'*



Pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles with talons interlocked

Photo: A. Christiansen

At the time Mandy was worried the pair may need rescuing so I rang Judy Beggs and Chris Lefel, both dedicated and helpful WIRES members from the Tilba/Narooma area. Judy reassured us that this was mating behaviour and that the birds would separate in time and all would be well. It was also a relief for me to arrive back at the tree early the next morning, just to check and find it eagle-free. Mandy and I both felt very lucky to witness and photograph this behaviour.

Since this encounter I have brushed up on my knowledge about these stunning birds. Here is a glimmer of what I discovered, it may surprise you too:

White-bellied Sea-Eagles from latitudes further south are larger than those from the north. The species breeds from around 6 years onwards and pairs up for life, finding a new mate only if one dies. The life span of a sea-eagle is thought to be around 30 years. One nest site near Merimbula has been in continuous use for more than 50 years.

The honking call heard around the breeding season is one of the loudest bird-calls in Australia. The pair honk in unison, with the male call higher in pitch than the female. The female is slightly larger than the male and usually lays a clutch of two eggs which are incubated for around six weeks. Nestlings are fed by both parents and fledge at around 70 to 80 days. The parents continue to feed the fledglings for around three months. Young birds often remain close to their parents until the following breeding season.

There you go, just a smattering and happily for me, still a lot to learn. I feel very privileged to live in Mystery Bay and to have a pair nesting close by. Long may it remain so. This video on YouTube shows the talon-grappling behaviour perfectly (crash free), if you are interested. Ann Christiansen <http://www.arkive.org/white-bellied-sea-eagle/haliaeetus-leucogaster/video-12a.html>:

### A day in the life of Swift Parrot surveyors

Swift Parrot surveys can be very unrewarding if you judge the experience solely in terms of finding Swift Parrots. There is so much forest to cover and the survey technique involves driving slowly, with windows down, to listen out for calls, and eyes up, to check for eucalypt blossom. We stop at areas that show promise but most of our time is spent in the car. Many kilometres are covered in a session, often without a Swift Parrot sighting. However, being out in the bush has other advantages. This was a day in May...

The Canberra Ornithological Group was visiting so we decided to do a day of Swift Parrot surveys around Narooma. We drove out along the Wagonga Scenic Drive towards the Tilba area and stopped at Armatage Road, a location where 500 Swift Parrots were found in August 2012. No Swift Parrots this time but we did see a group of Olive-backed Orioles. It's an unusual time of the year to see this species, let alone ten of them! We first saw a single bird high up in the canopy. Red Wattlebird? No, oriole. Then we saw another and another... they followed each other around, high up in the trees. How many? Five... no six... eventually they all flew towards the dead branches of a eucalypt and we counted ten.

Later in the day we stopped along Wild Horse Road where we could hear hundreds of lorikeets, mainly Musk, feeding in the Spotted Gum blossom. We also saw a number of honeyeaters: Yellow-tufted, Crescent, Yellow-faced, New Holland, White-naped. As we stood there absorbing the noise and activity that was going on around us, we saw a large flock of birds fly silently up from the gully behind us, cross the road and then down into the gully in front of us – binos up and we identified the group as Topknot Pigeons. There were around 50 in this flock and we watched as they circled around the tops of the trees in the gully, then disappear. We paused to appreciate the contrast of the noisy feeding honeyeaters and the silent pigeons.



Topknot Pigeon

Photo: S. Benjamin

Further up the road at the intersection of Wild Horse and Rats Head Roads (where do they get these names from?), we stopped to listen for Swift Parrots. There were two Superb Lyrebird calling from either side of the road. It is certainly one of the delights of being out in the forest in May as males are calling to attract a female for the breeding season. As we listened to these two rivals calling to and fro, we noticed something very interesting; not only were the males calling progressively louder but they were calling in the same way. One lyrebird would do a portion of its own song, the other replied with its rendition of the same call. The first bird then imitated a Grey Shrike Thrush, the other replied with its version of a Grey Shrike Thrush. The first bird then mimicked a Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, the second bird provided its imitation of the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo. A pause in the concert, then the second bird imitated a Crimson Rosella and the first bird answered with its rendition of the same species. This continued as they worked through a repertoire of species including Gang Gang Cockatoo, Laughing Kookaburra, Golden Whistler, Eastern Whipbird, Grey Butcherbird intermingled with sections of the lyrebird's own call. We all had heard lyrebirds call back and forth before but this was the first time that we experienced this type of exchange. We all felt privileged to have witnessed this interaction. Julie Morgan  
P.S. As it happens, we did find a few Swift Parrots too! A single bird called and a small flock of 6 birds flew over us near Ringlands at Narooma.

