

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



December 2015 - Issue #233

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

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Objects of the Club

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

The Bitterns are Booming



At Fivebough Wetlands on 12 November

Photos - Australasian Bittern by Phillip Williams;

Bitterns flying over by Rowena Whiting

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CONTRIBUTIONS

**For the February issue by
Wednesday 3 February**

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

**Christmas Break up is at
"Yarrabimbi" on Saturday
12 December**

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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Treasurer:	Phil Tenison	6953 4869	Website Co-ordinator:	Phillip Williams	6953 3524

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:

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Annual Subscriptions:	Family \$45.00	Adult/Single \$35.00	Journal only/Concession	\$25.00	

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

The beginning of a new club year

At the AGM last month Max O'Sullivan was re-elected president with Virginia Tarr joining Nella Smith and Eric Whiting as Vice Presidents. There were no changes to other positions - Penny Williams and Phil Tenison were re-elected as Secretary and Treasurer respectively.

The next message - a big thank you to all of you who have contributed to the newsletter throughout the year and made it what it is.

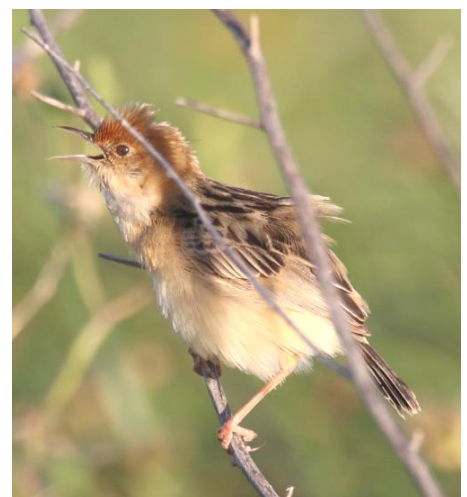
As you will see from the coming events the program is already being planned for next year. Please let Max or Penny know if there is somewhere you'd like to go, also if you are able to lead an outing.

Wishing you all a very **Happy Christmas** and looking forward to seeing you all in the New Year with observations and stories aplenty to tell. **Rowena.**



Melanie Baulch

Some images from Phil Tenison taken at Fivebough Wetlands and Evan Smyles Road.
from left Kestrel, Kestrel chick and Cisticola



Visit to Tharbogang Swamp

28 November 2015

Griffith City Council invited MFN to visit Tharbogang Swamp to view waterbirds, cultural artefacts and on-ground works carried out at the site during the past two years utilising NSW Environmental Trust funding. The visit commenced with a discussion about the type of works which have been carried out at the site including regular bird monitoring (carried out by Max and Joanne), photo monitoring, 45km of direct seeding and 5ha grass seeding, woody noxious weed control, cultural heritage survey and 1.7km fencing and gates replaced. In particular, Joanne emphasised the benefit achieved through the replacement of fences and resulting exclusion of stock. This was particularly visible on the lower banks of the wetland body where the samphire and saltbushes have begun to colonise the previously bare ground. Unfortunately, the generally dry conditions following the direct seeding have not been favourable for a wide scale germination event and



therefore does not appear to be successful at this stage. The good news is that some seed will remain viable for a number of years, so it is likely that some germination and growth will occur in the coming years.

The site visit had been planned with the expectation of an extensive shallow waterbody and abundant waterbirds, however the warm dry conditions and heatwaves



By the remaining water - Rowena Whiting
Artefact – Joanne Tarbit (top)
Artefacts of a working site – Rowena Whiting
Sue standing by a scar tree - Rowena Whiting

during the last month had all but evaporated the water,

resulting in just the dam at the southern end of the site with any water. We commenced the walk with observation of the dam, which only provided one waterbird sighting, a single Grey Teal. Neil commented that only a fortnight prior, the waterbody had been much more extensive and waterbirds had been abundant.



We then walked back to the marker stakes working our way past about 40 of these and observed the stone artefacts at each site. There was some debate within the group as to the value of some of these artefacts, given that many were quite small and possibly the chipped scraps from the creation of tools, rather than the tools themselves.

Similarly some of the group postulated that the artefacts may have washed down from the surrounding McPherson Range ridgeline. Whilst I suspect that some localised movement of the artefacts may have taken place over a period of time, many of the artefacts were observed to be igneous rock types and would in the first instance have been carried to the site from elsewhere. The nearest known igneous rock outcrop is south of Warburn Swamp, 6km to the west of Tharbogang Swamp, though it's not known if the artefacts originated from this site or further afield.

