

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



February 2019 - Issue #267

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

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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



Celebrating World Wetlands Day at the Fivebough Wetlands

Image by Kathy Tenison

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the March issue by

Wednesday 6 March

To Rowena Whiting

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***Outings to Rocky Waterholes
and the
Glossy Black Cockatoo Count***

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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.

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

Welcome to a new year.

A special year for the Club - it is our 25th anniversary year. We need ideas of how you would like to celebrate this event in October. A photographic/art exhibition is planned

Unfortunately our summer camp had to be postponed with the heatwave conditions and fire risk in the area see page 14 for new arrangements.

Otherwise the year has started well with a great evening of informative presentations and a visit to Fivebough Wetlands for the World Wetlands Day. It was very well organised by Kathy Tenison as the local Murrumbidgee Landcare co-ordinator; assisted by a number of MFN members. Find an informative report on page 4. Then last week some members attended a workshop to learn about monitoring Malleefowl, see Nella's article on page 6. Enjoy this bumper issue, Rowena.

Some other events of interest (carried forward from page 14)

- 15 March Friday** **Boree Creek, 'Larell', Shelterbelts and Saltbush: Maximising livestock performance and biodiversity on your farm. Sustainable Farms**
Contact is Dr Mason Crane M: 0427 770594
<http://sustainablefarms.eventbrite.com>
- 17 – 20 March** **John O'Brien Festival at Narrandera**
25th year of the "Australian Festival of Word and Song" Poetry, writing, street parade, street markets, busking, bush dance, bush poetry.
6th NHMA National Tractor Week at the showgrounds For program of events go to
www.johnobrien.org.au
- 1 – 5 April** **Bird Atlassers Autumn Camp at Condobolin**
A base camp will be located at Gum Bend Lake, Condobolin where bird surveys will be conducted - 35 ten minute blocks.
See www.nswbirdatlassers.org.au
- 5 May Sunday** **Annual Koala Count at Narrandera Flora and Fauna Reserve**
Contact Nella Smith 6959 1210.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo
by Phil Tenison



Mona Finley and husband Laurie from Darlington Point met the MFN group at the park on the way in to town. The purpose of the visit was to go to the Tiddalik Wetlands in the town and for us to add support to the local group trying to convince the local Shire Councillors that the wetlands are worth saving despite serious opposition to the contrary by some of the councillors who saw them as a waste of money and wanted it to be no longer the responsibility of Council.

In the walk around the wetlands, we saw 22 species of birds in the wetlands and nearby bushland along with a number of calling frogs in the ponds themselves. So the wetlands do attract a good assortment of fauna and are

well worth preserving. This is particularly so for the number of smaller birds that are attracted to the site – birds such as honeyeaters and wrens that prefer to use smaller areas of water rather than go to the nearby river. Not only that, but the birds would be encouraged to nest in the small shrubs that the group have planted around the wetlands that have now grown sufficiently to attract these smaller species.

The ponds also attract the usual common water bird species such as Black Duck, White-faced Herons and Australian Reed Warblers and Glenn and Margrit recorded some of the frog calls for later ID on their frog app

Betty Bradney and I have written letters of support for the keeping of the wetlands and will forward them to the Council and Mona in the hope that the councillors will have a change of attitude to maintaining the wetlands. Darlington Point does have regular visits of travelling birdwatchers and the wetlands can only add to the enjoyment of their stay in the town. Both the Cumberland Bird Group and the Central Coast Club have had campouts there in recent years so the area does offer good birding and the wetlands can only add to this.

Margrit Martin has reported that 2 of her frog calls have been identified from 'Frogid': Giant Banjo Frog (*Limnodynastes interoris*) and Spotted Marsh Frog (*Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*).



Mona Finley talking to some of the group by Kathy Tenison
A view of the wetlands through the reeds by Rowena Whiting

Bird list compiled by Max O'Sullivan

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Black Duck | White-faced Heron | Yellow Rosella |
| Eastern Rosella | Australian Reed Warbler | Sulphur-crested Cockatoo |
| Little Corella | Galah | Common Blackbird |
| White-plumed Honeyeater | Noisy Friarbird | Little Friarbird |
| Blue-faced Honeyeater | Australian Magpie | Australian Raven |
| Dollarbird | Whistling Kite | Crested Pigeon |
| Laughing Kookaburra | Welcome Swallow | Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike |
| Red Wattlebird | | |

Yarrada Wetlands

From Darlington the convoy of cars headed along the Sturt Highway about 20kms towards Hay to the Yarrada Wetlands which, in November, had some environmental water put into the wetlands there. By the time we arrived, it was getting fairly late so we didn't have a great deal of time to look for birds before retiring to the cars for a late afternoon tea/early dinner.

