

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



April 2019 - Issue #268

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

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Website: www.mfn.org.au

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

Objectives

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



Freckled Duck
Phil Tenison

Campbell Swamp - view from the hide -Rowena Whiting

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the May issue by
Wednesday 1 May

To Dionee & Graham Russell

Email: dioneerussell@gmail.com

Phone: 0428 536 290

*A time for counting:
Pollinator Count, Global Big
Day (bird counting), Koalas.*

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

President:	Graham Russell	0419 350 673	Editor:	Rowena Whiting	6953 2612
Vice President:	Alan Whitehead	6959 3779	Committee:	Trevor O'Brien	6962 5614
Vice President:	Eric Whiting	6953 2612		Joy Young	0474015303
Vice President:	Virginia Tarr	6962 5614		Glenn Currie	0488563321
Secretary:	Nella Smith	6959 1210			
Treasurer:	Ellené Schnell	0488 080 866	Website Co-ordinator:	Kathy Tenison	6953 4869

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

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

Membership enquiries:

Leeton	Eric Whiting	6953 2612	Griffith	Virginia Tarr	6962 5614
Narrandera	Nella Smith	6959 1210	Coleambally	John Wilkinson	6954 4129

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Welcome to another month.

The inbox has not been so full this month. Also I have received less photos so I've had to resort to using my own; hence a slightly smaller issue this time.

The March meeting was well attended to hear about Dionee and Graham's adventure to the Apple Isle where they undertook the Overland Track from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair, walking the 62.5 kilometres over 6 days. They certainly had more than their fair share of rain, with some snow. They had some great photos with the mosses and lichens showing their full colours in the wet; however birds weren't so plentiful and they found the best area at the end around Lake St Clair. Their presentation was most enjoyable.

Once again 'Show & Tell' was interesting with a number of people contributing. Sue Whitehead's Bunya Pine fruit prompted me to detour into Mountford Park the next day to see for myself and photograph the tree. Some of you may remember I had the full cone at a meeting a couple of years ago. This session often prompts members to expand on the subject and tell their own story. It would be nice to include a summary of the items so if you can write a short piece... We don't have a record of this fascinating information.

Returning to the inbox following the platypus sighting last month Roy Wade has written of his encounter with platypuses on his property at Euroley and added some facts.

Next month I will be away so unable to collate the newsletter; however Graham & Dionee have come forward to take it on so please send your copy to them **Dionee Russell**. A copy to me would be nice then I can keep it all in the MFN files.



Slips in the February newsletter for Kathy Tenison's photos. In correcting the names of the birds last month - (Black-winged Stilt and the spoonbills I neglected to say that they were my errors in transcribing the names on the image file to the captions. My apologies Kathy, Rowena.-

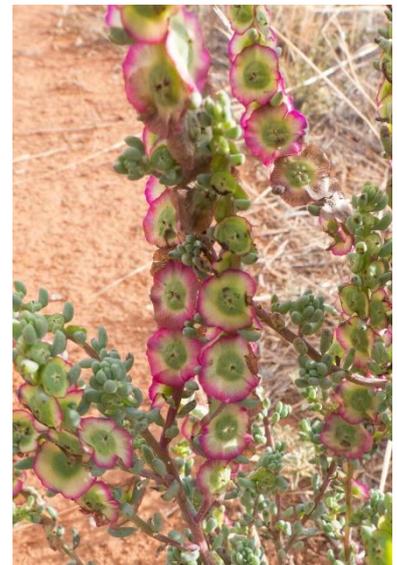
Black and White Bird Watching 16 March 2019

I couldn't find Campbell Swamp named on Google Maps, so it's no surprise that I got lost (twice) on our Saturday March 16 Club outing trying to find it – even though I'd been there (twice!) before. Some might say I have a poor sense of direction; I prefer to be thought of as a person who “investigates alternative routes”.