## When is a Casuarina not a Casuarina?

During a recent field trip in Deua National Park, many members were surprised to find an *Allocasuarina* which had both male and female flowers on the one plant. This was thought to be unusual, however, there are many species of *Casuarina* and *Allocasuarina* that can be either monoecious (both flowers on the one plant) or dioecious (male and female flowers on different plants).

Members of the family Casuarinaceae are found throughout Australia, SE Asia, Malaysia and some Pacific Islands. Habitats range from coastal areas and moist forests to arid regions. The common name in Australia (she-oak) was given by the early settlers, because the wood resembled that of the European oak. I can only assume that the 'she' was due to the inferior strength of the wood (a typical male attitude at the time). The name comes from either the Malay word 'casuari', or the Latin word 'casuarius'. The long drooping branches were thought to resemble the feathers of the Cassowary. The family is divided into 4 genera:

1. *Ceuthostoma* (12 species, none in Australia)
2. *Gymnostoma* (18 species, 1 in Australia- *G. australianum*, common name Daintree pine)
3. *Casuarina* (17 species, 6 in Australia)
4. *Allocasuarina* (58 species, all endemic to Australia). Allo from the Greek allos meaning the other, so *Allocasuarina* is the other *Casuarina* and was originally included in that genus. A change was first suggested by L.A.S. Johnson in 1982 and changed by CHAH (Council of Heads of Australasian Herbaria) in 2005.



*Allocasuarina* with male flowers and female cones

Photo: J. Morgan



Female flowers and cone

Photo: D. Anderson



Male flowers

Photos: D. Anderson

Casuarinaceae is an easily recognised wind pollinated family. Leaves are reduced to tiny teeth in whorls of 4 to 20 on jointed, needle-like photosynthetic branchlets. The portion of the branchlet between the leaves is called an 'article' and these have longitudinal ridges separated by grooves. The number of ridges is the same as the number of leaves. Stomata are found in these ridges, not on the leaves. Inflorescences consist of alternating whorls of bracts (leaf-like structures), 2 lateral scale like bracteoles and a unisexual flower. Male inflorescences form in orange-brown clusters at the ends of the branchlets, and if very dense, give the plant a rusty appearance. Female inflorescences are usually found in the axils of the branchlets and are small, usually red globular clusters. It is this inflorescence which develops into the woody 'cone', with the two enlarged bracteoles of each flower forming two lateral valves, which open when the seed-like samara (a fruit with a single seed and a wing) is ripe. Insects can sometimes form galls which could be mistaken for cones.

Characteristics used to divide the former single genus *Casuarina* into two distinct genera are:

Characteristic	<i>Casuarina</i>	<i>Allocasuarina</i>
Samaras	Grey to yellow/brown. Dull.	Red brown to black. Shiny.
Cones	Bracteoles thin and extending well beyond the body of cone.	Bracteoles thick & convex, mostly extending only slightly beyond cone.
	No dorsal protuberances (raised area on surface).	Protuberances present.
Leaves	6 – 20 in each whorl.	4 – 14 in each whorl.
Distribution	All states except Tasmania, S.E. Asia and Pacific Islands	All states.

The size and shape of the cone and the number of leaves in each whorl are used to classify/identify individual species. Propagation is usually from seed which germinates readily. Cones mature at about one year and are usually retained on the tree for several years. If collected and stored in a warm, dry place, the cones will open and the seeds can be shaken out. Most species will grow in poor, sandy soil as they are able to fix their own nitrogen. This is due to the presence of bacteria-like Actinomycetes in nodules of their roots. They survive in dry areas because of the sunken stomates and reduced surface area of the leaves, both of which restrict water loss through transpiration. Many are also used as sand stabilisers due to their extensive root systems. They are commonly planted as ornamentals and for wind breaks. The wood is a very good fuel and is also used for wood turning and parquetry.

