



The Melbirdian

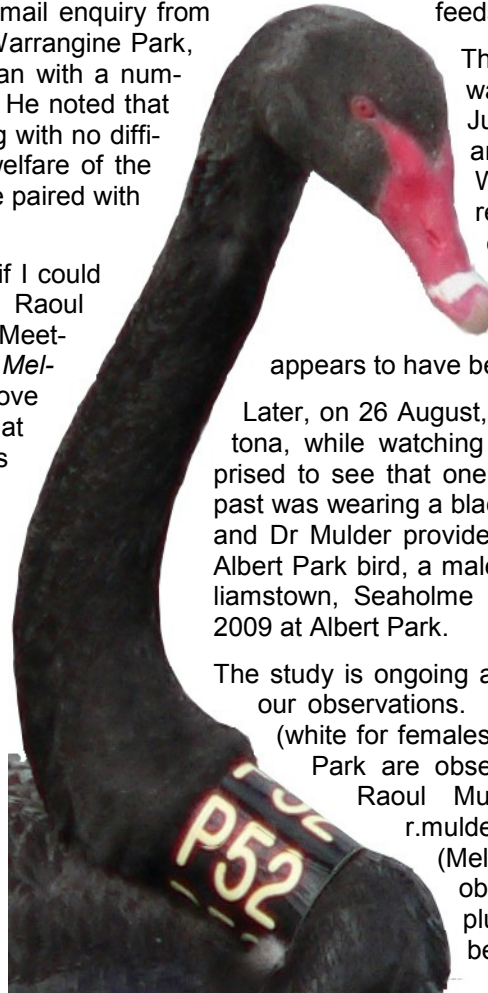
MELBOCA Newsletter Number 69
October 2009

Black Swans with Collars

The BOCA National Office received an email enquiry from David Hunt, President of the Friends of Warrangine Park, Hastings. He had observed a Black Swan with a numbered white collar (L59) around its neck. He noted that the bird seemed to be moving and feeding with no difficulty, but he was concerned about the welfare of the bird. He also noted that it seemed to have paired with a bird with no collar.

BOCA forwarded the email to me to see if I could assist. Fortunately, I remembered Dr Raoul Mulder's presentation to the MELBOCA Meeting in October 2007 (reported in the *Melbirdian*, December 2007), entitled 'The Love Life of Black Swans'. It seemed to me that this was probably one of the birds in his study, so I emailed him.

Raoul responded very promptly and provided the following information. Bird no. L59 is a female Black Swan and was one of a number of birds in the study population at Albert Park. The study is a long-term project investigating their biology, breeding behaviour and movements, in particular in relation to the ongoing drought. Collars have been used in America and Europe for more than 50 years and have been very successful, with no scientific evidence to suggest that the collars cause the birds any distress, injury or other harm. The collars are loose fitting and free to slip up and down the bird's neck as the bird



Black Swan with collar. Photo, Bill Ramsay

feeds and carries out other activities.

The records for this bird show that it was first captured at Albert Park on 5 July 2006, was resident there in 2007 and 2008, made a brief excursion to Williamstown in June and July 2008, returned to Albert Park, and was first observed at Hastings in January 2009. Dr Mulder advised that L59 had previously mated with P69, who is still at Albert Park. So P69

appears to have been 'dumped'.

Later, on 26 August, at the mouth of Laverton Creek, Altona, while watching the Hudsonian Godwit, I was surprised to see that one of the five Black Swans swimming past was wearing a black collar with no. P52. A quick email and Dr Mulder provided all the details. P52 was also an Albert Park bird, a male, known to make excursions to Williamstown, Seaholme and Altona, and last seen in June 2009 at Albert Park.

The study is ongoing and Dr Mulder was most grateful for our observations. If any Black Swans wearing collars (white for females and black for males) outside Albert Park are observed, please forward details to Dr Raoul Mulder on 03 8344 6245 or at r.mulder@unimelb.edu.au. Exact location (Melway reference or similar), date of observation, collar colour and number, plus photographs if available, will all be welcomed.

Bill Ramsay

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MELBOCA Branch Meetings

MELBOCA branch meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except December) in the Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn, not far from the library (Melway 46 E8). The meeting be-

gins at 8:00pm and features a guest speaker and a Member's Topic segment – so be sure to attend! Entry is by a donation of \$4. Out-of-town members and visitors are always welcome!

Upcoming Guest Speakers

Tuesday 27 October 2009 8:00pm

Bill Ramsay: 'The Feral Chook Islands – Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands'

Bill has taken marvellous photos on his travels. Be sure to discover the birding wonders on our northern islands with him.

Tuesday 24 November 2009 8:00pm

John Barkla: 'Photography – a new passion after 50 years of birding'

John will share with us his stunning photographs taken at the Western Treatment Plant and at Bowra Station in Queensland. An evening to wow you and delight you.

Past Meeting Reports

Tuesday 28 July 2009

Janet Hand welcomed all to the meeting and invited **Pat Bingham** to present her Bird of the Evening segment, Black and Pied Honeyeaters. For those of us planning a trip to the dry interior, where these striking black and white birds are found, it was great to be reminded of their similarities and differences. Both species are small, sexually dimorphic, have a long down-curved bill and highly favour the *eremophila* genus of plants as their food source. Despite these similarities, DNA tests have shown these species to be genetically unrelated. Both Black and Pied Honeyeaters have a black hood, but the black extends down to the belly in the Black Honeyeater; the Pied male has a white flash in the wing and white in the tail, both of which the Black male lacks. The females are far less distinctive, both being brown with a white front and could be confused with a songlark or a pipit. Their calls are quite different. The Black Honeyeater gives a single high-note whistle, usually from the top of a twig, whereas the Pied Honeyeater repeats one high note several times. Neither species migrates but they are highly nomadic in their search for a food source.

Annette Cook, the Education Officer at BOCA National Office, was then introduced to the audience. Her talk was entitled *Can BOCA Education Fly?* Such an important topic – as we go about our bird-watching, are we doing enough to instil interest in others?

Annette gave a well-arranged presentation about the reasons for education, what BOCA is doing in education and the way forward.

First, a sound knowledge of the environment should be for everyone. Such knowledge should provide a guide to all of our activities through life. Birds provide an excellent opportunity for sustainability education because they are easily seen, occupy a variety of habitats, are relatively easy to identify and, importantly, give us a measure of the health of our ecosystems.