The group also observed some of the scar trees at the site. The observed scars were all small and likely to have been used for food carriers and bowls. Larger scars are also identified elsewhere on the site.

At the end of the visit the group was asked to provide input into the use of unspent grant funds. The group agreed that improving regeneration of mid and upper story trees and shrubs is a priority and could be achieved through planting of tubestock. In addition accessibility could be improved through the construction of a culvert or concrete crossover at the south end of the site, as the existing culvert has been washed out and is impassable following rain.



I would also like to add that I was pleased to follow Max's lead on the second leg of the field trip and visit Campbell's Swamp with the group members who had remained. We were all pleased to see a moderate-high level of water in the wetland following the OEH environmental flow into the wetland the previous fortnight and 20 Magpie Geese utilising various parts of the wetland, which was an uncommon sighting for many of us.

Joanne Tarbit

Bird list for the Tharbogang outing 29/11/15 – Max O'Sullivan

Tharbogang Swamp		Campbell's Swamp	
Grey Teal	Pee-wee	Magpie Goose	Grey Teal
Striated Pardalote	Red-rumped Parrot	Black Duck	Hardhead
Magpie	Australian Raven	Purple Swamphen	Baillon's Crake
Black Kite	Kookaburra	Swamp Harrier	Budgerigar
Tree Martin	Common Starling	Australasian Grebe	Variegated Wren
		Straw-necked Ibis	Eurasian Coot
		Black Swan	Pelican
		Whistling Kite	White-bellied Sea-Eagle

Joanne also attached a link to the Wagga Wiradjuri Heritage Study which has some interesting images and information. http://www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/4646/Wiradjuri_Heritage_Study2.pdf

From the Inbox

Jane Paul has written about an Acacia at Nangar

Hi Eric, I think the wattle at Nangar would be *Acacia lanigera* Woolly Wattle, grows south from Coonabarabran, which is the one we get here. *A. venulosa* is found north from Tamworth. *A. lanigera* has curved and twisted seed pods and flowers lots in winter, so cheerful to see in the forests. Your reports of the Park are wonderful, now I can't wait to go again next year and find all the ones I missed. Wishing you and Rowena a very happy Christmas, wish I was going to the party for a walk at Andrew and Ana's. Best wishes, Jane

~~~~~

### Also about Nangar and the Bottlebrush from the Ranger, Claire Davis

Can you please let Eric know that the Callistemon that lines Terarra Creek within Nangar National Park is *Callistemon sieberi*. I will update the Wildlife Atlas as it should have been recorded but as is often the case sometimes the common plants and animals fail to get recorded. Regards Claire Davis I have just looked up its flowering time – mostly November to January – would be a picture and surely attractive to birds. Rowena.

~~~~~



Callistemon sieberi.

Received via the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria from the Museum

We have recently published a story on Culture Victoria called **Time Flies in Museum Collections - Ornithology in Victoria**

<http://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/land-and-ecology/time-flies-in-museum-collections-ornithology-in-victoria/>

Natural science collections are vast treasure troves of biological data which inform current research and conservation. Alongside bird skins, nests, eggs and DNA samples sits a magnificent collection of rare books, illustrations and images which charts the history of amateur and professional ornithology in Victoria. This story was created by Museum Victoria and showcases their early ornithology collections.

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### And last but not least an Erratum

**Erratum:** In the November newsletter article on Nella's snake ordeal at the Marreba Wetlands, the photo showing the long fangs on the snake did not belong to a Coastal Taipan as implied by the caption but to a North American Rattlesnake - oops!!!

A Mars Bar to Keith for pointing this error out. It's fairly obvious on closer inspection of the Googled picture but the fangs are possibly similar to those of the taipan. The tail rattle is a bit of a give-away.

Max O'Sullivan

People met as planned at the Petersham Rd carpark to Fivebough Wetlands before pooling cars and heading north to Evans Smyles Road. The reason for going there was to look for the **Crimson Chats** and other birds seen by the team of Nella, Penny and Phil T on the recent Twitchathon. The chats weren't to be seen even though Phil T managed to get photographs of them on the Monday after the twitch. The Hooded Robins weren't to be found either, however, the walk up the road did produce a number of good birds with plenty of **Rufous Songlark** and a fleeting look at a small flock of **Budgerigars** flying off into the distance.