Species found in the Eurobodalla region are: *Casuarina cunninghamiana* and *glauca*\*. *Allocasuarina littoralis*\*, *distila*, *nana*\*, *paludosa*\*, *verticillata* and *diminuata ssp.annectens*\*. Fran Anderson

\*indicates species may be monoecious or dioecious.

### The Net-Casting Spider: a spider with an unusual hunting strategy

Because they are an integral part of our universe (it would collapse without them) arthropods deserve more recognition than they generally get. Quite apart from their usefulness, they can be quite fascinating because their behaviour, compared to ours, is often really quite bizarre. Spiders in particular have some very odd habits that bear no resemblance whatsoever to our mammalian way of life.

Late one afternoon I noticed a large brown spider about 25cm long hanging upside down from the lower branchlets of a shrub beside the garage door, close to the brick driveway. I took a couple of photos (with great difficulty because when I had the spider in the viewer, I could not see whether I had all the spider in the frame or even if it was in focus). I took one from the front, one from the side and one from the back. When I looked at the pictures later, I noticed that there was a white woven structure hanging between its front legs, and web threads exuding from the 'tail'. The next morning, I went out to look and found that the spider had woven a beautifully designed net, about 2cm square, anchored from each corner with fine threads, while it held the net taut between its front pairs of legs.



Net-Casting Spider

Photo: Jenny Liney

The spider turned out to be a Net-Casting Spider (*Deinopis subrufa*), supposedly quite common, but I have never seen one before. The one I saw, judging from the size, was a female, rufous brown all over, with eight long legs, held in pairs so that it appeared to have only four legs. The thread of the net this spider produces is different to the thread spun by web weaving spiders that has sticky droplets attached to the strands. Rather than trap prey by stickiness, the net, when thrown by the spider, stretches to two or three times its resting size so that it totally envelops the unfortunate victim. The spider then does the normal spider thing of wrapping its next meal in ordinary web thread.

The net thread is called cribellate silk, and is produced from many tiny silk glands placed beneath a specialised spinning organ called the cribellum, that is situated in front of the spinnerets. A single cribellate thread is made up of thousands of tiny silk fibrils. In a close-up photograph, the fibrils give the silk a ‘woolly’ appearance. This wool-like characteristic is very effective in entangling the bristles, claws and spines of insects. The Net-Casting Spider has a row of leg bristles that is used to comb the fibrils in order to produce the required woolliness.



Net-Casting Spiders do most of their netting at night. The web

Photo: Jenny Liney

They have eight eyes, two of which are enormously enlarged and face forward. The two large eyes enable them to catch prey in the dark, as the eyes can concentrate light more efficiently than those of a cat or an owl. The image is focussed onto a large, light-receptive retinal membrane that is destroyed at dawn and renewed again each night. A male will usually shed his last skin and then seek a suitable female to mate with. He will rest on the outer skirts of the female's web, and will gently tug a strand to show her that he is interested. Once he has mated, he dies.

*Deinopis subrufa* is found throughout Eastern Australia in forest, woodland and heathland habitats, or even, occasionally, in domestic gardens. I found all these life strategies totally fascinating. Jenny Liney

REFERENCES: Burnet, B. *Spiderwatch: a guide to Australian spiders*. Reed Books Australia: 1996; Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia; Australian Museum: <http://australianmuseum.net.au>

## A trip to the Mallee country

The society's annual out of shire trip to Lake Cargelligo is on our calendar for October. Lyn Burden is leading the trip and, together with ENHS members, Fran, Gillian and I, travelled out west to explore the best spots for our field trip. It is always worthwhile venturing west of the Great Dividing Range where a whole new suite of bird species awaits.

Lyn had done an amazing amount of research and preparation, with printouts of all of the likely bird lists and birding hot-spots for us to peruse – we profited from the experiences of Tim Dolby, Sue Taylor ('100 Best Birding Sites in Australia'), and Richard and Sarah Thomas, as well as the birding-aus website. We set up camp (Fran and I in a cabin, Lyn and Gillian in tents) at the Lake Cargelligo Caravan Park, and made day trips out into the surrounding district from there. And at every site, we were rewarded with some spectacular sightings. On our first morning, we walked from the caravan park to Frog Hollow, on the edge of the lake, and from there we saw our first flock of Major Mitchell Cockatoos. The incredible pink under their wings lit up in the sunlight as they wheeled overhead. Nearby we also saw a small flock of Cockatiels and numerous raptor species.