The Yarrada Wetlands are an important breeding site for cormorants, ibis, egrets and herons but you need a canoe to travel the wetlands to find the breeding colonies. We did record 14 species in the short time we

were there so it certainly attracts plenty of birds in what would normally be a dry billabong. The water should remain for the summer so hopefully the waterbirds would have all successfully bred.

Max O'Sullivan



Yarrada Wetlands compiled by Max O'Sullivan

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Grey Teal | Chestnut Teal | Black Duck |
| Wood Duck | Hoary-headed Grebe | Yellow Rosella |
| Great Cormorant | Little Black Cormorant | Grey Shrike-Thrush |
| Yellow -throated Miner | Blue-faced Honeyeater | Hardhead |
| Purple Swamphen | Tree Martin | |

**An Owlfly (family Ascalaphidae)
by Eric Whiting**
**Members with binos and cameras
to the fore at the Yarrada Lagoon
by Kathy Tenison**

World Wetland Evening – Thursday 31st January 2019



The World Wetland Evening was part of a global event organised to celebrate the positive input wetlands all over the world have in cleaning up river systems, buffering floods, providing habitat for a large diversity of wildlife and providing a wonderful place for us all to visit and enjoy.

Fivebough Wetlands provided an ideal venue for our World Wetland Evening. We saw a good number of bird species (28x) including Freckled Duck, Red-kneed Dotterel, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills. Given we are suffering the effects of a prolonged drought it was great to see these birds calling Fivebough home.

Sixty people took part in the workshop that covered such topics as wetlands in our region, birds, frogs, history, management and climate change impacts. We began the evening with a wonderful Welcome to Country by William Ingram.

Erin Lenon spoke about some of the decisions that are made in order to provide water to wetlands. It is certainly not an easy job to know what water is required where with several delivery partners involved. These decisions include maximising environmental outcomes, not intending harm/adversely, using local knowledge and negotiating consent.

Melva Robb told us all about how the history of Fivebough, including traditional owners, the Wiradjuri people used Fivebough Wetlands as a stop-over between the Murrumbidgee River and the adjacent hills. From the mid 1940's to 1960's approximately 20 ha of the western edge of Fivebough was leased to the Leeton Cannery. Waste from the cannery was consumed by grazing of pigs.

In August 2001, the Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands Trust commenced the nomination for listing Wetlands as being of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands become a Ramsar site under the Convention on 21 October 2002.

Bec Byrne talked about the management of the wetlands. It is a complex job to ensure weeds/pests are under control, Cumbungi controlled, walking track upgraded, new bird viewing shelters put in place, plus keeping up with environmental water releases to name a few. There has been \$647,000 used to upgrade Fivebough since 2015 which is a huge undertaking. There are still many more upgrades in the pipeline.

Cathy Semmler explained climate change, in the Riverina Murray is expected to experience more hot days in the near future and the far future. The region on average is projected to experience an additional 8 hot days in 2030 and 23 more hot days in 2070. There will be lower levels of rainfall and increased moisture stress during winter, spring and autumn. Some of the impacts for wetlands will include:

- Reduced periods of inundation
- Changes in seasonality of flooding events
- Decreased frequency of large breeding events, with population dynamics issues for affected species
- Loss of water-dependent species (e.g. non-burrowing frogs and fish and invertebrates)

The earlier we can prepare for future climate impacts the better we can plan and adapt.

Max O'Sullivan talked about the birds of Fivebough and Tuckerbil giving us insight into the types of birds that are local, those that are migratory and waders. How some birds like to feed in the mud while others like the water a bit deeper. Fivebough and Tuckerbil are managed to try and cater for the varying needs of these birds. Some of the birds come and go at different times of the year like the Brolgas who come in the winter and often remain locally until late spring. Some others come from Siberia all the way to Fivebough.

Carmen Amos provided us with stories about student reactions to frog calls and allowed us to listen to the FrogID app found at www.frogid.net.au/. Some of the frogs we heard on the app were the Peron's tree frog, the Giant Banjo Frog and the Sudell's Frog which are burrowing species. These frogs are all found in the Murrumbidgee Catchment.

Dr Keith Hutton pointed out that all the migratory birds are subject to international agreements with China, Japan, Republic of Korea and others to protect migratory birds that come to Australia from their territories.

Fivebough Wetlands is not only significant in the Riverina and Murray Darling, but also throughout Australia, as far north as Siberia and Japan and beyond the Arctic Circle. And we have it in our own backyard...amazing! We need to look after all of our wetlands.