Who does BOCA educate? Certainly our members, but also members of the community, particularly young people. A recent survey sent to all branches of BOCA and affiliated groups showed that young people and schools are at the top of the list, and the general public are also enthusiastic recipients. It is the national office and branches that are providing the education, but only three branches have a member assigned to education. A significant number of talks are given to non-BOCA groups, with the commonest education activity being bird walks.

Education programs run by BOCA have targeted beginners, children and people in aged care. Programs take the form of community activities and some specialist bird programs, for example, photography and bird forums like the Leeton Birdfair, which provide an excellent informal environment for passing on knowledge. The resources to hand are libraries, posters, pamphlets, DVDs and the valuable material produced by BOCA branches.

To form guidelines for future education activities, BOCA's recently conducted survey provided information that was

the basis of an Education Planning Day held in June 2009, which was attended by members of several branches including MELBOCA, the Helmeted Honeyeater Recovery Program and the Birds Australia Education Co-ordinator. There are several events coming up. Annette highlighted the following:

1. BOCA Bird Week in October with the theme of *Wetland Habitat – Wetland Birds*. Assistance is required for this event in various areas.
2. Annette is fostering links with the Port Phillip and Westernport *Waterwatch* program, which has volunteers testing the health of all the rivers and streams controlled by Melbourne Water, with the idea that water testers could be encouraged to also note bird activity on their regular excursions.

BOCA has participated annually in the Australian Birdfair at Leeton, NSW. This November the theme will be *Australia – Land of Parrots*. Annette encourages members to attend this great forum and parrot experts are encouraged to get involved.

So, *Can BOCA Education Fly?* Indeed it can. BOCA has a stalwart Education Committee, but Annette would welcome more assistance. They're looking for people with new ideas, a robust knowledge of birds, teaching skills, IT skills and, yes, time. Not, of course, all in the one person, but enthusiasm can score highly. On the vexed topic of funding, Annette said that it is crucial, and any help with the attaining of funds would be gratefully received.

Pat Bingham gave the vote of thanks and injected her own enthusiasm into Annette's plea for members to get involved. Don't be a couch potato!

Janet told those attending that Bird of the Evening is to become Member's Topic, broadening the scope of the opening segment, encouraging more people to participate. Sunny Fernie is the coordinator so if you have a 5-10 minute segment, please get in touch.

Graeme Hosken flagged that he had developed new forms for sightings of White-plumed Honeyeater, Noisy Miner and Eastern Spinebill requiring just the suburb and the postcode.

Graeme also told the meeting that he had accepted responsibility for finding volunteers to help at Head Office. As outlined by John Barkla in the recent *Bird Observer*, current financial constraints within BOCA led to an urgent request for volunteers to help on a regular basis, weekly or fortnightly, to assist in office work. Training in required skills will be given by the paid staff; tasks as simple as answering the phone and filing can be managed by anybody. Ideally, ten volunteers are sought so if you can help, please get in contact with Graeme.

Announcements of camps, walks, outings and the shop followed, and having noted that the next meeting would be on Tuesday 25 August, Janet closed the meeting.

Daphne Hards

Outing Report: Maribyrnong, Pipemakers Park and Afton Street Conservation Park

Tuesday 1 September 2009

The morning was cool with a gentle breeze, which was a pleasant change from the cold winds and occasional showers of the previous days. Hesitant at first about the impact that two busloads of primary students might have on the birdwatching, we re-assured ourselves that the local avifauna had endured worse. Our group numbered 17 as we set off under the leadership of Pat Bingham. Australian Magpie and Crested Pigeon joined numerous Red Wattlebird, White-plumed and New Holland Honeyeater and Welcome Swallow by the car park. Initially, we paused among the themed gardens and admired the planning that reflected the different times and people of the area. Frogs called as we approached the wetlands, even though little surface water was visible, while Superb Fairy-wren were occasionally seen and more frequently heard. Crested Tern and Silver Gull patrolled the brackish river whilst Little Pied Cormorant spent much time diving. An early Dusky Woodswallow, previously unrecorded for the area was sighted. Immature Dusky Moorhen indicated successful nesting and a Eurasian Coot on a nest looked determined to raise young. A small flock of Common Greenfinch proved difficult to see as they dived into a flowering acacia. A few meters along the track considerable excitement ensued as we observed an immature White-bellied Sea Eagle being harassed by a raven.

The Edgewater Estate development is very closely settled and overlooks the water, though there was no evidence of

boating yet. Instead, the landings were used by Little Pied, Great and Little Black Cormorants and Australasian Darter. A pair of Black Swan brought their 5 new cygnets across, probably to accustom them to the potentially food-providing humans. We felt that two weeks was far too young to learn bad habits and simply admired the fluffy ones. A Little Grassbird was heard but unseen and an Australian Reed-Warbler flitted, occasionally calling, though it was still early in the breeding cycle. We headed back to the cars for a well-earned sit and some lunch.

After lunch, numbering 13, we drove to the Afton Street Conservation Park. Here, many of the species previously seen were again spotted, though we added Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo to our list. A history of the area's habitation by local aboriginal tribes and early settlers, as well as its later use in twentieth-century industries, such as pipe and explosives manufacturing, was set out on display boards throughout the park along with information on the ecology of different zones. These display boards and additional explanations by those who had studied the area, were fascinating. At the end of the day we had a bird list of 49 species and an appreciation of a part of Melbourne previously unfamiliar to most of us. Our enthusiastic thanks went to Pat for her work in making a very successful day.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Member Names

For use on MELBOCA Outings & BOCA Camps

*Both spring-action
lapel clip & safety pin*



**Jack
Winter**

*With space for emer-
gency contacts on the
back (recommended to
help leaders in case of
emergency)*

MELBOCA BRANCH
Bird Observation & Conservation Australia

\$2.00 each

Orders taken at MELBOCA Balwyn Meetings & MELBOCA Outings

Payment required at time of ordering

Nominate if to be collected at Balwyn Meeting or at a MELBOCA Outing

Depending on collection requirements, the name tag should be available at the next meeting or outing

Interesting Sightings

The following Field Reports were received via email, through the BOCA National Office website and in person from members at the MELBOCA monthly meeting at Balwyn, 28 July 2009. The report includes White-plumed Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill and Noisy Miner sightings within 40km Melbourne, plus other Field Reports.