Our next destination was the renowned Sewage Treatment Plant where locals told us that there were always "masses of Avocets". Not this time though. Unfortunately our visit coincided with the arrival of a team of research scientists from UNE who were trapping, banding and then releasing several species, including Grey Teal. The advantage was that we got to see some Teal very close up, but the downside was that the majority of birds had been spooked and took off to avoid this intrusion. We were lucky though later in the week when we saw a couple of Avocets at a nearby wetland known as Sheet of Water. They were in the company of Australian Shelduck, Black Swan, Yellow-billed Spoonbill and numerous other more common waterbirds, including many Darter, ducks and all of the more common cormorants.

Venturing out into the Mallee, we visited the recommended sites, such as Chat Alley (where we saw only White-fronted, not the much anticipated Crimson), Round Hill Nature Reserve, Parrot Alley and Nombinnie Nature Reserve and Whoey Tank. At each place we saw some very special and beautiful birds, including Mulga Parrot, Blue Bonnet, Red-rumped Parrot and Mallee Ringneck, White-winged and Splendid Fairy-



wrens (but not in breeding plumage), Grey-crowned Babbler, many Apostlebirds, as well as some less familiar honeyeaters including Striped, Spiny-cheeked, White-plumed and Yellow-plumed.

Some of our most successful excursions were when we merely drove along a dirt road, quite slowly, with the windows down, listening for calls. The best spots were almost invariably near puddles of water from recent rains, where we regularly discovered several species not far in from the road. Several Red-capped and Flame Robins as well as Striated Pardalote, Mistletoebird, and Chestnut-rumped and Inland Thornbills were added to the list in this way.



Mallee country

Photo: M. Anderson

In one desolate-looking area of salt-bush scrub, we spent about an hour trying to get a good view of a Southern Whiteface, and our persistence was finally rewarded. The birds are not fussy about the aesthetics of their habitat, and they like the salt-bush because it protects them from predators. I remember seeing my first Splendid Fairy-wren in an area near Leeton which had been trashed by illegal dumping. To me, the area was an eye-sore, but the wrens happily hopped around amongst the low shrubs and rubbish.

Our final list totalled 120 species, with only one 'lifer' for me, the Crested Bellbird. It's always exciting to add a new species to the life list. But the Gilbert's and Red-lored Whistlers eluded us, as did Speckled Warbler, Chestnut Quail-thrush and Superb Parrot. Possibly May is not the ideal time to visit for some of these less common species but hope springs eternal for October.

**The field trip to the Lake Cargelligo region is scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October – see further details on page 2 of this newsletter and on the Activities page of the Website.** In October, the fairy-wrens will be in full breeding plumage and more of the blossom-dependent honeyeaters are more likely to be in residence. I would like to thank Lyn most sincerely for all of the time and effort that she put into preparing for the trip, for supplying the vehicle and doing almost all of the driving - and for lugging the spotting scope around for us so that we got the best views of the birds. Mandy Anderson



*ENHS members have many stories to tell about their observations of nature. 'My Patch' is a forum where these stories can be shared with others and will be published both in the newsletter and on the website. Photos are welcome. Please send your contributions to [mypatch@enhs.org.au](mailto:mypatch@enhs.org.au)*

*Logo design by Trevor King*

## **Banded Stilts (two) on the move**

I noted in the Birds in Focus column in the current (Vol.4 No.1 March 2015) issue of Australian birdlife magazine a short piece on research into the movements of Banded Stilts. I have read that Banded Stilts are occasionally seen in coastal areas, including New South Wales.

This reminded me of an event that occurred a couple of years ago, proof indeed of the extraordinary distances covered by these birds. On 27 January 2013, I was on the edge of the Moruya River at the Riverside Park, when I was surprised to see two Banded Stilts on the rock wall surrounding the old riverside swimming pool. Three species of cormorant, as well as Silver Gulls use this rock wall as a roost, particularly when the tide is highish. But Banded Stilts – in ten years of regular observation – never.

It would have been of great interest to know the starting point for their journey to the South Coast of New South Wales. Unfortunately, I did not have a camera with me when I saw the stilts, but as I have spent a lot of time in inland Australia, I am familiar with this bird species. I could not have mistaken them for anything else. I do hope that they will return at some time in the future. John Liney

### Little Penguins and Peregrine Falcons on Batemans Bay Islands

A group of volunteers had the opportunity to kayak out to a few of the rocky islands in the Batemans Bay estuary in early May as part of an official marine debris survey and cleanup party, under the auspices of the NSW NPWS and the ESC. Normally there is a *No Landing Policy* applying to these islands.