Many people contributed to the success of the evening and I would like to thank all the speakers, helpers and attendees along with the NSW Department of Industry - Land and water for funding the catering from The Hungry Fox for their wonderful support.

Kathy Tenison



**Carmen Amos and Erin Lenon at the presentation
by Nella Smith
Royal Spoonbills and the Group at the Brolga
Shelter by Kathy Tenison**



Birds at Fivebough on World Wetlands Day 31 January 2019

After the initial meeting in the Presbyterian Church Hall followed by the group meeting at the picnic shelter at Fivebough, the group moved down to the first viewing platform in the wetlands to see what birds were about at that time of the evening. On the way several groups of both **Australian White** and **Straw-necked Ibises** flew over on their way to their night roost away from the wetlands, unlike their cousins the **Glossy Ibis** that fly into wetlands to roost for the night.

At the viewing platform looking over the remaining body of water in the southern pond, we were able to view a goodly array of water birds including **Pelican, Black Swan, Australian Shelduck, Grey Teal, Black Duck, Pink-eared Duck, Hardhead** and a preening **Freckled Duck** close for all to see. As well, there were **Black-winged Stilts**, both **Yellow-billed** and **Royal Spoonbills** – the latter in breeding plumage with their wild head feathers showing, **Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Purple Swamphen, Coot, Red-kneed Dotterel** and a small group of **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** also flew in.

The only raptor seen was a lone **Swamp Harrier** along with a few **Galahs** flying through and hundreds of **Common Starlings** flying in to roost in the reeds for the night.

Other birds possibly seen by some of the other observers would have been **Australasian Shoveller, Chestnut Teal** and **Masked Lapwing** and possibly **Little Black** and **Little Pied Cormorants**.

The fading light got the better of us and we made a hasty exit in the evening light to get back to the cars. It was from all accounts a very successful afternoon

and thanks to Kathy Tenison for doing all the organising beforehand and on the day.

Max O'Sullivan



Group walking out to the Broilga Shelter

Black-tailed Stilt

Photos by Kathy Tenison

Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata*, Monitoring

The **Malleefowl** is a large ground-dwelling bird with strong feet and a short bill, about the size of a chook.

The Malleefowl occurs in semi-arid parts of mainland Australia, ranging from New South Wales (west of the Great Divide), extending into north-western Victoria. I have known of them at Barellan, Binya State Forest, Rankins Springs, Yalgogorin, West Wyalong and Patchewollock.

Malleefowl usually occur in mallee eucalypt woodlands with a dense but discontinuous canopy and a varied shrubby understorey but they can be found in mixed woodlands as well, as we saw at West Wyalong. The key to their presence is the period since the habitat was last burnt, with habitat that has not been burnt for 40–60 years preferred which means that the habitat has largely large old mallee trees. Frequently burnt areas are unsuitable and do not support populations of Malleefowl.

The Malleefowl does not build a nest like most other birds. Instead it uses its strong feet to scrape large amounts of leaf litter and sand from the ground and into a large pile. The eggs are then laid into a cavity at the top of the mound and covered over. As the leaf litter begins to compost it generates heat and this is used to incubate the eggs, rather than sitting on them. The male bird checks the temperature of his breeding mound regularly, and scrapes material onto or off the mound to keep the temperature just right.

Within the past century the range of Malleefowl has contracted, particularly in arid areas and at the periphery of its former range. In the semi-arid zone, where Malleefowl densities are highest, the clearing of

habitat has been the major cause of the marked decline in the distribution of the species. The bird is listed as Vulnerable to extinction and declining.

Researchers will be conducting a project in our region over quite a few years. The Malleefowl Recovery team will establish as many as 41 malleefowl monitoring sites across southern Australia in one of the largest adaptive management experiments ever attempted in Australia. Researchers and volunteers will be checking mounds for usage, visitation by other fauna and other features on a regular basis by researchers and by specially trained volunteers.

Feral predators will be managed in and around treated sites but remain unchecked in control sites, allowing researchers to gauge the effect of predator suppression on the malleefowl population.

The scale of the project means The University of Melbourne researchers are working in close collaboration with the National Malleefowl Recovery Team, Bush Heritage, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and state government agencies in NSW, SA, Victoria and WA (in addition to several other conservation and volunteer organisations) to establish and monitor the sites.



Monitoring Malleefowl is well suited to volunteer involvement and volunteers do a good deal of it. This is a really good excuse to go for a walk in the most biodiverse bit of bushland that we have.