This report only covers items received up until 16 August

2009 as I was away from 18 August to 9 September 2009. Items received after 16 August will appear in the December issue of *The Melbirdian*.

MELBOCA is very interested in the apparent disappearance of the White-plumed Honeyeater from the Melbourne suburbs. Is this the case in your area and if so, are Noisy Miners present?

Noisy Miner

Date	No. Recorded	Street/Location	Suburb
Most days Jun. 2009	4 (attacking Little Wattlebirds)	Cabena Cres.	Chadstone

During the Royal Park Bird Survey on 2 August, one was recorded at the western end of the park. They do occur in other areas of the park.

Eastern Spinebill

Date	No. Recorded	Street/Location	Suburb
01 May 2009	2	Railway Line	Dandenong
04 Jun. 2009	6	Wellington Rd	Clematis
21 Jun. 2009	31	Royal Park	Parkville (Winter Survey)
02 Aug. 2009	23	Royal Park	Parkville (Early Spring Survey)

Roger McGlashan reports from Sunbury that WPHE numbers have reduced near his home and New-Holland Honeyeater numbers have increased. Noisy Miner are not in the same area.

June Farnam reports that WPHE have been in Henkel St., Brunswick, since 2002. In May this year, New-Holland Honeyeaters and Little Wattlebirds arrived and battle lines have been drawn. Which Honeyeater will prevail?

White-plumed Honeyeater (WPHE)

Date	No. Recorded	Street/Location	Suburb
02 Aug. 2009	3	Royal Park	Parkville
03 Aug. 2009	2		Sunbury
16 Aug. 2009	1		Sunbury

Bush Fire Birds

Since Black Saturday in February, MELBOCA has received many reports of small to large flocks of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo in the eastern suburbs, presumably searching for food, and more often than not found in large pine trees with plenty of cones.

Other species have also appeared in members' gardens for the first time. Has your garden or a nearby park been visited by a new species since the fires?

In January this year, Judy and I spent three days holidaying at a small guest house in Marysville, enjoying the scenery and bird life. On Sunday 9 August, we returned to witness the devastation caused by the February fires and the small void where that guest house had once stood.

Many gardens surrounding the homes that were destroyed in the village were coming back into life and it was

Continued over page

Interesting Sightings (cont'd)

a sight for sore eyes to see up to a dozen Flame Robins, many being males, shining against the blackened surroundings. In the village near the ski hire huts, a seed feeder had been installed which attracted several King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas. Grey Currawongs were also pre-

sent. Driving up to Keppel's Lookout, not a bird was seen, although tree ferns were sprouting and spider webs were observed. Let's hope it will not be long before the bird life returns.

Graeme Hosken

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo

Date	No. Recorded	Street/Location	Suburb
24 Jun. 2009	20	Austin Av.	McCrae
25 Jun. 2009	12	Dingley Village	Dingley
11 Jul. 2009	13	Parkside Boulevard	Carrum
14 Aug. 2009 (7:10am)	42 (flying east)	England Rd Wetland	Glen Waverley
15 Aug. 2009	20-30	Gasworks Park	Port Melbourne
27 Jun. 2009	1	Thomas St Park	Hampton
07 Jul. 2009	19	Thomas St Park	Hampton
12 Jul. 2009	3 (and feeding in trees)	Thomas St Park	Hampton
17 Jul. 2009	1	Thomas St Park	Hampton

Other Sightings

Date	Sighting	Street/Location	Suburb
20-21 Jun. 2009	Australian King Parrot (3 – feeding on Port Wine Magnolia; observed for 15-20 mins)		Vermont East
21 Jun. 2009	Little Grassbird (1), New-Holland Honeyeater (7), Red-rumped Parrot (8), Silvereye (2)	Royal Park (Winter Survey)	Parkville
30 Jun. 2009	Pied Currawong (2 – first sighting in garden since May 1998)	Rowsley Rd	Mt Eliza
01 Jul. 2009	Bassian Thrush (2)	Bolin Bolin Billabong	Bulleen
06 Jul. 2009	Australian Hobby (1 – first sighting in area since 1989)		Clematis
09 Jul. 2009	Grey Fantail (1)	Myrtle St	Hawthorn
12 Jul. 2009	Yellow-rumped Thornbill (10+)	Albert Park Golf Course, north end	Albert Park
16 Jul. 2009	Little Corella (25+ – first sighting on university grounds in 20 years of observation)	Monash University	Clayton
30 Jul. 2009	White-browed Scrubwren (1 – first sighting in garden)	Myrtle St	Hawthorn
02 Aug. 2009	White-naped Honeyeater (5), Red-browed Finch (1), Hardhead (3)	Royal Park (Early Spring Survey)	Parkville
06 Aug. 2009	Princess Parrot (1 – someone has lost an expensive bird!)	Yarra Valley Flats near Banksia St	Heidelberg
14 Aug. 2009 (7:10am)	Hardhead (2)	England Rd Wetland	Glen Waverley

All MELBOCA Outing reports may be found on the MELBOCA Website, www.melboca.org.au.

Graeme Hosken, Recorder

Outing Report: Brisbane Ranges

Wednesday 12 August 2009

A misty morning gradually became a sunny day as 35 birdos assembled in the Anakie Gorge car park under the leadership of Dave Torr. We walked up the track to the calls of Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Australian Magpie and Little Raven, with Grey Shrike-thrush, White-naped and White-plumed Honeyeater and Red Wattlebird adding minor notes. The Superb Fairy-wren and Brown Thornbill joined White-browed Scrubwren and the occasional Eastern Yellow Robin in the underbrush, but the excitement came as people craned to locate the pairs of Scarlet Robin. A Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo was heard calling on the hillside and the cry of "Wedgie" had us peering skywards. This was not the only raptor as a Brown Goshawk had briefly been seen earlier. As we turned back, we added Red-browed Finch and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater to the Anakie Gorge list with the lucky tailenders also obtaining good views of a small flock of Varied Sitella. By this stage at least one person had ticked a "lifer".