The visit was scheduled so as to avoid the Sooty Oystercatcher nesting season. There had been reports of Sooty Oystercatchers rearing chicks in a large cave on one of the islands until recently, but there was no evidence there during our visit. There was speculation the chicks had grown and left the area, or had fallen foul of the active Peregrine Falcons nesting on that island - at least one active Peregrine Falcon was observed during the cleanup visit.



The avian highlight of the visit, however, was the fairly sizeable presence of Little Penguins with plenty of signs of current and recent activity. At least 20-25 hollows/burrows were counted of which at least 8-10 seemed to be still occupied given the fresh droppings, feathers and strong odour; one burrow had two Little Penguins clearly visible. Most of these burrows were at the back of a small steep pebbly 'beach' on the western side of a larger island in amongst tangled weedy vegetation, or under the sharp metamorphic rock slabs above the high tide line. There seems to be a healthy population given the small size of the islands (off east end of Corrigans Beach). Little Penguins are occasionally seen in the waters of our coast but not in large numbers. Historically, there were reports of the existence of a larger and noisy colony on these rocky outcrops years ago, to the extent that overnighting fishing vessels in the bay would avoid mooring in the waters around these islands to ensure a quiet night's sleep.

The debris collected on the islands was, happily, relatively limited - mainly rubbish floating onto the islands from recreational boating and shore based activities, such as footwear, bottles, cans, esky foam and plastic containers. A second clean up of Maloney's Beach (more open to the sea) a week or so later had a good deal more larger scale maritime debris including fishing gear and oyster industry equipment. Bill Nagle

### Highlights from ENHS records - Autumn 2015

Avian species	Number	Place	Observer	Comments
Musk Duck	4, 5	PS/Long Swamp, BI	JM/DHK	2 immatures at PS
Black Swan	Up to 120	MHS/WL	JM/DSD	
Plumed Whistling Duck	31, 1	Silo Farm/Com	JC	31 near Mortfield Dairy, Comerang Forest Rd, in March.
Pink-eared Duck	Up to 150	Com	JC	Numbers increase over May
Aust Shoveler	Up to 10	Com	JC	
Hardhead	10	Com	JC	
Hoary-headed Grebe	12	Mogo SF	FM	On Deep Creek dam
White-headed Pigeon	30, 20	BP/TS	JW/CM	Reported feeding on wild olives at BP by M Fitzgerald.
Brown Cuckoo-Dove	15	NA	JMG	
Brush Bronzewing	1	NA	MA	
Peaceful Dove	1	SB/Bingie	NC/AM	Unusual locations for this species
Bar-shouldered Dove	2	BP	JW	
Topknot Pigeon	50, 10	Wild Horse Rd,	DSD/JM	