We returned to Fivebough around 6.45pm – way too early for the hoped for **Australasian Bitterns** that were also a part of the twitch team's count the fortnight before. So we settled down in the shelter for drinks and nibbles before heading into the swamp to see what birds were coming in to roost at that hour. Through a break in the cumbungi, just below the T-intersection, we all saw plenty of birds – ibis, spoonbills, shelducks, egrets, herons, terns and a mixture of ducks (see list below).

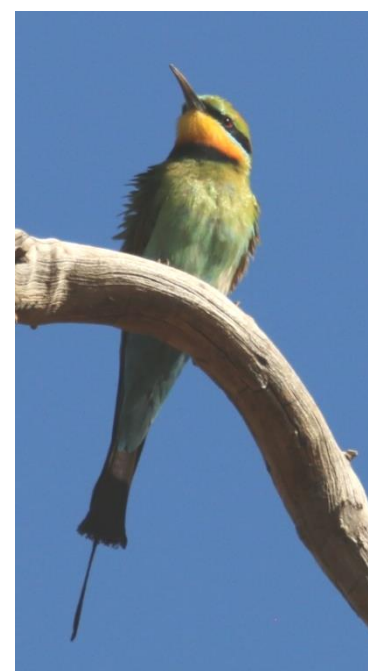
People began to disperse and the Narrandera and Griffith contingents decided to return to the cars to go home. This was around 7.45pm. On the way past the hide, a group of us looked up to see two bitterns flying overhead [see Phillip's photo on cover – Ed] and people with cameras managed to get some good shots in the light of the setting sun. In the meantime, several bitterns were heard booming – actually, they were heard as soon as we started the walk from the shelter.

We all felt that we had achieved our objective having seen the two bitterns so clearly but on the way back we ran into Keith Hutton who was on his way into the wetlands to wait until 8.10pm for the fly-out of more bitterns. As it was just before 8 when we met him, we decided to stay until Keith's time and sure enough, 12 birds flew up from the swamp from the Hooey Lookout end and we had magnificent views of the birds. Unfortunately, by that stage, the light was poor and Phil Williams, Rowena and Phil Tenison felt they got a photo of the flock – at least they were identifiable as being bitterns [see Rowena's photo on cover – Ed.] The clearest shots by them when viewed later only got 9 birds in view but there were definitely 12 flying together.

Keith conferred later that several others flew past him as it got towards 8.30 and the light was fading fast. So, in all, we estimated at least 17 birds in flight with another 3, possibly 4, calling from the cumbungi.

It was interesting to hear that the booming males called differently - one only boomed twice in succession whilst another, we assume it to be a different male, boomed three times and possibly the dominant one boomed four times. They would stop for a short time before repeating the sequence.

This incredible irruption of birds in such numbers has astounded both Keith and Matt Herring who came to see the display on Monday night (16 Nov.). Keith has never recorded this many birds at Fivebough before – 17 seems to be the maximum recorded in the early 1990s.



Photos by Phil Tenison  
Rainbow Bee-eater (above)  
Intermediate Egret (left)

Keith is maintaining a close watch on the water level to ensure the perfect amount for the birds to breed successfully and it is hoped there will be some successful nests this time around. Last year the only known nest was predated by foxes, it was assumed.

On a visit there on Wednesday night (18<sup>th</sup>), I counted 20 different birds in flight plus the 2 or 3 booming – but there could have been more.

On top of that, there were well over 2,000, possibly over 3,000, **Glossy Ibis** flying in to roost for the night along with over 500 **Whiskered Tern**.

What an incredible boost for the wetlands as a Ramsar site of major significance.

Max O'Sullivan

**Bird list for the two sites visited on 14/11/15.**

**Evans Smyles Road**

|                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Nankeen Kestrel           | Peaceful Dove           |
| Crested Pigeon            | Common Bronzewing       |
| Major Mitchell (H)        | Galah                   |
| Red-rumped Parrot         | Blue Bonnet             |
| Eastern Rosella           | Cockatiel               |
| Budgerigar                | Laughing Kookaburra     |
| Rainbow Bee-eater         | Tree Martin             |
| Welcome Swallow           | Yellow-rumped Thornbill |
| Southern Whiteface        | White-plumed H/e        |
| Little Friarbird          | Australian Raven        |
| Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike |                         |
| Willy Wagtail             | Pee-Wee                 |
| Apostlebird               | Jacky Winter            |
| White-winged Chough       |                         |
| Rufous Songlark           | Double-barred Finch     |