Convoy-driving to the old gold town of Steiglitz was no problem, but fitting all our vehicles into the car park was a challenge. New birds seen on the walk around the former mining area and miners' house included Yellow-faced and Brown-headed Honeyeater and Eastern Spinebill. A Grey Shrike-thrush caught a large caterpillar which it proceeded to bash against a branch. A male Golden Whistler and a

Striated Pardalote delighted many while the current town site yielded Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Australian Wood Duck, Common Blackbird and House Sparrow. The last two were the only introduced species seen. We all learnt that you can detect a Koala by its smell as one sensitive birdo demonstrated. The recent rain, though not extensive, had been sufficient to bring out the vivid greens of the moss on the ground, though the disturbed soil supported little understorey.

Then it was convoy-driving again to the Stony Creek reservoir where waterbirds were added to our list. Eurasian Coot dominated, but among their dozens was the occasional Australian Shelduck, Musk Duck and Chestnut Teal, with an elusive Hoary-headed Grebe plus a couple of Black Swan in an inlet. We moved to another section of the dam and added Welcome Swallow, Great and Little Pied Cormorant and Masked Lapwing. A briefly-sighted Swamp Harrier joined the raptor list, but a high point was a young Wedge-tailed Eagle standing on some rocks on the far side of the water, keeping obligingly still for telescope viewing. From here we headed to an area where Spotted Quail-thrush had been occasionally observed, but, as expected with such a crowd, nothing was seen or heard. Here we held the final bird count – 56 species – and made a heartfelt vote of thanks to Dave for a greatly appreciated day.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings

Outing Report: Mill Park Lakes and Hawkstone Park

Wednesday 13 May 2009

Mill Park Lakes is about 25kms north of Melbourne, between Epping and South Morang. The wetland looks as if it has been artificially constructed to collect and clean up the storm-water run-off from the surrounding housing development. It also provides waterfront views for many houses, habitat for wildlife, trails for exercising and a great place to go birding. After leaving the wetland, the water flows into Hendersons Road Drain, which flows into Darebin Creek, which flows into the Yarra River, which flows into Port Phillip Bay near Williamstown.

We met at the northern end of the wetland near the small shopping centre. There were many water birds at this point and some people had recorded 18 species before the walk commenced. The ducks were very tame and waddled towards us instead of flying away. Obviously they are used to being fed by humans.

There are walking tracks around the wetland and also through them. We tried to do the lot and finished up taking about two-and-a-half hours. The winding grassy tracks into the wetland produced the best birding. We were able to get close-up sightings of Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Australasian Shoveler and, the highlight of the day for many people, a pair of Blue-billed Ducks. At one point the male Shoveler and male Blue-billed Duck crossed paths and

were in the same picture. The sun kindly came out behind us for a few minutes to highlight the incredible colours of these birds. It was very difficult to walk away from that spot. We recorded 50 species for the morning, including nine ducks and eight parrots. There were birds flying over and calling all the time we were there. A very birdy place.

Hawkestone Park is about 4kms to the east of Mill Park Lakes. We drove there and had lunch at the Red Gum Picnic Area, which has toilets and picnic tables. The wind had increased a bit by now so we moved into the centre of the roundabout which has a grassed area surrounded by trees which acted as a good windbreak.

After lunch, we drove to the Le Page Homestead area and walked to the dams near the homestead, then down the steep track to the Plenty River. There were not many birds around at first but a few started to come out as we persisted up the Plenty River track towards Nioka Bush Camp. It seemed like a very quiet spot after Mill Park Lakes but the "bird call" revealed we had recorded 35 species, including a pair of Peregrine Falcons, a male Golden Whistler and a White-throated Treecreeper.

Of the 35 species, 12 were not seen at Mill Park Lakes so our total for the day was 62 species.

Geoff Russell, leader for the day

Outing Report: The Briars, Mount Martha



Monday 13 July 2009

A grey sky and the prospect of storms did not deter 22 enthusiasts from assembling in the car park with David and Sue Ap-Thomas, our leaders for the day. The most numerous species observed in the car park were Noisy Miner, Rainbow Lorikeet and Common Starling. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Australian Magpie added their calls and Australian Wood Duck watched us from the fence. Then it was off along the track to the sounds of Little Raven and Eastern Spinebill (birds at opposite ends of the size spectrum).

It was refreshing to see some water in the dams after so many months of dryness. A few Chestnut Teal and a pair of loud Masked Lapwing joined with numbers of Superb Fairy-wren by the water. The flowering Water Hawthorn was greatly admired as it streamed in the flow of Balcombe Creek – until we found out it was an introduced weed. Brown Thornbill and New Holland Honeyeater moved through the bush and from the main hide we watched both Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebe diving. Numerous loud frog calls were heard around the water but, as is frequently the case, there were no sightings. A few saw a Black (Swamp) Wallaby and most of us sighted at least one koala. Other honeyeaters seen in-

cluded White-eared, White-plumed and White-naped plus Red and Little Wattlebirds. A female Eastern Shrike-tit among the foliage challenged the photographers but Spotted Pardalote on a bare branch were beautifully captured.

Straw-necked Ibis and Australian Pelican passed overhead and cued us to look up and see both Black-shouldered Kite and Nankeen Kestrel. The highlight of the day was an immature White-bellied Sea-Eagle being mobbed by a pair of Little Raven. It was a bad day for large raptors, a little later a Wedge-tailed Eagle was doing its best to evade the attentions of three ravens.

Near the entrance to the reserve the Flame Robins were observed, the males truly brilliant. We'd seen numbers of Eastern Yellow Robin in the bush tracts but the Flames made the most of the open country. Only four introduced species were seen, including individuals of Spotted Dove, Common Myna and Common Blackbird.

As we wrapped up with a species count of 53 for the day, we thanked David and Sue for sharing their knowledge of this rewarding reserve.

Diane Tweeddale
Convenor MELBOCA Weekdays Outings group
(Photo, Sue Brabender)

MELBOCA Education Report

MELBOCA needs your help and support at both the following events.

Australian Plants Expo: Sustainable Gardening with Australian Native Plants

Saturday 10 October, 9:00am-5:00pm
 Sunday 11 October, 9:00am-4:00pm

Templestowe College, Cypress Ave., Templestowe (Melway 33 D7)

Adults \$4, children free

The Australian Plants Expo will feature plant sales, a huge display of Australian native flowers, and presentations on landscaping, sustainable water use and wildlife, an audiovisual program, propagation demonstrations, display of botanical art, and book sales.