		Tilba/MYA SF		
Tawny Frogmouth	2	Deua R/Pedro/ TS	MS/JS/JH	
White-throated Nightjar	Call	PS	JM	To 8 <sup>th</sup> March
Aust Owllet-nightjar	1 or 2	Com	JC	
White-throated Needletail	More than 46	Pedro	JS	Last report on 23 <sup>rd</sup> March at Com (JC)
Shy Albatross	3	BI	DSD/JM	In March
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	1	MB	MA	Close to the shore in April.
Australasia Gannet	8	MB	MA	
Pied Cormorant	2	Bingie	DHK	
White-necked Heron	3	Bodalla	MA	
Intermediate Egret	1	NA	DSD	
Cattle Egret	More than 150	Com	JC	In April
Eastern Reef Heron	2, 1	MB/BP/Bingie/ BI	MA/JW/ DHK/DO	
Straw-necked Ibis	200, 70	Com/Bumbo	JC/MA	
Royal Spoonbill	41, 28, 25	NA/JC/WL	DSD/JC/ JMG/ R Streeter	
Eastern Osprey	1	NA	MA	In May. Caught a fish in the inlet.
Square-tailed Kite	1	PS/Fairhaven	JM/DO	Last record 20 <sup>th</sup> March at Fairhaven
White-bellied Sea-eagle	6	BP/PP	JW/MA/ AC	3 adults displaying at BP; 2 adults with talons locked at PP
Spotted Harrier	1	TS/Com	MA/AC/JC	At the corner of Hector McWilliam Dr and the highway at TS
Swamp Harrier	1	Barlings Swamp	JW	
Little Eagle	1	Comerang Farm Road	JC	In March
Peregrine Falcon	1	BP/Pedro/Com	JW/JS/JC	
Buff-banded Rail	Up to 5	TS	JH	Feeding in the garden, 2 young near the chook house, older birds in bird baths.
Eurasian Coot	200	PP	FM	
Aust Pied Oystercatcher	35	WL	DSD/JM	In March; 29 in May
Sooty Oystercatcher	16	Cullendulla Ck	DB	Including 1 juvenile
Black-winged Stilt	2	Com	JC	In March/April
Pacific Golden Plover	4 to 6	MB	MA	In breeding plumage in late March
Red-capped Plover	33	WL	DSD/JM	March
Double-banded Plover	29	WL	DSD/JM	Numbers building from March to May
Black-fronted Dotterel	6	Com	JC	
Hooded Plover	1 to 4	WL	DHK/MA	Possible 2 at NA in May (DSD)
Latham's Snipe	1	Com	JC	On April 1 <sup>st</sup>
Bar-tailed Godwit	75, 15	NA/WL	JMG/ R Streeter/ AC/MA	
Eastern Curlew	15, 5	MHS/WL	DSD/JM	March
Grey-tailed Tattler	1	NA/MB	DSD/JM/ MA	In NA in May, MB in March
Little Tern	3	TS	WN	2 adults and a fledgling in early March
Gull-billed Tern	4	MHS	JM	On May 31 <sup>st</sup>
Caspian Tern	6	Mossy Pt	ABB	
White-fronted Tern	6	MB	MA	In April
Glossy Black Cockatoo	Up to 6	MKS/Deua R/Bodalla	SMG/MS/ MA	
Yellow-tailed Black	34	WL	MA/AC	May

Cockatoo				
Gang-Gang Cockatoo	6	Bodalla SF	AM/JM	
Little Corella	More than 150	MYA	JL	
Musk Lorikeet	Thousands	Narooma area	DSD/AM/JM	From Kianga Forest Rd to Wagonga Scenic Dr. Spotted Gum in flower.
Little Lorikeet	30	Benandarah SF	DB/JM	
Aust King Parrot	Up to 130	Com	JC	Larger groups gather at this time of the year.
Swift Parrot	2-10 1	Narooma area Benandarah SF	DB/DSD/ AM/JM	Small groups in Bodalla State Forest in flowering Spotted Gum.
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	Call	PS	JM	In early April. Last of the season.
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	BP	JW	Young raised by Australian Magpie, reported by M Fitzgerald.
Powerful Owl	1 or 2	Catalina/MKS/ Malua Bay/ Deua R/PS/ Pedro/MB	SB/MW/ SMG/MS/ JM/JS/ ORN	Pair duet at PS in April. More reports of this species than in recent years.
Southern Bookbook	2, 1	PS/Deua NP	JM/AM	Daytime sightings, following rain.
Masked Owl	1	Pedro	JS	In April
Eastern Barn Owl	1	PS/Com	JM/JC	In April
Azure Kingfisher	2	Com	JC	
Sacred Kingfisher	1	MB	MA	Last record 25 <sup>th</sup> March
Superb Lyrebird	7	Bodalla SF	DSD/JM	Males very vocal
Green Catbird	1	NA	JMG	Immature in April
Southern Emu-Wren	Up to 6	Cullendulla Ck	DB/JM	
Pilotbird	1, C	Bodalla SF/ MYA SF	AM/JM	
Large-billed Scrubwren	2	Cowdreys Ck	AM/JM	
White-throated Gerygone	Call	Com	JC	Last record on 6 <sup>th</sup> March
Striated Pardalote	Call	Lilli Pilli/MYA SF	IAG/JM	
Eastern Spinebill	100	PP	FM	Many immatures
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Up to 1000, 400	Benandarah SF/ Clyde River NP	DB/AM/ JM	Feeding on Spotted Gum
White-eared Honeyeater	8	MYA SF	JM	First return to PS on 13 <sup>th</sup> April
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	40	NA	DSD/JM	Large group interacting as they moved from tree to tree. Courtship feeding.
Fuscous Honeyeater	70	Clyde River NP	AM/JM	
Scarlet Honeyeater	8, 2	ERBG/BP/PS	MA/JW/JM	Passage at BP in April; still present at PS at the end of May.
Crescent Honeyeater	20, 11, 10	ERBG/Bodalla SF	MA/DSD/ JM	Along Cobra Rd, Red Knob Rd in Bodalla SF
New Holland Honeyeater	150	PP	FM	Dominates the coastal vegetation. Seen carrying food and feeding young.
White-cheeked Honeyeater	10, 6	PP/MYA SF	FM/JM	
White-naped Honeyeater	200	Clyde River NP	AM/JM	Feeding on Spotted Gum
Noisy Friarbird	Up to 200	Boyne SF	DB/JM	Overwintering across the shire on Spotted Gum blossom.
Spotted Quail-thrush	1	Deua NP/NA	AM/JM/ JMG	
Varied Sittella	12	Turlinjah	MA	Old Mill Rd
White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	2	MYA SF	JM	