**Fivebough Wetlands**

|                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Little Pied Cormorant    | Little Black Cormorant  |
| Great Cormorant          | Whiskered Tern          |
| Masked Lapwing           | Marsh Sandpiper         |
| Sharp-tailed Sandpiper   | Australian Shelduck     |
| Magpie Goose             | Black Swan              |
| Plumed Whistling-duck    | Wood Duck               |
| Black Duck               | Grey Teal               |
| Australasian Bittern     | White-faced heron       |
| Black-winged Stilt       | White-necked Heron      |
| Little Egret             | Cattle Egret            |
| Great Egret              | Royal Spoonbill         |
| Yellow-billed Spoonbill  | Pelican                 |
| Straw-necked Ibis        | Australian White Ibis   |
| Glossy Ibis              | Red-necked Avocet       |
| Swamp Harrier            | Spotted Harrier         |
| Sulphur-crested Cockatoo | Little Corella          |
| Superb Wren              | Australian Reed-Warbler |
| Little Grassbird (H)     | Spotless Crake (H)      |

**Photos:**

**Crimson Chat (male and Juvenile) by Phil Tenison**  
**Fivebough at sunset by Rowena Whiting**



**An addition to the bittern numbers since the outing.** On the very hot and windy Friday evening of 20<sup>th</sup> November an English visitor and I counted 34 bitterns flying up to the roost site and on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> Keith counted 32! What an incredible number to be in the one wetland and for such a long time. I can't believe such numbers will breed there as there are too many but I think they may be just waiting for the local rice crops to reach a height that will enable them to disperse and hopefully breed there.

Keith reports that the **BITTERN BONANZA** started on 3 November when he recorded just 4 and increased thereafter reaching the maximum of over 30 by late November. Numbers since 30 November have reduced to 13 being seen almost nightly. On the night of 2 December Phil, Kathy myself and a visitor with Kathy sat patiently in the hide until almost dark with no bitterns showing and then just as I was about to suggest we leave, 2 birds flew up past the hide around 8.35 and they were followed by a fly-past of 11 together – WOW! Phil took some photos but the light was fading fast by that time. So although the numbers have dropped considerably, there seems to be the 13 remaining at least until this report was written. No booming was heard that evening so maybe the males have already attracted their females and, hopefully, some of the 30+ might be already nesting at Fivebough!

One further note about Evans Smyles Road, I went back on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> November and found a pair of **Crimson Chat** and a male **Hooded Robin** where the twitch team had seen them and the budgies were also still present. When Phil T sent his photos of the chats Keith pointed out that the one we thought was a female was actually a juvenile bird and on closer inspection, I agreed. You can see the typical yellow ceres at the base of the bill that indicates a young bird (see Phil's photo). So it appears the chats have bred there.



**Max O'Sullivan**

## What Pollinates our Flowers?

Ever sat down and watched a flower or a small group of flowers for ten minutes at a time? That is what people were asked to do during the week of 15-22 November. To be precise they were asked to see and record what visited the flower(s). Anything that alighted on or crawled over the flower counted. It was all part of the Wild Pollinator Count project – a scientific study to assess what pollinates flowers in Australia.

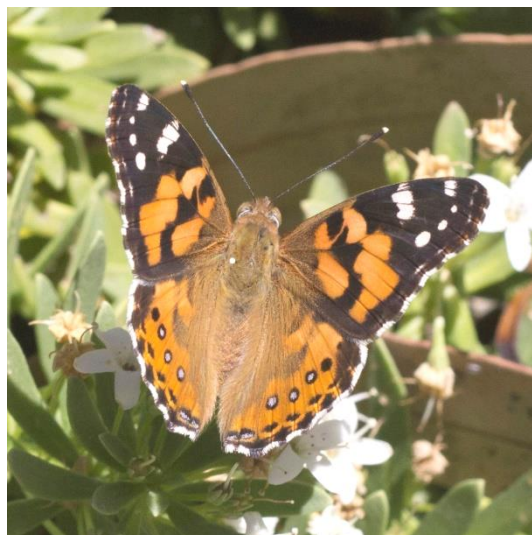
To most of the population the answer is obvious, honey-bee. Maybe some birds, notably honeyeaters may help and over in the west there is that Pygmy Possum that features on some TV shows. Yet honey-bees are an European introduction, so what did the work before they were introduced? Do they still play a significant part in pollination across the country? Surprisingly there is very little reliable information. Hence the project.