The full program of presentations will be available at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~sgapvic> from late August

Breakfast with the Birds at Banyule

Sunday 25 October, 7:30am

Presented by Banyule City Council. Join BOCA for an early-morning walk with experienced guides who will help identify over 70 species of birds. This is a free event with a light breakfast provided.

Meet in the car park, Banyule Flats Reserve, Somerset Drive, Heidelberg (Melway 32 F2). **Bookings are essential** (preferably at least one week before). Phone BOCA on 9877 5342 on weekdays.

We need a couple of people to assist in setting up the display at Templestowe on Friday afternoon, 9 October, and several members for a roster to answer questions from the public over the weekend.

We need leaders/guides for Banyule. Janet Hand will be contacting previous guides if she does not get enough volunteers. Everyone is welcome to attend this walk but please book early so we know how many guides to organise. Between 2001 and 2008, we averaged over 75 species on the morning walk through this area.

Janet Hand,
MELBOCA Education Officer

Bassian Thrush at Wilson Reserve, Ivanhoe

As a teenager in the 1950s, I got to know the Bassian Thrush, then called the Ground Thrush, in the dense tea-tree scrub at Sorrento. Never numerous, it soon disappeared with the spread of housing and cats. Later I got to know it as a denizen of the mountain forests and fern gullies around Healesville and Warburton. In May of 1995, a neighbour told me he had seen one at the confluence of the Yarra and Darebin Creek, in Ivanhoe. Foolishly, I did not believe him.

A short time later, on 14 July 1995, I was walking around Wilson Reserve in Ivanhoe, where recent new plantings of indigenous shrubs screened the Bailey Billabong from the golf course. And there it was, a Bassian Thrush, feeding under shrubs where the recently weeded ground had been partly spread with new mulch. The bird was unmistakable, large in size with beautifully scalloped plumage, brown above and white below. As soon as I reached home, I telephoned the Council Environment Officer. Her response was, "Well, it looks as if we're doing the right thing with the re-planting, doesn't it?"

In subsequent years, single Bassian Thrushes continued to appear now and again, always in winter. I assume that they were flying back to mountain forests for spring and summer and breeding there.

Recently, however, they have become rather more regular visitors. This year, on Birdline Victoria's 'Recent Sightings' site, other observers have also reported Bassian Thrush at Wilson Reserve.

I kept my eyes open, hoping for a photograph. On 6 August I was lucky – a Bassian Thrush crossed the path



Bassian Thrush carrying worms. Photo, Anthea Fleming

in front of me, in a damp, sheltered corner of the reserve. I stood still and focused the camera. Something in its beak – was it carrying mud? Could it be building a nest? It went on digging among the grass. I took another photo as it turned to eye me. Then it walked away behind a tree, then behind another tree, and then back into the undergrowth. I was able to keep track of it until it suddenly flew up to a nest on the stub of a eucalypt branch about six feet up.

Almost instantly, a second bird flew from the nest. I had no time to focus, so the picture was far too blurred to reproduce, but it shows both birds at the nest, one with a white faecal sac in its bill. Clearly they had nestlings. I did not try to inspect the nest, fearing to lead predators to it, or to disturb the parents. Little Ravens and Grey Butcherbirds were both flying and calling nearby at the time.

When I returned on 8 August, no birds were at the nest, which was built of fine twigs and bark (no mud), with some moss (now brown) around its lower parts. Although close to a busy track,

it was well screened from casual view by dense young *coprosma* shrubs. I have not seen any birds at the nest since, but on 15 August one of the old birds was nearby, carrying a beakful of worms – presumably any surviving young were still dependent.

Only a week before, on 31 July, I had observed an Olive Whistler a short distance away on the Yarra bank. Though the birdlife has changed over my 38 years of bird-watching at Wilson Reserve, it remains a great place for birds. You never know what will turn up.

Anthea Fleming

Maribyrnong Valley Bird Surveys

The Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley (FMV) are creating a book on the birds to be found along the Maribyrnong River and adjacent parklands.

The book will be a not-for-profit publication to encourage bird-watching and enjoyment of the many and diverse habitats to be found along the Maribyrnong River Valley.

To get started, we need to carry out surveys. Unfortunately, we, the FMV, have very limited experience in bird identification and are asking for volunteers from the birding community to assist in documenting the birds.

It is proposed to hold an initial survey on:

Sunday 29 November from 9am until 11am.

If you would like to assist with the surveys please register your interest via email with fmvBirds@gmail.com.

Dandenong Catchment Survey Summary

Another two months of cold, blustery weather for our intrepid survey volunteers. Bird species and numbers may be lower than usual, but some sites were still able to record new sightings.

Frog Hollow added Brown Goshawk, Kilberry Boulevard added Little Grassbird, Golf Links Road added Whistling Kite and Crimson Rosella (also a new sighting for the Surveys), Hallam Valley Road added Great Cormorant and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and Waterford Wetlands added Noisy Miner. River Gum Creek was the odd one out with no new species for the period.

Total species for the Surveys increased by one to a total of 129. We now have two years data and look forward with interest to see if there are any early trends apparent when Jenny Lau analyses the available data.

With the spring arrival of migratory birds, it is a good time to get some excellent birding in, without having to leave the suburbs. Most sites take a pleasant couple of hours easy walking to complete.

See the BOCA/Melbourne Water Catchment Survey insert for details of observations at MELBOCA sites.

Arthur Carew

Outing Report: Yellingbo Bird Walk

Sunday 2 August 2009

Seventeen hopeful birdwatchers braved cold and threatening conditions to visit Yellingbo Nature Reserve, just over half an hour's drive from Ringwood. The birds sounded happy to see the group gather in the car park discussing recent bird walks. As usual, there was time for most to enjoy a quick bite to eat and a hot drink prior to the commencement of the walk. Spotted Pardalote, White-eared Honeyeater, Striated Thornbill and Laughing Kookaburra were all on the list before we'd even started the morning's walk.

Three Swamp Wallabies were seen across the bank of the Woori Yallock Creek. A flock of White-naped Honeyeater flew into the top canopy of the large eucalypt close by. It sounded like a game of "chasey" as they moved off once more, chattering away. Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Grey Shrike-thrush, Eastern Yellow Robin, White-throated Treecreeper and Grey Fantail all acknowledged our presence in one way or another along the roadway.