Members of MFN and other organisations recently attended a Malleefowl Mound Monitoring training day at West Wyalong. This was very informative and very professionally conducted. We spent an afternoon looking and learning about methodology and all the aspects of it. The following morning we visited two mounds where the methodology was further explained. Volunteers will be required in November 2019. Another training day will be held then as well. Volunteers will also be needed to collect and go through CT camera cards that have been deployed in the landscape. David Kellett will be speaking at our next meeting so please get your questions ready.



Photos and story by **Nella Smith**

In the Mailbox from Sue Chittick-Dalton, a quick snapshot of a Barking Gecko.

“Barking Gecko *Underwoodisaurus*. Or *Koonisaurus* because of the regular white dots on back and tail. I found it in my basement and it is so different to the normal ones I see regularly.” Sue



Sue also commented how like the dot paintings of Aborigines its markings are.

The other photo is by Phillip Williams

Fish Kills in the Murrumbidgee River System

You have probably heard in the media and the furore about fish kills on the Darling River. We have also had a few of these events on the Murrumbidgee further west from us. This article gives a bit of understanding of how and why it happens.

What has happened?

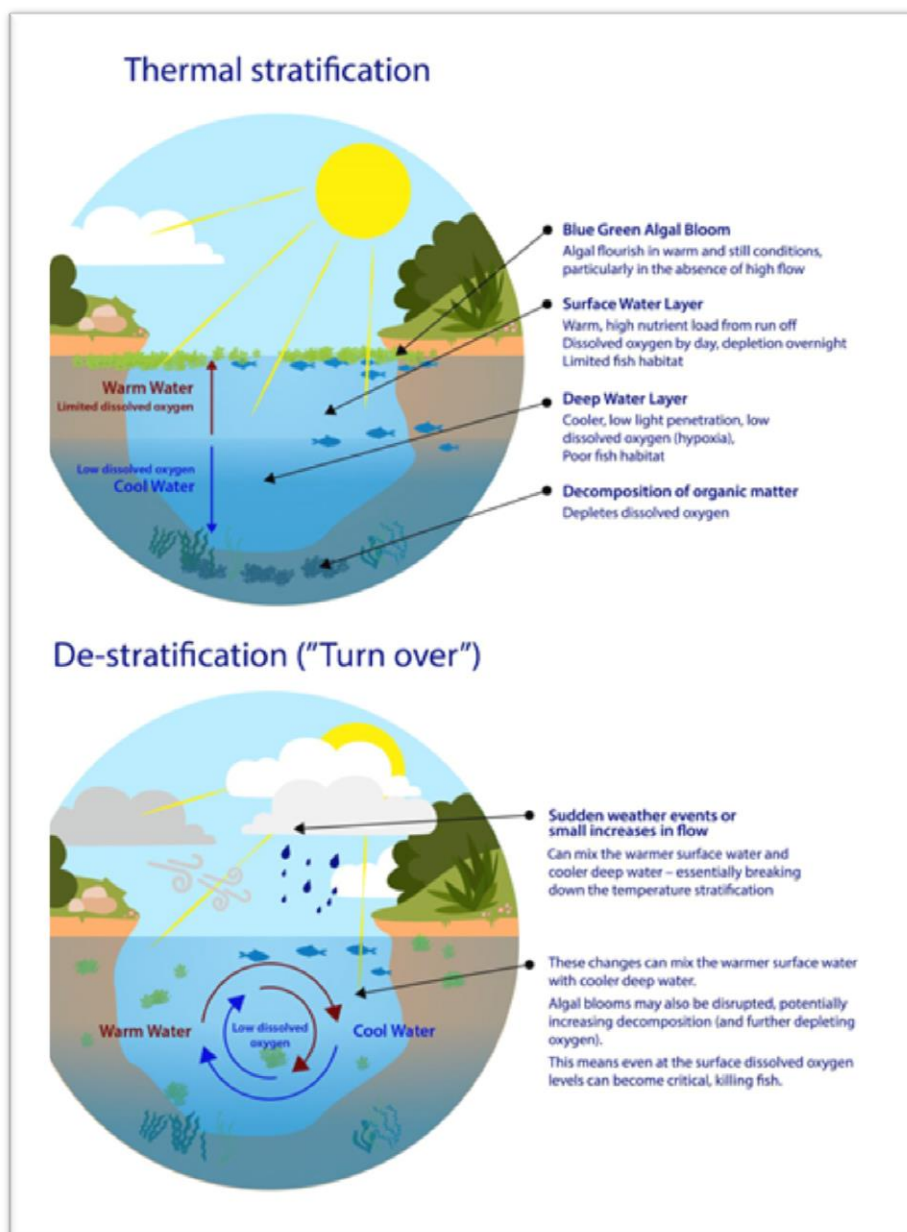
- A week ago up to 2000 dead fish were reported in a small section of the lower Murrumbidgee River upstream of Balranald.
- Fish kills were restricted to the still water immediately upstream of Redbank Weir.
- The majority of dead fish appeared to be carp and native golden perch, with smaller numbers of native bony bream, silver perch and Murray Cod.