A casual observation of several flowers quickly reveals that several types of insects visit flowers. Not all do so with the intention of feeding on honey. Some are predators often lying in wait for the honey eaters. Spiders are often these predators as well. Nevertheless anything that comes in contact with the stamens can pick up pollen, however accidentally it may be, and transmit it to the stigma of another flower thus pollinating the recipient.

To aid counting, the organisers have produced a Tally Sheet divided up into simple categories – bees, beetles, butterflies and moths, flies, wasps, and 'others'. Three well illustrated pages are a quick reference guide.

Under 'bees' on the Tally sheet there is a row for honey-bees of course. There is a row for Blue-banded bees. These have been noted as being quite common natives associated with pollination. What is not known is how widespread they are or what flower species they prefer. Another row is for other native bees – science has identified quite a number but know less about them. A general guide to telling whether an insect is a bee or not, is that bees have a single pair of mostly transparent wings like flies, but usually hold them flat along the body when at rest. Flies usually hold them at an angle of 45 degrees. Bee wings are usually broader closer to the tips whereas fly wings are broader through the middle section. Head shape also generally differs, triangular or tear-shaped with long, oval eyes and moderately long antennae for bees, rounded with big round eyes and short antennae for flies.

Beetles are distinguished by the hardened pair of outer wings. Ladybirds with their spotted rounded bodies are given a separate row on the tally sheet under the general category of beetles. Many ladybirds are predators as gardeners know, but not all – the Pumpkin Beetle is one of the exceptions.



Butterflies are common flower visitors as are moths. The common assertion that butterflies fly by day and moths by night has so many exceptions that it should be well and truly forgotten. A better way, though still a broad generalisation, is that butterflies will hold their wings vertically together at rest whilst moths hold them back alongside the body.

Photos by Eric and Rowena Whiting  
From top: flies(2), wasp, bee,  
soldier beetle, moth and butterfly

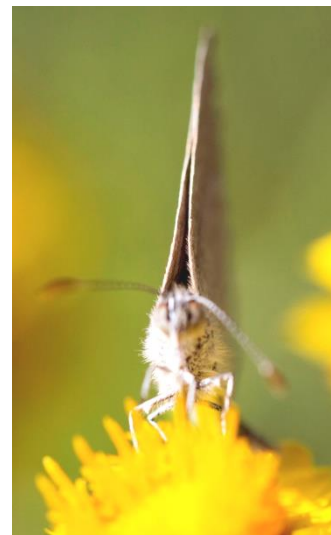


Apart from being distinguished from bees (and wasps), flies warrant a closer look. There are hundreds of different types differing in size, shape, and in particular body colour. They are not just Blue-bottles, or the pesky things that cause so much trouble when we are outside during summer. One particular group, the Hover-flies should be watched for their amazing flying abilities.

So next time you have a few moments to spare, spend some time looking for all those flower visitors, preferably with paper and pencil to record what you see.

Go onto the website [www.wildpollinatorcount.com](http://www.wildpollinatorcount.com) to pass on your results or just for further information including a list of identification references. To see what others have observed try the website [www.bowerbird.org.au](http://www.bowerbird.org.au) and search for 'Wild Pollinator Count' in projects.

**Eric Whiting**



## **Twitchathon Report – ‘In the Absence of Max’ Team**

Phil and Kathy Tenison and Penny Williams and I began on the river for the usual river birds none of which we found. Next year we might just start in Narrandera, Phil. There were numerous flocks of Superb Parrots and even Grey-crowned Babblers which were hard to find last year.

Tuckerbil was good because the gate was open but we risked not seeing a Zebra Finch and a Red-capped Robin by not walking. The White-backed Swallows and the Red-backed Kingfisher were absent but Magpie Geese and Native-hens appeared unexpectedly.



Photos by Phil Tenison  
Crimson Chat taking off (Evan Smyles Road), at Fivebough Wetlands

I was a bit hesitant about Evans Smyles Road because it is so changeable and quite a long way but it produced some lovely threatened woodland species namely Hooded Robin, Crimson Chat and a chatter of budgies.

Sadly we ran out of time to visit Andrew and Ana's for the Glossy Black Cockatoos as we had to be at Fivebough next, it was getting a bit late but we managed a good view of Avocets, lots of Stilts, Swans and Whiskered Tern from the lookout.