Having eventually arrived I found the area as life-filled as I remembered, from both a plant and animal perspective. In relation to the former, I clung to Eric like a gecko on glass, both along the entrance path and the boardwalk (more on this safety hazard later) as he described many of the species extant, such as the lignum thickets and swamp couch. Striking was the crystal clarity of the shallow water, being perennially filtered by this same aqueous flora. In some places it was the inland equivalent of coastal seaweed-adorned rock pools.

The spacious bird hide, with its information display and adjacent signage, is pretty special, and I was proud that it was a long-ago initiative of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists. A hide is a wonderful place for field ornithology as, not only does it allow one to be close-up and personal with our avian subjects, but one can even chat, eat and stroll about – oh, and spy on birds of course. I leave it to Max to supply the full – impressive – list for this very enjoyable and informative outing.

**Freckled Duck family (breeding) –
Phil Tenison (taken mid February)
Pearl Bluebush *Mariana sedifolia*–
Rowena Whiting**



Most charming for me was a close-up view of a pair of Red-rumped Parrots attending to what was probably their nesting hollow. Also a family of the elusive Freckled Ducks was in attendance. A curiosity was a less than edifying flock of feral pigeons, which seemed to be permanent residents of the wetland; their normally preferred habitats being ledges, grain silos and statues. And of course there were Starlings, always Starlings.

Even though the bird-watching hide was great, even better was a walk along the eastern track fringing the swamp. The four raptors present, Swamp Harrier, Hobby, Whistling Kite and Black-shouldered Kite (its ruby-red gaze being enough to *scare* its prey to death) seemed largely oblivious to our presence. However, they probably kept some of the smaller bush birds under cover.

This was certainly not the case with the male onyx-black Darter with tawny juvenile snuggling up together at their large, hemi-spherical nest, just a meter or so above the water.

Then a top sighting; three black-and-white Magpie Geese, two resting on a dead branch, the third idly poking about the shallow water for an afternoon snack. Non-flying, close-up Magpie Geese were yet another first for me.

Great as that was, the piece de resistance of the trip was a couple of Pied Butcher Birds at the top of a large, dead tree ... No they're not ... White-Winged Trillers maybe? ...

But my attention was distracted by a strange brown honeyeater quite close to me. This bird then flew up to join the still unidentified black-and-white birds on the dead tree. Shortly after, when I caught up with the group, Max mentioned, with an uncharacteristic tone of excitement (after all, he's seen *everything*) that he'd spotted a Pied Honeyeater a little earlier. So that was it, my mystery birds were Pied Honeyeaters, the brown bird being the female. This was later confirmed by Max when he observed five of them in the same tree. (*Five to my three! This is not a competition, y' know!*)

From what I've read, due to their rarity one would be unlikely to see them again in ones lifetime; certainly in that area, pretty well on the eastern fringe of their arid zone range.

What a privilege.

Now back to the rotting boardwalk: I recently visited the North Head Nature Reserve in Sydney. This is highly recommended, but one needs a whole day to really enjoy the marvelous views, history, geology and flora (though not great for birds). Of particular interest to me were the galvanized steel-mesh

**A splash of colour – saltbush,
View of the western edge of the swamp, by
Rowena Whiting**

walkways, especially as they traversed the boggy "hanging swamps". Why so interested? Because on



our outing I was part of a discussion regarding the onerous task of replacing the old wooden walkways at Campbell.

This extremely efficient, metal, light-weight but sturdy - and it seemed low-cost, ease-of construction - solution might help solve the replacement problem. The brand name was "Rhino".

The many reasons one immerses oneself in field natural science in general and bird-watching in particular are always nuanced; never black and white ...

Well, with the outing at Campbell, with the exciting visitations of the Magpie Geese and Pied Honeyeaters, this time the reasons were very black and white – for me at least.