Why has it happened?

- Scientists are working to better understand the cause of the fish kills – but recent monitoring has confirmed very low oxygen levels in the weir pool.
- During summer, when river flows stop or are very slow, the water in weir pools can stratify. This means the water forms a layer of cold water and a layer of warm water. Each layer has different oxygen levels.
- Scientists believe a passing cold weather front on the week-end resulted in low temperatures and high winds which mixed these two water layers together. This lowered the amount of oxygen in the entire weir pool and killed the fish.

What is being done?

- Fish refuge flows using water for the environment are being provided into the lower Murrumbidgee River now.
- These flows are in addition to previous deliveries which targeted the Yanga area and should be reaching Balranald now.
- Water holders are working with river operators, water scientists, fisheries managers and ecologists to manage beneficial low flows into the lower Murrumbidgee River.
- The purpose of these flows is to turn the still water at Balranald Weir into a slow flowing river.



- Michael Kitzelmann, the General Manager of Balranald Shire Council said, “We intend that these water deliveries will provide important refuges for native fish and promote movement of fish and other aquatic animals to those refuge areas”.
- “We’ve been working closely together with State and Commonwealth agencies to prevent or minimise future fish kills” he said.
- The water delivery will be made up of water from multiple water holders, including the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.
- Weather forecasts for next few months indicate hot and dry conditions with some cool weather changes suggesting a continued risk of fish mortality. Water managers and scientists are working to develop flows to minimise this risk.
- Field staff are actively monitoring the oxygen levels in the river to help guide water deliveries. This is some of what Carmen Amos does (she spoke about frogs on the World Wetlands Day event)

Historically these events would have occurred every year somewhere on the river and fish would have been able to move away from these de-oxygenated areas but these days there is often nowhere to go. The low flows in the river, the hot conditions and the dis-connectivity and maybe the additional nutrients that we pour in, in the form of phosphorous from our fertilisers and our washing machines are all to blame.

Contributed by Nella Smith

Images courtesy NSW DPI and most information from OEH Water

Fivebough Wetlands – Award

In December 2018, Bec Byrne attended the NSW Lands & Water Excellence Awards, on behalf of Fivebough & Tuckerbil Wetlands team; finalists for an award. The team was nominated for excellence in Community Service and from over 170 nominations, was announced the winner on the night. This honour was received in recognition of the significant ecological, cultural, recreational and educational benefits delivered by the Wetlands for the local Leeton community. The award acknowledges the vision, hard work and dedication of those who have contributed to the Wetlands in many different capacities, through years past and presently to develop the sites. To all these wonderful people, your efforts are greatly appreciated!

A Climate Change and Wetlands event was held at Fivebough on Thursday 31 January, in celebration of World Wetlands Day 2019. Coordinated by Kathy Tenison of Murrumbidgee Landcare, the evening was a great success, with speakers sharing information about Fivebough Wetlands and climate change and the potential impact on such a valuable ecosystem. Over 50

attendees came along to enjoy the event and many came for a wander at Fivebough to take in the stunning landscape and its’ inhabitants at sunset. Glossy Ibis, Freckled Ducks and many other treasures were spotted on the water from the viewing platform of Brolga Shelter.

Visitors may notice Fivebough becoming a bit drier over the coming weeks, as per the management plan for the Reserve, the intention is to allow a drying cycle to maintain the ephemeral wetland pattern of the ecosystem to flourish. Unfortunately it may not be most appealing for aesthetics however the site is a working wetland with ecological management values. The management team always try to ensure there is sufficient water at Fivebough during breeding times to support our precious birdlife.

Bec Byrne NSW Department of Industry – Lands & Water



Shona Cowley (Group Leader, Wagga) and Bec Byrne (Project Officer, Griffith) at the presentation. The Award (below)



When is a Moss not a Moss?

This enigma confronted the group I was with in the Victorian Alps recently when told a low stiff-leaved herb was *Lycopodium festigatum* – the Mountain Clubmoss. It did not look like a clubmoss and at around 20cm high was certainly bigger than any moss they knew. It looked more like one of the many flowering heaths found in the area except that instead of flowers it had erect shoots bearing cylindrical cone-like heads.