We raced to the T-intersection for the shorebirds and there was now plenty of mud for flocks of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, a few Greenshanks, Marsh Sandpiper, Red-kneed Dotterel and probably others.

Keith said that the Australasian Bittern would appear at 8.05pm and do you know what? They did. Four of them! Dinner at the Tenison's was well received and appreciated greatly, thanks Kathy.

An early start in the morning for the Binya run.

The Winery was good for Painted Honeyeater, Spiny-cheeked and one lone Major Mitchell. Binya was good for Speckled Warbler, Splendid Wren, Turquoise Parrots (ducking out in ones) and Mulga and Ring-necked Parrots but not for Eastern Yellow Robin.



Barren Box provided mostly already seen species except for White-winged Fairy-wren, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Zebra Finch and Nankeen Night Heron.

The Griffith Sewage Ponds was the only place where there were ducks. We also encountered our opposition there. A bit of mopping up around town did not produce a Red Wattlebird but we did find the Rainbow Lorikeet.

Thanks, Phil for providing most of the infrastructure and patience.

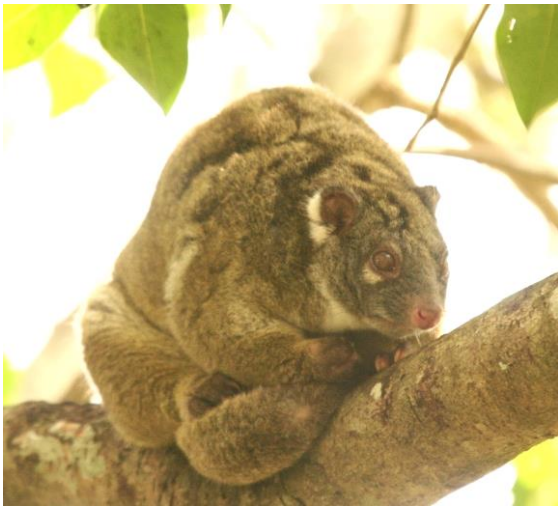
**Nella Smith**



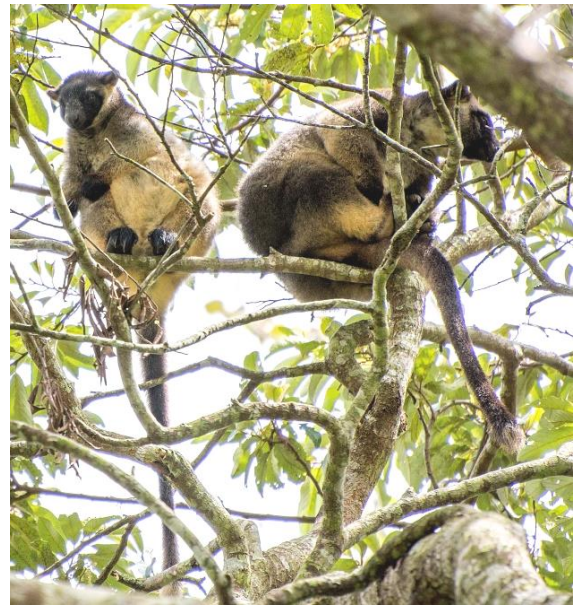
## Penny and Phil's visit to Yungaburra

Penny and Phil Williams had two nights with me when I was house-sitting in Yungaburra in late September. Fortunately, it was drama-free unlike Nella's visit the next week after they left for Undarra Lava Tubes and Mount Surprise.

We managed to visit most of the sites around the Atherton Tableland and they both managed to get some good photos of the local birds and animals. Close-by was Peterson Creek at Yungaburra which is a very reliable site for platypus as well as a good birding site. **Lumholtz Tree-Kangaroo** can be seen there but is very difficult and I only saw one the whole time I was there.