There was a great deal of movement in the farmyards. Australian Magpie, Welcome Swallow, a couple of White-faced Heron, Pacific Black Duck and Australian Wood Duck all made an appearance, including Magpie Lark, Eastern Rosella, Blackbird and the ubiquitous Common Myna. Brown Thornbill were highly visible in the trees beside the creek.

Red-browed Finch busily chattered while jumping along the track ahead of us as bright sunshine filtered through the clouds. We investigated the not-so-dry swamp (moistened by recent rains) for some of its rarely seen inhabitants. The more adventurous members of the group sporting gum boots (some that had never seen mud!) travelled deeper into the swamp for a closer look. To the onlookers' surprise a Varied Sittella appeared on a bare branch of one of the many dead trees in the swamp. It patiently sat while slower moving birdwatchers gathered their binoculars to inspect the find. Superb Fairy-wren and White-browed Scrubwren, commonly seen here, also made an appearance.

Further around a bend in the track, Little Raven were call-

ing in great number, bringing to mind the Old World collective noun, a *murder* of crows! Whilst technically incorrect, a murder of Little Raven just doesn't have the same impact.

For something completely different, a Crested Shrike-tit put on a lively show as it jumped along an overhanging branch just above us, calling mournfully. Further away, a raptor soared on the horizon – was it a Wedge-tailed Eagle? A Swamp Harrier? Lots of discussion ensued with heads down in deep thought. It was one of at least three raptor sightings for the day. Some were just too far away to name with accuracy.

On the way back to the car park for lunch, frog calls reminded us of the recent rains that had made their habitation in the low-lying areas possible for the time being. Even though grey clouds were threatening, everyone sat in the usual circle and conversed happily together while taking in some sustenance for the afternoon walk.

We walked single file across the "slippery bridge" and down the track beside a small feeder watercourse, running once again, by the Woori Yallock Creek in the valley of the reserve. Water settles here and makes the walk much more interesting at this time of the year.

A female Golden Whistler was sighted, along with White-plumed Honeyeater, New Holland Honeyeater and White-throated Treecreeper. Distant views once again of raptors encouraged more discussion and hypothesising among the group.

Thanks to the sharp-sighted David Ap-Thomas and Geoff Deason, among others, we finished with a total of forty-one birds for the day. Despite somewhat cold conditions, it had barely rained all day; however, it rained consistently all the way home. This reserve is closed to the public, so only those lucky enough to be invited, or who are entrusted with a key may drive into it and enjoy its peace and tranquillity. Many thanks to all who made the effort to join us at Yellingbo on the day.

Maryanne Anderson

Do You Know Your Waders?

Here is your chance to learn more! MELBOCA is running a short course on identifying the more common waders. Led by John Barkla, BOCA President, Wader Enthusiast and Chairman of the Melbourne Water Biodiversity Conservation Advisory Committee, the first session will be a Study Meeting at BOCA National Office followed by a Field Day at the Western Treatment Plant, Werribee.

Times:

Study Meeting: 7:30pm, Thursday, 19 November 2009
Field Day: 9:00am, Sunday, 22 November 2009.

Venues: Study Meeting: BOCA National Office, 183-185 Springvale Rd, Nunawading. Enter via rear door in Market St. (Melway 48 F10).

Field Day: Western Treatment Plant, Werribee. Meet on Point Wilson Rd (29 Mile Rd) at Paradise Rd gate, 1km south of the Fwy (Melway 11 D12)

Eligibility: The course is only available to BOCA Members, and has a limit of 40 participants

Fees: Fees are \$25 per person (which includes both sessions) and are payable to BOCA National Office at the time of booking.

WTP Permits: The first 25% of participants who nominate at the time of booking that they hold a WTP Birdwatching Special Access Permit endorsed 'Inducted', and who are prepared to take three passengers on the Field Day to travel to and around the WTP, as well as the return journey to Melbourne, will receive a full refund of \$25.

This short course is a fundraiser to assist MELBOCA in purchasing a laptop computer for use at its Monthly Meetings and Education Sessions.

To make your booking contact BOCA National Office, Tel: 9877 5342

Wildlife Health Surveillance

Dr Pam Whiteley of the Veterinary Faculty of Melbourne University is working on a project to monitor the health of Victoria's wildlife. In terms of birds she is particularly interested in parrots and cockatoos. Pam has asked for our assistance as detailed by her below and I would appreciate it if you would pass on the request to branch members who may be able to help in reporting observations. Wildlife Health Surveillance Victoria is working collaboratively with governmental and non-governmental organizations to increase reporting and investigation of wildlife health events (such as death and sickness) in populations of free-ranging mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians in Victoria. This is so we have a better understanding of wildlife health, both baseline data and detecting changes. Please Google our website for more information: Wildlife Health Surveillance Victoria.

Following a survey over summer, we wish to focus our investigations on parrots & cockatoos and koalas. We are

also interested in platypus and in July of 2009 we investigated a die-off of sub-adult Eastern Grey Kangaroos near Halls Gap due to a blood sucking intestinal worm that is a normal parasite of macropods (we now want to know how widespread this is in Victoria).

We are keen to examine carcasses of dead free-ranging parrots and cockatoos. We would be very grateful if any dead birds could be collected into a plastic bag without handling (turn the plastic bag over the bird), then into a second bag and held with ice (chilled, not frozen, is best).

Please contact **Pam Whiteley**, 0400 119 301, to organise transport for necropsy at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Werribee, where we have expertise in avian (and wildlife) diseases.

Please remember to always wash and disinfect hands and equipment after handling animals.

Please contact:

Pam Whiteley BVSc MS MACVS (Epi & Australian wildlife) BTeach
Wildlife Health Surveillance Victoria
Faculty of Veterinary Science, The University of Melbourne
250 Princess Highway, Werribee, 3030
pamw@unimelb.edu.au 0400 119 301

MELBOCA members please note that BOCA is still keen to add to its own birdskins collection, so, while encouraging all members to cooperate with the Wildlife Health Survey, we would also ask members to first contact BOCA's Conservation Coordinator through the BOCA National Office, 03 9877 5342, with the details of any recovered carcasses.

MELBOCA Dates to Remember

If you would like to get outside, see some fantastic birds and meet friendly people, then MELBOCA outings are just what you need. Check out some of the outings on offer and we hope to see you in the field!