Alan Whitehead

Bird Lists

Campbell Swamp: Max O'Sullivan

Australasian Grebe	Little Pied Cormorant	Great Cormorant
Darter + juv at nest	White-faced Heron	Royal Spoonbill
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Straw-necked Ibis	White Ibis
Magpie Goose	Black Swan	Freckled Duck
Hardhead	Black Duck	Australasian Shoveler
Grey Teal	Chestnut Teal	Pink-eared Duck
Swamp Harrier	Whistling Kite	Black-shouldered Kite
Hobby	Spotted Crake	Spotless Crake (H)
Coot	Swamphen	Crested Pigeon
Feral Pigeon	Red-rumped Parrot	Tree Martin
Welcome Swallow	Willie Wagtail	Reed Warbler
Purple-backed Wren	White-plumed Honeyeater	Pied Honeyeater
Singing Honeyeater	House Sparrow	Starling
PeeWee	Pied Butcherbird	Magpie

Wyangan Causeway: Virginia Tarr

Pelican

Black-winged Stilt

Pied Cormorant

Lake Wyangan Picnic Area: Virginia Tarr

Mallee Ringneck

Red-rumped Parrot

Crested Pigeon

PeeWee

Kookaburra

Willie Wagtail

Swamphen

Royal Spoonbill

Great Egret

Value of Roadside Vegetation –

For our field trips we invariably travel to patches of woodland. To reach these we drive through extensive areas of cleared land. The woodlands are like islands in an ocean, and like islands life there is in danger of inbreeding and extinction if the island is too small and remote. Small areas of remnant vegetation are like island chains allowing for generations for those that can jump the gaps. Most of the remnant vegetation occurs along our roadsides particularly along travelling stock routes.

From time to time there is talk of creating wildlife corridors across the country, usually only ending up with fragmented strips of tree planting. These are fine for the future if the fragments are eventually linked up. As habitats though for all the species that require mature trees it is like a builder telling you he will build you a home but you will not be able to move in until fifty or sixty years later. Meanwhile the current habitat is being nibbled away. A runaway burn-off here, a wayward drift of herbicide spray there, an overzealous clearing for a fire break here and frequently a road improvement (that is 'improvement' for motorists not nature) there.

We would all like to preserve as much as we can, but we do not know what are the worthwhile bits that need saving. In 1998 Greening Australia (Griffith) organised roadside vegetation surveys across five local government areas – Hay, Carrathool, Murrumbidgee, Leeton Shires and Griffith City. MFN undertook the Leeton part and managed to cover most of the rural roads. This survey in reality only assessed tree cover, not the total value as habitat fauna-and-flora-wise, In particular habitat for some of our threatened species was not considered and therefore some roadsides were not given recognition of their importance as actually warranted.

Following the damage to significant Painted Honeyeater habitat along Apostle Yard Road last year, it is proposed to do a survey of Leeton roads for habitat. The result will be given to the Shire Council so that they are aware of and conserve the significant areas.

Eric Whiting

**Vegetated roadsides –
a wildlife corridor**



**Cleared roadside – no protection for
migrating wildlife**



Visit to Coleambally Irrigation Biodiversity Trust Re-vegetation Sites

Originally 11 sites were set aside for revegetation. These were mostly areas that were not suitable for rice farming and irrigation. Luckily they remained, so we are left with Boree Woodlands and Blackbox woodlands which are both threatened ecological communities. We visited sites 10 and 11. We parked at site 10 and walked across inspecting the range of plants which had been planted out as part of a Saving our Species Sandhill Re-vegetation project. Species that were planted that survived were mostly Casuarina species. Acacia and Hopbush species with hard seeds had been directly sown. I was amazed at the success rate considering the conditions. Rabbits have been eradicated and grazing macropods are reduced. Keith said that more than 1 rabbit per hectare severely impacts the regeneration of a site. On the top of a sandhill we speculated on the identity of a large older shrub that looked like a Myoporum but with the opposite leaves might have been a Sandalwood.

The channels which send water to the Irrigators were mostly built on old Black Box depressions which were probably along prior streams. We followed one of these back to the beginning noting the size of the trees and the numerous hollows suitable for the parrots which is what we mostly saw on this excursion.

It was getting on for 7pm when we headed back into the town centre for refreshments and further socialising before heading home. Many thanks, Keith for showing us the blocks and for the delicious slices from the pre-school cake stall. Hopefully Keith will be able to supply some of the background and management information of the areas for a future newsletter; also a chance to visit some of the other sites.