The name Clubmoss is misleading as these plants are an entirely separate branch of the plant evolutionary tree – the Class Lycopsideae (flowering plants are in Class Magnoliopsida).

When plants first invaded dry land in the early Silurian period around 420 million years ago (mya), one of the first problems they encountered was support to lift them off the surface. Long stiffer cells evolved as an axis for the photosynthetic cells – the beginning of a stem. These stiffer cells were not conductive, water and nutrients flowed up and down the stems in a film on the outside of the stem, limiting the plants both in height and confining them to moist habitats. The plants were the fore-runners of today's mosses.

By late Silurian to early Devonian c400 mya, the stiffening cells evolved into single tube-like structures and took over the role of water and nutrient transfer. These plants were the early Lycopsideae. With the greater efficiency plants could grow larger. At the same time the plants developed roots with a similar structure to the stems – thus tapping more nutrients and water. By 360-290 mya in the Carboniferous period, lycopods grew in dense forests up to 2 metres high in the swamps that became thick coal beds over eons.

Early lycopods did not develop leaves. The simple tube cells were not efficient enough to support the extra quantities of water required to cool by evaporation the solar heat gained by flat surfaces of leaves. Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere in early Devonian times were over 15 times more than today's. The greenhouse effect was extreme with global temperatures very high. It was a hard battle for plants to keep temperatures of exposed cells below lethal 50°C levels.

By the late Devonian the simple tube stem cells evolved in some plants into the more complicated but highly efficient vascular tissues. These plants were the early ferns and the eventual forerunners of higher plants culminating in today's dominant flowering plants.

As plants spread further across the globe their photosynthesis steadily decreased carbon dioxide levels and oxygen levels increased, so by late Carboniferous times the climate was closer to the present one. Higher oxygen levels led to a UV-shielding ozone layer. Restrictions on leaf development eased. The better vascular systems of ferns began to out class the lycopods and dominance changed.

Today lycopods are represented by three minor families Clubmosses are in one, and the similar Spikemosses (*Selaginella* species) are in another. They differ in that clubmosses produce a single type of spore in their cone-like sporophylls whereas Spikemosses produce both larger and smaller spores in theirs. The third family the Quillworts (*Isoetes* species) produce spores at the base of grass like sporophylls. Quillworts are aquatic and have been found in the Riverina, but would generally be overlooked as young grass shoots. Both Clubmosses and Spikemosses are confined to the moister climes of alpine or coastal woodlands and forests.

Eric Whiting



Winton Wetlands (near Benalla) 11-13 October 2018

The Winton Wetlands are close to Benalla. The printed eBird Field Checklist boasts 191 species of birds as having been sighted there. We visited the Wetlands on 2 days the 10th and 13th of October 2018, however at the time of our visit the Wetlands a lot of the area was dry. These Wetlands are a lot larger than our local Fivebough Wetlands and have a greater range of habitats. We were not able to cover all the areas in the 2 days nor did we see anywhere near the 191 birds on the list.

The first day was very windy and not a good birding day. On arriving at the Mokoan Hub we were pleasantly surprised to find a bird list, map and a very nice café on site. We enjoyed a coffee at the café which seemed to be well

patronised. An officer at the Mokoan Hub talked to us about where to find the birds and other aspects of the Wetlands. The coffee shop looks over an area that would have some water in it with a scope set up to look through. While we were there a bus load of people arrived and a local guide took them to a couple of sites near the coffee shop then to the nearby Education Centre where they had morning tea.

The rest of the day we spent moving around the wetlands looking for birds. The highlight of the day was when we got close to a **Striated Pardalote** who was happy to chirp a lot and pose as we took photos of it.



Winton Wetlands Dead Timber in former dam



Striated Pardalote

Winton Wetlands boasts the “Art in the Landscape” project. The different art works can be seen along Boggy Bridge Road. Our first stop was “Martin’s Barge”. This was an old Barge used years ago to move around the swamp with 4 brightly coloured models of cows on board. Further along this road was the “Boggy Bridge Fish Trees”. Some dead trees had been painted with brightly coloured fish which when viewed at the appropriated angle appear as a complete “fish”. We also came across the CFA Tank. The concrete tank has become the canvas for street artist Guido Van Helton to paint on the faces of three people. (We had visited Benalla and spent time looking at the street art in the town, so this we saw as an extension of that idea.)



Art in the Landscape: Water tank, coloured cows, fish trees

The other area we visited was Greens Hill. There was a large empty stick nest there which we were told was that of a White-bellied Sea Eagle. Here we also found a large red bellied black snake and a Wallaby.