Cicadabird	Calls	MKS/PS	SMG/JM	Last record March 26 <sup>th</sup>
Rufous Whistler	4	Deua R	MS	Still present in May.
Australian Figbird	10, 9	MYA, NA	JM/DSD/ ORN	
Olive-backed Oriole	11	Tilba	DSD/JM	One group of 10 birds. Widespread reports of single birds thru May.
White-breasted Woodswallow	More than 16	Pedro	JS	
Masked Woodswallow	1	Kianga	BS	On powerlines.
Dusky Woodswallow	8, 6	Bergalia/PP	DHK/FM	
Grey Currawong	1	Deua R	MS	In May
Spangled Drongo	1	PS/Akolele/MB	JM/B Jones /AC	May records. Last year's records were in March/April.
Rufous Fantail	5, 4	PS/Deua R	JM/MS	Including 2 immatures at PS in April
Leaden Flycatcher	1	MB	AC	Late record in April
Little Raven	20-40	Com	JC	
White-winged Chough	15	Pedro	JS	
Scarlet Robin	2, 1	Bergalia/Bingie/ PS/Com	DHK/AM/ JM/JC	
Rose Robin	4, 3	Com/Bodalla SF	JC/DSD/ JM	More than usual at Com. An immature at Bodalla SF.
Golden-headed Cisticola	10	Com	JC	
Aust Reed Warbler	2	MKS/Com	SMG/JC	
Silvereye	Thousands	PS	JM	Migration strongest in April
Tree Martin	Up to 80	Com	JC	
Bassian Thrush	2	Deua R	MS	
Australian Pipit	Up to 8	Com	JC	
Red-browed Finch	Up to 120	Com	JC	Nesting in March at Com and Malua Bay (MW)

<b>Non-avian species</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Observer</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Short-beaked Echidna	1	Coolagolite	DO	
Common Wombat	1 to 2 and signs	Com/ Coolagolite	JC/DO	
Yellow-bellied Glider	2	Mossy Pt	HR	Calling to each other
Sugar Glider	Calls	BP/Mossy Pt, PS/Com	JW/HR/JM /JC	
Common Brushtail Possum	5, 6	Pedro/Com	JS/JC	
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	Up to 41	Coolagolite	DO	
Red-necked Wallaby	10	PP	FM	
Grey-headed Flying Fox	More than 300,000	BBWG	DB	Numbers rising again. Tens of thousands at MHS in March. Camp at Ringlands.
Dingo	Calls	Mungerarie Fire Trail	FM	A pack called as we lunched. We noted that the calls were getting closer.
Red Fox	1	PS/Pedro	JM/JS	
Snake-necked Turtle	Up to 6	Com	JC	
Black Rock Skink	Up to 20	MYA	JL	
Yellow-bellied Water Skink	2 to 3	Com	JC	
Weasel Skink	1	BP/ Mossy Pt	JW/HR	March
Gippsland Water Dragon	5 to 10	Com	JC	
Jacky Lizard	1	Coolagolite	DO	Last seen 11 <sup>th</sup> May
Lace Monitor	1	PS/Coolagolite	JM/DO	In March
Diamond Python	1	PS	JM	May
Red-bellied Black Snake	2	Com	JC	
Australian Fur Seal	5, up to 17	MHS/NA	JM/JMG	
New Zealand Fur Seal	6	NA	DSD	In May