However, a very co-operative **Green Possum** was easily seen on most visits. It is called green because its fur is a mix of black, grey and yellow fur giving it a greenish tinge. When wet after a shower, it looks much greener and I was misinformed years ago that it was because of a fungi in the fur that turns green when wet. However, this

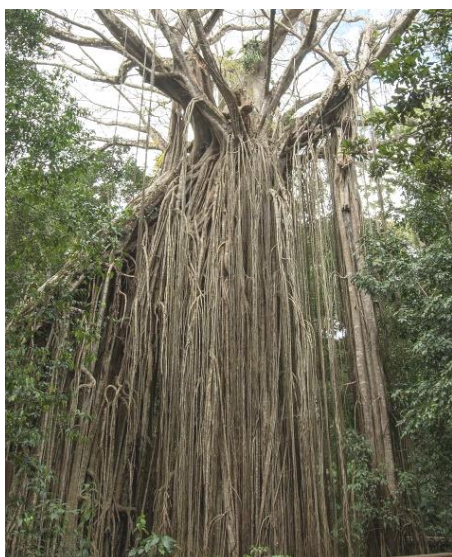


Photos by Phillip Williams  
Clockwise from above: Tree Kangaroos, Fig Birds, Curtain Figtree, Pied Monarch and a Green Possum by Mick Tealing



theory seems not to be the case.

Close-by is the Curtain Fig Tree National Park and we had views of both the **Grey-headed Robin**, **Pale Yellow Robin** as well as a **Pied Monarch**.



A visit to the Nerada Tea Plantation and factory just out of Malanda was a more reliable daytime site to see the tree-kangaroo which are nearly always present in the trees around the cafe. We were fortunate as the day we were there, there were 4 in the one tree. When partaking of tea and scones, Phil managed a good shot of a pair of **Fig Birds** whilst Penny and I were sipping our ginger and lemon tea!!

Next was a visit to Mount Hipipamee National Park, also known as The Crater NP, where there is a known bower of the most beautiful **Golden Bowerbird**. Unfortunately, we got there in the late afternoon and the light inside the rainforest was not good so Phil only managed some very dark shots of the male bird coming in to his bower. Other bird watchers I directed to the bower site ended up being chased by a very aggressive **Southern Cassowary** but fortunately none of the times I went were fraught with such danger. The only Cassowary I saw was on a trip to Etty Bay just south of Innisfail where one was wandering around the camp

ground close to the beach. There was a reported male with 4 chicks there also but it didn't show on the morning I visited.

Other places we went to were Lake Eacham, Lake Barrine and Hastie Swamp all excellent sites for birds and photo opportunities. Phil got a great photo of a **Tooth-billed Bowerbird** above his display arena at Lake Barrine and an **Australian Reed-Warbler** at Hastie Swamp.



Hastie Swamp is like Fivebough Wetlands here and I visited it regularly. Mornings were best around 8.30 when huge numbers of **Magpie Geese** fly in from local feeding areas to roost for the day. It is an amazing sight to see well over a thousand geese coming in to the swamp – a sight only bettered by even greater numbers in Kakadu. The swamp is



also a good spot to see whistling-duck, both **Plumed** and **Wandering Whistling-duck**. Also present on most visits was a lone **Black-necked Stork (Jabiru)** which was photographed by a local birder feeding on an **Australasian Grebe**. It was also reported that a pelican was also seen swallowing one – poor little grebes! During my 2 months there, the water level dropped considerably so a number of wading birds disappeared towards the end of my stay.



Other birds of note in the area were over 50 **Australian Pratincole** and 7 **Australian Bustard** in freshly ploughed paddocks just out of Atherton. Both **Sarus Crane** and **Brolgas** were a very common sight the whole time but numbers dropped gradually towards the end of October as the cranes moved off towards the gulf and Northern Territory in anticipation of the coming wet season.

Just west of Atherton, the rain forest and rich agricultural areas of the tableland soon give way to very dry country where the irrigation from Lake Tinaroo is utilised to produce all the bananas, mangoes and other tropical fruits we see in our supermarkets here. The area has also become a massive sugar cane growing district and even in the wetter areas around Atherton, sugar cane is taking over from the traditional crops of potatoes and corn. It's a bit like cotton becoming more common in the Riverina than the traditional rice farms during the past 10 to 20 years.

**Max O'Sullivan**

**Photos:**

**Tooth-billed Bowerbird (top left) - Phillip Williams**  
**Magpie Geese coming into land (top right) – Penny Williams**  
**Plumed Whistling-Ducks and Magpie Geese (above) – Phillip Williams**

## President's Annual Report – 2015

This year began with the 20 Year Celebration of the formation of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists and was a rerun of the first outing to Fivebough Wetlands lead by Keith Hutton as he originally did 20 years ago when the club was formed in October 1994. This was followed by a social gathering at 'Yarrabimbi', Andrew Thompson's place on Colinroobie Rd. [See Nov. and Dec. 2014 newsletters]



Not to be outdone, the Club's Xmas event was also held at Andrew and Ana's with a late afternoon walk followed by good food and chats with the many club members who attended. The highlight of the walk was to see 11 **Glossy Black Cockatoo** come in to drink at Andrew's dam. [See Dec. 2014 newsletter] Many thanks to Andrew and Ana for inviting the club to their property and to Ana for her wonderful catering.