The Wetlands area has quite a history. There were 2 sites we visited that had been the locations for small primary schools. Other signs marked the sites where dwellings had stood before the flooding of the area in

1971 as water storage dam for irrigation. These signs told of the history dwellings and their occupants. Little evidence remained to show a school or residence had existed on these sites. A dam wall had been constructed up one end of the present-day Wetlands to flood the area and form a water storage area. This area was marked by large dead trees. The building of the dam wall and subsequent flooding of the area caused hardship for those who lived on the area before it was flooded. Plans for decommissioning the dam started in 2004 and in its place create the Winton Wetlands. The construction work to make this happen started in 2009. It was finally decommissioned and returned to a wetland in 2010. Returning the area to a wetland was a controversial decision. Farmers were worried about their future and the supply of water to their irrigation farms.

Official Reasons given in some brochures include:

- High losses through evaporation of water in the dam
- Low water quality e.g. blue-green algae
- High cost of maintenance
- Returning the area to wetlands gave water savings, about 20 Giga Litres, to meet the Victorian govt commitment to return some water to the Snowy River.

On the second day that we visited the wetlands we started by looking at the Dam Wall area. It appeared the Dam Wall had been changed and major works carried out to create the wetlands. It was a bit difficult to understand all that had happened.

Then we headed to the Lunette walk. The walk started from an area of plantings done several years ago. The walk was through through a paddock that had a little shade occupied by some sheep, otherwise it was dry and with little birdlife to be seen or heard.

At Humphries Hill there was a camp ground/picnic ground with toilets and an old tank with art work done on the inside of it. Here there was a short walk through some of the dead trees that were described as indigenous trees. There were 2 scar trees and one with a branch with a hole in it. There was no signage to tell us what they were about.



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

We then went to the Duck Pond. Here there was an expanse of water with birds! The highlight here was the **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** that kept moving closer to us and our cameras as we stood still at the water's edge.

At the end of the day we headed up to an area which has been developed with some glamping tents. These appeared to be unoccupied at the time of our visit and with toilets nearby.

The Winton Wetlands was dry as was the rest of the local area due to the drought and bird numbers were well down. I think it is worth another visit when there is more water and the dryland areas are suffering less.

Story and photos by **Penny Williams**

Bird List

Maned Duck (Australian Wood Duck)
 Grey Teal
 Red-necked Avocet
 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
 Australian Pelican
 Nankeen Kestrel
 Silver Gull
 Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike
 Striated Pardalote
 Australian Magpie
 Willie Wagtail
 Crow/raven sp
 Common Starling

Australasian Shoveler
 Pink-eared Duck
 Masked Lapwing
 Eastern Rosella
 Australian White Ibis
 Corella sp.
 Laughing Kookaburra
 Noisy Miner
 Yellow-rumped thornbill
 Welcome Swallow
 Grey Fantail
 White-winged Chough
 Australasian Pipit

Pacific Black Duck
 Pied Stilt
 Black-fronted Dotterel
 Red-rumped Parrot
 Straw-necked Ibis
 Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
 Superb Fairywren
 White-plumed Honeyeater
 Dusky Woodswallow
 Brown Treecreeper
 Magpie-lark

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Blue-tongue Lizard [2]	Karri Rd, Leeton	15/11/18	Barry Allen
Wedge-tailed Eagle [1]	Murrami Rd, Stanbridge	05/12/18	Graham Russell
Superb Parrot [2]	Narrandera Wetlands	05/12/18	Alan Whitehead
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Narrandera Wetlands	05/12/18	Alan Whitehead
Australasian Bittern [2]	Campbell Swamp Griffith	05/12/18	Max O'Sullivan
Australian Little Bittern [3Heard]	Campbell Swamp Griffith	05/12/18	Max O'Sullivan
Marsh Sandpiper [50+]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/12/18	Max O'Sullivan
Sacred Kingfisher [1]	Bella Vista Dr, Leeton – calling all day!	10/12/18	Kathy Tenison
Brolga [1]	Tuckerbil from Koonadan	11/12/18	Max O'Sullivan
Koala [dead juvenile]	Narrandera Common	12/12/18	Warrick Bradney
Wood Sandpiper [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	13/12/18	Max O'Sullivan
Little Bittern [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	02/01/19	Max O'Sullivan
Plumed Whistling-duck [16]	Lake Wyangan Picnic Area	03/01/19	Max O'Sullivan
Dollarbird [1]	Euroley Bridge, Yanco	05/01/19	Kathy Tenison
Superb Parrot [30+]	Yanco Reserve	05/01/19	Kathy Tenison

There were many young birds in the flock which is a very good sign of a successful breeding season.