<b>Frogs</b> JC/JL/JM/ DO/HR/JW/FM	Common Eastern Froglet, Eastern Banjo and Brown Striped Frog, Haswell's Froglet, Brown, Toadlet; tree frogs: Brown, Jervis Bay, Keferstein's, Peron's, Leaf-green, Tyler's, Verreaux's, Eastern Sedgefrog
<b>Moths</b> AC/JC/JM	Ghost, Plume, Lichen-eating Caterpillar, Red-lined Geometrid, White and Clara Satin, Cream Wave, Plantain, Mecynata, Subidaria, Sodaliata, Red-spotted Delicate, White-stemmed Gum, White-stemmed Wattle, Coprosma and Convolvulus Hawk, Banded Lichen, Heliotrope, Tiger, Crimson Tiger, Magpie, Northern Old Lady, Black Noctuid, Green-blotched, Bogong, Variable Cutworm, Native Budworm
<b>Butterflies</b> JC/JL/JM/JW/FM	Splendid Ochre, Lilac and White-brand Grass-skipper, Narrow-brand, White-banded and Greenish Grass-dart, Macleay's, Orchard Swallowtail, Cabbage White, Dusky Knight, Brown Ringlet, Imperial, Black Jezebel, Varied Sword-grass Brown, Common, Spotted and Bank's Brown, Marbled Xenica, Meadow Argus, Aust Painted Lady, Yellow Admiral, Monarch, Common Grass Blue
<b>Dragon and Damselflies</b> JC/JM	Common Bluetail, Wandering and Scarlet Percher, Blue Skimmer, Tau Emerald
<b>Beetles</b> JC/JM	Plague Soldier, Repsimus, Click, Net-winged, Three-lined Potato, Dung; Ladybirds: Yellow Shouldered, Twenty-six Spotted, Twenty-eight Spotted, Spotted Amber, Striped, Fungus-eating, Mealybug
<b>Spiders</b> JC/JL/JM/DO/JW	Flower, Leaf-curling, Red Back, Daddy Long Legs, Black House, Spiny, White-tailed, Little Striped and Garden Wolf, Huntsman, Jumping, Water, Comb-footed, Wheel-weaving Garden, St Andrew's Cross, Net Casting

**RAINFALL (mm). March:** 32 at BP, 23 at MKS, 38.5 at Com, 39 at MB, 22 at Coolagolite. **April:** 152.5 at BP, 107 at MYA, 146.5 at Com, 110 at MB, 246.5 at Coolagolite. **May:** 36.5 at MYA, 44 at Com, 70.5 at Coolagolite.

### Contributors

MA	M Anderson, MB	SMG	S&M Guppy, MKS	DO	D Ondinea, Coolagolite
SB	S Benjamin, Catalina	JH	J&J Houghton, TS	HR	H Ransom, Mossy Pt
ABB	A&B Bellingham, Mossy Pt	DHK	D&H Kay, Bergalia	JS	J Sagar, Pedro
DB	D Bertzeletos, Surfside	JL	J&J Liney, MYA	BS	B Scales, Kianga
AC	A Christiansen, MB	GM	G Macnamara, TS	MS	M Summerhayes, MYA
NC	N Clark, SB	AM	A Marsh, Bingie	JW	J Whiter, BP
JC	J&P Collett, Com	JM	J Morgan, PS	MW	M Wilkinson, Malua Bay
JMG	J&M Gordon, NA	CM	C Morrison, TS	FM	Field Meeting
IAG	I&A Grant, Lilli Pilli	WN	W Nelson, TS		B Jones, Pambula
		ORN	R Nipperess & O Niennattrakul, MB		R Streeter, NA
<b>Places</b>					
BB	Batemans Bay	ERBG	Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens	NP	National Park
BBWG	Batemans Bay Water Gardens	MKS	Maulbrooks Rd S, MYA	PS	Pedro Swamp
BI	Bermagui	MO	Meringo	PP	Potato Point
BP	Burrewarra Point	MYA	Moruya	SB	Surf Beach
Com	Comerang	MH	Moruya Heads, N&S	SF	State Forest
CO	Congo	MB	Mystery Bay	TS	Tuross
DS	Durras	NA	Narooma	WL	Wallaga Lake

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