Wednesday Wanderings

Wednesday 28 October – Bulleen Park, Bulleen – 9:45am (Mel 32 D10). Entering from Bulleen Rd, turn left towards Archery/Model Aeroplanes. Toilets on site. A flat walk upstream and around Bolin Bolin Billabong if not too muddy. This area yielded a list of 63 species when we were here in February 2006. BYO chairs for lunch back at cars.

Wednesday 25 November – Yarra Trail, East Ivanhoe – 9:45am (Mel 31 K10). Meet at Eaglemont Tennis Club parking area, enter off the Boulevard. Sorry, no toilets here but toilets at our destination downstream at Wilson Reserve. This area yielded a list of 48 species when we were here in March 2006. BYO chairs & lunch to eat back at cars.

Weekday Outings (All welcome, no need to book.)

Tuesday 20 October – Truganina Parklands, Altona Meadows – 10:00am-3:00pm (Mel 208 K2). Bush and waterbirds. Leader Leonie Robbins. Drive along Queen St and turn south into Andrew Park Dr. Park in furthest car park. No toilets on site. Nearest toilet is at Apex Park (Mel 209 D1).

Beginners Outings

Saturday 17 October – Cranbourne Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne – 10:00am (Mel 133 K10). Meet in Stringybark Picnic Area (not Australian Garden) off Ballarto Rd. Note: this is an all-day event.

Saturday 21 November – You Yangs Regional Park, Little River – 10:00am (Mel 611 F5). Take the Little River exit off the Princes Hwy and follow the signs. Note: this is an all-day event.

Birdwalk at Yellingbo Reserve (Contact MELBOCA, 03 9802 5250)

(MELBOCA have been conducting monthly surveys at this key habitat for the endangered Helmeted Honeyeater for more than 30 years).
Take Warburton Hwy to Woori Yallock, turn right to Yellingbo. At Yellingbo, turn right towards Seville, then left into Macclesfield Rd. After 2.5km turn right at large pine trees (Mel 305 G11). Toilets on site. Bring lunch and gumboots (after rain).

Sunday 1 November – Gate opens 10:00am, walk starts 10:30.

Sunday 6 December – Gate opens 10:00am, walk starts 10:30.

PhotoBOCA Events (Contact photoboca@optusnet.com.au)

Saturday 17 October – Beechworth/Chiltern.

Saturday 14 November – Melbourne Water, Edithvale/Seaford Wetlands – 8:30am-2:30pm. Contact PhotoBOCA.

Late Spring Camp

Monday 30 November – Willow Grove, Latrobe Valley. Monday 30 November to Friday 4 December.

Camp fees \$7.00 per person per night. Non-members add \$10.00 per person to the total fee. Day visitors are welcome. (Mel 528 B/C6 or Vic Roads 97 D3). Outings leave camp each day at 9:00am.

Contact BOCA on 03 9877 5342 to book.

Spring Coach Tours

Saturday 10 October 2009 – Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary, Linton. Leader: David Coutts, BOCA Manager of Clarksdale. Morning and afternoon walks, lunch break at the Sanctuary's new Environment Centre. Cost: \$65.00 BOCA members; \$70.00 non-members.

Saturday 21 November 2009 – Geelong Area. Leader: David Torr. Birding at various wetland sites between Geelong and Point Henry, depending on water levels and tides on the day. Cost: \$55.00 BOCA members; \$60.00 non-members.

Prepaid reservations only. To book, please post fare to:

BOCA
PO Box 185
Nunawading 3131

or for credit card bookings phone 0398775342.

Late cancellations can be phoned in to the office, but for a refund, please confirm in writing. A cancellation fee will be charged.

Please dress appropriately for the weather and wear sensible footwear. Don't forget your binoculars, hat, drinks and lunch. Extra baggage can be left safely on the bus when out walking. Tours leave from outside Hamer Hall, St Kilda Rd, Melbourne (Mel 2F G7) at 8:00am sharp, returning approximately 6:00pm.

Please consult the Bird Observers' Calendar for additional details about the above walks and for additional outings in the Melbourne Area.

Contact

Mailing address:

MELBOCA
C/O BOCA National Office
PO Box 185
Nunawading VIC 3131

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Diane Tweeddale
Geoff Russell
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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.melboca.org.au

Where Have 'Our' Maggies Gone?

For the past few years I have been observing a pair of Australian Magpies that nest in our local reserve. Four years ago, there appeared a second female, with a young one, on the far side of the reserve. The original pair had two juveniles that year. Soon after observing the second family, the original family arrived in my garden with the lone female and baby. My original thought was that the adult male had 'adopted' the second family.

The following season, however, the truth became clear: he was a bigamist. The two females nested about 40 metres apart and he moved between the nests, feeding and caring for both groups. All the adults later fed the five juveniles.

This pattern continued until this year. They were regular visitors to my garden and would sit on the pergola and sing. We went on holidays in the second half of

March. In our absence, the home visits ceased, although Australian Magpies were still seen in the area. I met a neighbour, who had also enjoyed their visits, and he asked "Where have our magpies gone?" He said that there is a new male which visits his home that was a larger bird and very bossy. He suggested that such new birds are fire refugees and have chased away our usual residents. I hadn't thought of that.

One day in July, I was very happy when two magpies arrived on my pergola and started to sing. Moments later, a flash of black and white swooped down and they were gone – not to be seen or heard again. I do miss our magpies and their warbling.

Janet Hand, East Doncaster

Can You Help?

MELBOCA requires a new Beginners' Outings Leader/ Coordinator

MELBOCA requires a Beginners' Outings Leader/Coordinator for outings commencing 20 February 2010. In the past, both these functions have been carried out by Michelle Judson. After four years in this role, Michelle is relocating to the United Kingdom and will not be able to continue. Ideally, we would prefer a volunteer willing to take on both the role of Leader and the role of Coordinator, but the task could be split into two.

Coordinator: To plan the outings, prepare notices for inclusion in *The Bird Observer*, have participants sign the Attendance Book, complete the Outings Bird List Proforma on the day and forward a copy to MELBOCA as a record of the outing.

Leader: Lead the outings on the day and assist participants with the identification of birds.