Painted Honeyeater [2]	Yanco Reserve	05/01/19	Phil Tenison
Brolga [11]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/01/19	Keith Hutton
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [>60]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/01/19	Keith Hutton
Marsh Sandpiper [13]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/01/19	Keith Hutton
Glossy Ibis [>250]	Fivebough Wetlands	08/01/19	Keith Hutton
Magpie Goose [2+ 7 chicks]	Campbell Swamp Griffith	09/01/19	Neil Palframan

Neil saw the adult pair accompanying 7 goslings.

Spotted Harrier [1]	Corbie Hill Rd, Leeton	15/01/19	Max O'Sullivan
White-browed Woodswallow [8]	Outside Leeton Waste Treatment Plant	15/01/19	Max O'Sullivan
Diamond Firetail [2]	Narrandera/Barellan Rd	15/01/19	Max O'Sullivan
Blue Bonnet [4]	Hooley Lookout Fivebough Wetlands	20/01/19	Keith Hutton
Australasian Bittern [2]	Gum Creek Rd via Griffith – in rice	26/01/19	Max O'Sullivan
Great Crested Grebe [1]	Campbells Swamp Griffith	26/01/19	Max O'Sullivan
White-winged Chough [22]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/01/19	Keith Hutton

Unusual to see Choughs at Fivebough and in such a large flock.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/01/19	Keith Hutton
Wedge-tailed Eagle [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/01/19	Keith Hutton
Black Falcon [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/01/19	Keith Hutton
Marsh Sandpiper [6]	The Basin Dam Koonadan/Tuckerbil	29/01/19	Keith Hutton
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [9]	The Basin Dam Koonadan/Tuckerbil	29/01/19	Keith Hutton
Painted Honeyeater [1]	The Basin Dam Koonadan/Tuckerbil	29/01/19	Keith Hutton

Very unusual to see this honeyeater at this site.

Blue-faced Honeyeater [5]	Palla St, Griffith	29/01/19	Virginia Tarr
Purple-backed Wren [2]	Palla St, Griffith	29/01/19	Virginia Tarr
Plumed Whistling-duck [200+]	Coleambally ponds on the main road	30/01/19	Neil Palframan
Freckled Duck [1 preening]	Fivebough Wetlands	31/01/19	World Wetlands Day
Spotted Crake [2]	Causeway at Lake Wyangan – north side	01/02/19	Neil Palframan
Spotless Crake [2]	Causeway at Lake Wyangan – north side	01/02/19	Neil Palframan
Freckled Duck [10+]	Campbell Swamp Griffith	01/02/19	Max O'Sullivan
Grey-crowned Babbler	McNabb Cres Griffith – pair with 3 young	04/02/19	Sue Chittick-Dalton

Sue also reports the daily visitors to her garden – **Blue-faced H/e, Mallee Ringnecks** and **'28' Parrots, Red Wattlebird** and **Grey Shrike-Thrush**.

**** COMING EVENTS ****

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

- 14 February Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: "*Reviving Riverina's Malleefowl*" presentation by David Kellett, Land Service Officer, Riverina LLS
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 16 February Saturday** **Rocky Waterholes, Narrandera**
A twilight meeting for a walk along the channel bank followed by nibbles at the area by the bridge.
Meet at the bridge (off Old Wagga Road) at 5:30pm. Bring binoculars, insect repellent, nibbles and drinks.
Contact: Glenn Currie 0488563321 Email: glenncurrie100@hotmail.com
- 2 March Saturday** **Glossy Black Cockatoo Count**
This year there is a shortage of dams with water and unless we have some good rain dams to sit at will be limited. However then the birds will be concentrated. These will be checked near the date and members advised where they need to go.
Timing will be from 6:30pm until the birds come in (or not) – probably need to stay until 8pm. Please record all species and numbers of fauna that come near the dam or down to drink.. If you are able please record sex of glossies. There are forms for this and they should be sent to Nella so she can collate the results. –Take a chair, a drink, your hat, a recording sheet (which she will give you) or paper and pencil and your binoculars. Some people will not see any targeted species as we don't really know where they are.
Please contact Nella 6959 1210 at Narrandera Graham 0419 350 673 at Leeton or Virginia 6962 5614 at Griffith if you would like to participate. they can contact you with directions to a location nearer the date.
Or Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 6 March Wednesday** **Copy for the March newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 14 March 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.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 16 or 17 March** **Outing is still to be decided - ideas welcome**
Saturday or Sunday **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.
A minimum number of 20 people is required for this to go ahead.
Please contact Nella if you will be unable to go and have paid a deposit, also if you would like to go. Nella Smith 6959 1210.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.

See Page 2 for other events