Top: Group on top of the sandhill with vegetation from direct seeding in 2017 – Rowena Whiting
Above: Blue Bonnet – Graham Russell
Below left: Black Box woodland -Nella Smith
Below: Boree Woodland – Rowena Whiting
Bottom: Mistletoe growing on the boree (in flower) – Rowena Whiting



Bird List

Noisy Miner	Blue Bonnet
Red-rumped Parrot	Pied Butcherbird
White-winged Chough	Superb Parrot (20)
Galah	Eastern Rosella

Nella Smith



Platypus encounter

Some additional information about the platypus and a personal experience of watching them. Ed

Glenn Currie had an interesting account of sighting a platypus while walking with Nella and Margrit in the March newsletter.

In the 1950s and 60s our farm at Euroley gave us access to the Yanko Creek where I was able to observe a platypus on numerous occasions.

Sometimes a second one appeared and if I stood silently could watch them ducking and diving but was not lucky enough to see their offspring.

My encyclopedia of Australian Wildlife tells me the platypus, *Ornithorhynchus antirus*, is a primitive egg-laying mammal confined to eastern Australia and Tasmania where it is still common.

The duck-like "bill" is of pliable leathery skin and the whole body except the snout, hands and feet is covered with velvety fur.

The female lays 2 eggs in a nesting chamber at the end of a burrow excavated on a bank.

They feed on crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic animal life.

The male platypus has a half inch long poison spur on the back of each hindleg. The spur is connected to a poison sac and serves for defence. The female doesn't have spurs.

Roy Wade



Photo by Nella Smith taken at Belvedere Salt Lake near Ballarat, Victoria

Collecting Feathers - Feather Map of Australia project

Max O'Sullivan brought along a feather for his 'Show & Tell' and told us about the Feather Map of Australia project

The Feather Map of Australia project aims to collect waterbird feathers from wetlands around Australia. These feathers will be analysed using nuclear

techniques, such as mass spectrometry and high resolution X-ray fluorescence, to identify stable isotopes and minerals that are incorporated into feathers through the ingestion of food. These analyses will identify the differences in feathers from diverse parts of Australia, creating a Feather Map.

It is a joint project of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) and University of New South Wales (UNSW), and will be used to track the movement of waterbirds around Australia from wetland to wetland based on an analysis of the feathers to identify stable isotopes and mineral elements.

More details about this project, including how to participate, can be found at:

<http://feathermap.ansto.gov.au/> On the web site there is an excellent map that shows where feathers have been collected, however it only gives the count, not the species. There are very few in our area. They are looking for Citizen Scientists to help with the collecting and the web site gives details of how to get involved.. Max made an important point that when picking up a feather make sure you do not touch the quill end.

Rowena Whiting Information from the web site.



MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

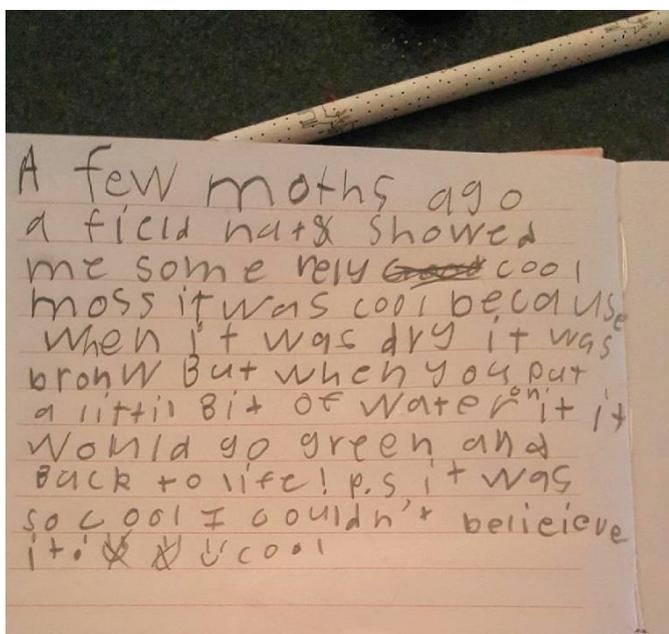
Common Greenshank	Lake Cisneros, Coleambally	28/02/19	Keith Thompson
Red-kneed Dotterel	Lake Cisneros, Coleambally	28/02/19	Keith Thompson
Tawny Frogmouth [1]	Narrandera Fauna & Flora Reserve	01/03/19	Nella Smith
Straw-necked Ibis [30+]	Jubilee Oval, Griffith	03/03/19	Virginia Tarr
Yellow-plumed Honeyeater [2]	Jubilee Park, Griffith	03/03/19	Virginia Tarr
Black-tailed Native-hen [90]	Fivebough Wetlands – some young birds	04/03/19	Keith Hutton
Black-tailed Godwit [1]	Fivebough Wetlands – has now departed	04/03/19	Keith Hutton
Blue-faced Honeyeater	Karri Rd, Leeton	10/03/19	Barry Allen
Yellow-rumped Thornbill [6]	Whitton Museum	11/03/19	Margaret Strong
Double-barred Finch [2]	Fivebough Car Park	12/03/19	Max O'Sullivan
Wedge-tailed Eagle [3]	Fivebough Wetlands – circling overhead	12/03/19	Max O'Sullivan
White-winged Chough [15]	Narrandera Wetlands	13/03/19	Alan Whitehead
Purple-backed Wren [4]	Narrandera Wetlands	13/03/19	Susan Whitehead
Superb Wren [2]	Narrandera Wetlands	13/03/19	Susan Whitehead
Silvereye [4]	Narrandera Wetlands	13/03/19	Susan Whitehead
Kookaburra [1]	Whitton Museum	14/03/19	Margaret Strong
Just a single bird which Margaret thought was unusual.			
Black Falcon [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	15/03/19	Max O'Sullivan
Freckled Duck [10+]	Campbell Swamp	16/03/19	MFN Outing
Magpie Goose [3]	Campbell Swamp	16/03/19	MFN Outing
Darter [male and juv at nest]	Campbell Swamp	16/03/19	MFN Outing
Pied Honeyeater [5]	Campbell Swamp from the car park	16/03/19	MFN Outing
Purple-backed Wren [3]	Piccoli Reserve, Griffith	24/03/19	Virginia Tarr
Collared Sparrowhawk [juv]	Jubilee Park, Griffith	24/03/19	Virginia Tarr
Australian Shelduck [65]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/19	Keith Hutton
Black-winged Stilt [150]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/19	Keith Hutton
Australasian Shoveler [23]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/19	Keith Hutton
Cattle Egret [7]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/19	Keith Hutton
Masked Lapwing [40]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/03/19	Keith Hutton
Citrus Swallowtail Butterfly	Peter's house garden Koonadan	27/03/19	Peter Draper
Peter reported this large black and white butterfly in his garden which was identified by Rowena and Eric, Nella and Keith.			
Pallid Cuckoo [2]	Koonadan Rd, Leeton	27/03/19	Max O'Sullivan
Brown-headed Honeyeater [6]	Fivebough Wetlands	27/03/19	Max O'Sullivan
This is the first time I have recorded these honeyeaters at Fivebough.			
Glossy Black Cockatoo [6]	Brobenah Hall Rd – Barry Allen's dam	27/03/19	Max O'Sullivan
Superb Parrot	Coleambally area	30/03/19	MFN Outing
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [43]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Wood Sandpiper [11]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Keith has said this number of Wood Sandpipers equals the record of 11 and they have stayed around for several weeks – some were still present on 3 April.			
White-faced Heron [32]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Straw-necked Ibis [230]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Both Straw-necked and White Ibis are present in varying numbers at Fivebough – the recent addition of more e-water has made the northern area very good for all water birds.			
Brolga [20]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Allan Richards and I counted 26 Brolga around mid-day on 30/03/19.			
Silver Gull [320]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Black Swan [34]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Little Raven [190+]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
It is interesting that some birds seem to have left the area, particularly Pelicans which no doubt have			

headed for Lake Eyre which is now filling from the recent cyclones up north. The stilts have also dropped in numbers in the past week and there haven't been any Native-hens either so something has changed for them to make them move.