If no volunteer is forthcoming before the first outing in 2010, in the short term, MELBOCA will arrange for an experienced leader to be available for each outing.

Beginners' Outings are a long-standing tradition for BOCA Members in the Melbourne area, but they will not be able to continue without a Leader/Coordinator or a Leader and a Coordinator. Beginners' Outings are normally held on the afternoon of the third Saturday of the month, February to November, at sites close to Melbourne. MELBOCA will be able to assist the new Coordinator with a list of past sites where Beginners' Outings have been held.

If you are interested in volunteering for either or both of these positions, please contact Graeme Hosken, on: tel: (03) 9877 5342 or at gahosken@bigpond.com.



MELBOCA is the
Melbourne Branch of
Bird Observation &
Conservation Australia

The Melbirdian is published six times a year Member birding-related stories and articles (up to 800 words) are invited. September 1, 2009 is the deadline for receipt of information for inclusion in the October issue. Put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and send in your birding-related stories and articles!

Survey site number and location	Melway	Survey site number and location	Melway
1 Frog Hollow Wetland, Endeavour Hills	91 G9	4 South of Golf Links Road, Narre Warren	110 F11
2 Kilberry Boulevard, Hampton Park	96 J9	5 Hallam Valley Road, Hampton Park	96 A3
3 River Gum Ck Reserve, Hampton Park	96 H9	6 Waterford Wetland, Rowville	73 E10

Table 1. Bird species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

Bird species	Site number						Bird species	Site number						
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Black Swan	X		X	X	X		Australian Spotted Crane							
Australian Shelduck							Spotless Crane							
Australian Wood Duck		X	X	X	X		Dusky Moorhen	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Pink-eared Duck							Eurasian Coot	X		X		X	X	
Australasian Shoveler			X				Black-winged Stilt			X				
Grey Teal			X		X		Black-fronted Dotterel					X		
Chestnut Teal		X	X		X	X	Red-kneed Dotterel							
Northern Mallard							Masked Lapwing			X	X	X	X	
Pacific Black Duck	X	X	X	X	X	X	Latham's Snipe							
Hardhead			X			X	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper							
Blue-billed Duck			X				Pacific Gull							
Australasian Grebe	X		X		X	X	Silver Gull			X				
Hoary-headed Grebe							Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo							
Rock Dove			X		X		Galah	X		X				
Spotted Dove	X	X	X	X	X	X	Long-billed Corella				X			
Common Bronzewing							Little Corella					X		
Crested Pigeon					X		Sulphur-crested Cockatoo			X		X		
Australasian Darter	X		X				Rainbow Lorikeet	X	X	X	X	X		
Little Pied Cormorant	X	X	X	X	X		Scaly-breasted Lorikeet			X				
Great Cormorant				X	N		Musk Lorikeet							
Little Black Cormorant			X	X	X		Crimson Rosella				N			
Pied Cormorant							Eastern Rosella			X		X		
Australian Pelican					X		Red-rumped Parrot					X		
White-necked Heron							Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo					X		
Eastern Great Egret					X		Palid Cuckoo							
Intermediate Egret							Shining Bronze-Cuckoo							
Cattle Egret							Laughing Kookaburra							
White-faced Heron	X	X	X			X	Superb Fairy-Wren	X	X	X	X	X		
Little Egret							White-browed Scrubwren	X			X	X		
Australian White Ibis		X			X		Yellow Thornbill							
Straw-necked Ibis	X						Yellow-rumped Thornbill							
Royal Spoonbill							Brown Thornbill				X			
Yellow-billed Spoonbill							Spotted Pardalote					X		
Black-shouldered Kite					X		Striated Pardalote							
White-bellied Sea-Eagle							Yellow-faced Honeyeater							
Whistling Kite				N			White-eared Honeyeater							
Black Kite							White-plumed Honeyeater	X	X	X	X	X		
Brown Goshawk	N						Bell Miner							
Collared Sparrowhawk							Noisy Miner			X		X	N	
Swamp Harrier							Little Wattlebird		X	X				
Little Eagle					X		Red Wattlebird	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Nankeen Kestrel				X			White-fronted Chat							
Brown Falcon							Crescent Honeyeater							
Australian Hobby							New Holland Honeyeater		X	X	X	X		
Peregrine Falcon							White-naped Honeyeater							
Purple Swamphen	X		X	X	X	X	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike					N		
Buff-banded Rail							White-winged Triller							
Baillon's Crake							Golden Whistler							

Survey site number and location	Melway	Survey site number and location	Melway
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Table 1. Bird species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

Grey-shrike Thrush	X						Silvereeye						
Grey Butcherbird		X	X				Welcome Swallow	X	X	X		X	X
Australian Magpie	X	X	X	X	X	X	Fairy Martin						
Pied Currawong							Tree Martin						
Grey Fantail							Common Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	
Willie Wagtail	X	X	X		X		Song Thrush						
Australian Raven							Common Starling	X	X	X	X	X	X
Little Raven	X	X	X	X	X	X	Common Myna	X	X	X	X	X	X
Magpie-lark	X	X	X	X	X	X	Red-browed Finch						X
Scarlet Robin							House Sparrow	X	X	X			X
Flame Robin					X		Eurasian Tree Sparrow			X			
Horsfield's Bushlark							Australasian Pipit						X
Eurasian Skylark					X		European Goldfinch		X	X	X	X	
Golden-headed Cisticola							Common Greenfinch				X	X	
Australian Reed-Warbler			X										
Little Grassbird		N	X		X		Feral Duck	X		X	X		
Brown Songlark							Feral Goose				X		

Total number of bird species seen at each site during the current survey months:	29	26	47	31	51	18
Total number of bird species seen at each site to date:	83	59	98	89	91	44
Total number of bird species seen at all MELBOCA sites to date:	129					

Table 2. Other species observed at MELBOCA survey sites.

Species	Site number						Species	Site number					
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6
Frogs							Mammals						
Common Froglet	X	X	X		X		Red Fox	N					
Southern Bullfrog							European Rabbit			X		X	
Spotted Marsh Frog							Brown Hare						X
							Feral Cat						
							Fish						
							European Carp						

Key:

X Denotes species seen at this site during the current survey months.

N Denotes new species seen at this site during the current survey months.

Ns Denotes new species seen on non-survey day.

 (Shading) denotes species seen at this site on previous surveys.