Wedge-tailed Eagle [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Black Falcon [1]	Fivebough Wetlands – a regular	30/03/19	Keith Hutton
Pied Honeyeater [10+]	Campbell Swamp	31/03/19	Allan Richards
Birds still present in the trees beside the car park fence feeding on the fruit of ruby saltbush.			
Fan-tailed Cuckoo [1]	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	31/03/19	Allan Richards
Yellow-plumed Honeyeater [1]	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	31/03/19	Allan Richards
Ground Cuckoo-Shrike [2]	Chat Alley via Lake Cargelligo	02/04/19	Max O'Sullivan
Great Crested Grebe [8+]	Lake Cargelligo	02/04/19	Max O'Sullivan
White-winged Wren [8+]	Settling Ponds, Lake Cargelligo	02/04/19	Max O'Sullivan
Pied Honeyeater [20+]	Settling Ponds, Lake Cargelligo	02/04/19	Allan Richards
Spotted Nightjar	Lowde St, Nericon – Neil's place	02/04/19	Neil Palframan

Sadie's Moss Discovery

Eric showing Sadie & Jarvis revival of mosses photo by Kathy Tenison



Autumn Wild Pollinator Count

The Autumn Wild Pollinator Count runs from 14 to 21 April. It is an opportunity to contribute to wild pollinator insect conservation in Australia. You are invited to count wild pollinators in your local environment and help us build a database on wild pollinator activity. Just find any flowering plant, watch for just ten minutes and record all the insects land that land on the flower during that time. It can be done any time during the week.

Find out how all the details at <https://wildpollinatorcount.com/> or join the club at the Landcare food garden in Narrandera on April 14, for contact see coming events.

Global Bird Day

This annual event is on 4 May, be a part of birding's next world record. And no matter what you do, have fun, enjoy the birds you find, and share your sightings on eBird. Because in our world, every bird counts. Last year's Global Big Day set a new record, with [7,025 species](https://ebird.org/globalbigday) reported in one day. Go to <https://ebird.org/globalbigday> for more information and how to participate or talk to Max.

Both are National citizen science projects.



**** COMING EVENTS ****

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions please email or phone if you intend to come.

SAVE THE DATE for the

Celebration of our 25th anniversary on the weekend of 18/19/20 October 2019 -

We are planning for an Anniversary Dinner, Outings and a Photographic Exhibition over this weekend.

- 11 April Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: Please bring along something for Show & Tell
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 14 April Sunday** **Autumn Wild Pollinator Count** See page 10 for more information
Venue: Food garden at Narrandera **Time:** 8.00am
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 25-28 April** **Autumn Camp at Laurel Hill near Tumbarumba (postponed from January)**
Thursday – Sunday Our booking has been transferred to **April, Anzac Day and following weekend**. It is for 3 nights at \$95 per person night, fully catered.
Own transport but we will car pool where possible.
We will be exploring the mountain forests, sub-alpine grasslands, a secluded dam and waterfalls.
We have got 20 attendees which is the minimum so if you are considering it please commit yourself.
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 1 May Wednesday** **Copy for the May newsletter is due. Please send to Dione Russell**
Email: dioneerussell@gmail.com **Phone:** 0428 536 290
- 4 May Saturday** **Global Bird Day** See page 9 for more information.
Spend a few minutes birding, and tell eBird what you find.
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 0434 923 766
- 4 May Saturday** **The Central Coast Birders will be staying in the Leeton area.** An opportunity to join them on their birding activities. Details of their program will be forwarded when available.
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 0434 923 766
- 5 May Sunday** **Annual Koala Count at Narrandera Flora and Fauna Reserve.**
Meet there at 10:00 am where you will be assigned to a team
Follow the signs from Lake Talbot canal bridge (just before the swimming complex). Bring binoculars. Barbeque lunch available at a small cost.
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 9 May Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: to be decided
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.