The next major event was the annual trip to the mountains in mid-January where we stayed in the Scouts'

**Left: Glossy Black Cockatoo  
Phillip Williams  
Below: Gang-Gang Cockatoos  
Graham Russell**

accommodation at Cabramurra.

We had been there a number of years before and felt it was worth another visit. Catering was very capably done by Ana with assistance from Penny on the Friday night and then Neil and Johanna took over the kitchen on the Saturday evening and we certainly didn't starve on the weekend. Thanks to Penny for organising the camp and Neil for his organising and leading the activities for the weekend. [See Feb. 2015 newsletter]

The rest of the year had a mix of varying meetings, outings and other activities. Highlights of meetings included a talk by Matt Herring giving an update of the Bitterns in Rice study and to thank the club for our donation to assist in buying satellite tracking devices for the continued work for the next rice season (February meeting), Meredith Billington and Peter Butler gave an interesting talk on their year as volunteers in the Solomons in 2013 (July meeting), Nella Smith also talked about her trip to Canada and Alaska (September meeting) and Phil and Kathy Tenison gave a presentation on their recent trip to East Africa – Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya (October meeting).



Other activities included members assisting with the planting of over 90 plants of the Holly Leaf Grevillea (*Grevillea illicifolia*) at Round Hill Nature Reserve in July with Rangers Allan McLean and David Egan's guidance [See Aug. newsletter].

Melanie Baulch, Dick Green and myself assisted Nella with her St Joseph's school outing along the Murrumbidgee River just out of Narrandera [See June newsletter].

**Taking a break at Eagle Falls in the  
Cocoparras - photo: Penny Williams**

Several other activities were cancelled or postponed because of wet weather early in the year – the annual Koala count at Narrandera and tree planting in Griffith in particular.

Outings of note included a visit to Barry Hehr's property to look at his proposal to fence off a section of his property to protect the hills' flora. The area is a Glossy Black Cockatoo habitat and Barry had applied to the MFN for environment funding. The club agreed to support Barry's application.

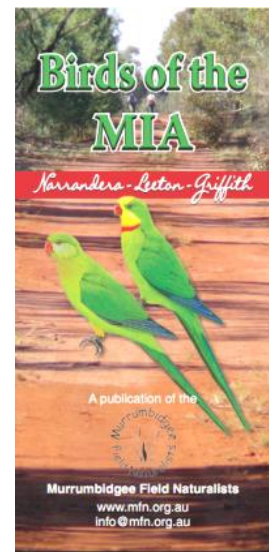
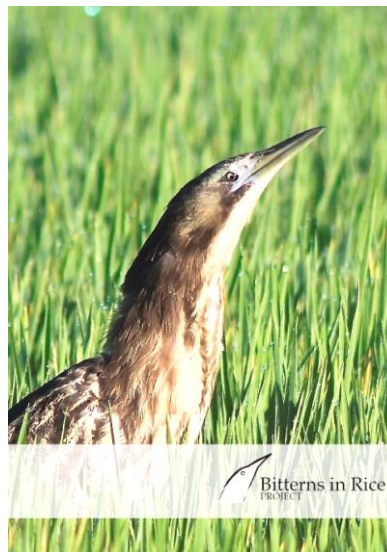
Members also joined other groups on various outings: the Dubbo Field Naturalists at Cocoparra



National Park and a couple of Wagga groups at the October outing organised by Dick Green [See November newsletter for details of that saga].

The Spring Camp at Nangar National Park near Forbes proved very successful and thanks to Graham and Dione Russell for all their organisation, cooking and guiding [See October newsletter].

There were two important brochures published this year. Firstly the long awaited upgrade of the Birds of the MIA brochure was printed and thanks to Nella and Johanna for their help in putting that together. This brochure combined the original three separate guides into the one. Members also attended the launch of Matt Herring's booklet on the Bitterns in Rice project. This followed on from Matt's continued study of bitterns over the winter period. This was dramatically highlighted by the first bittern, Robbie, to be satellite tracked from late January. His epic journey from the rice fields near Coleambally to South Australia and Western Victoria and back has been well documented on Matt's Bitterns in Rice website.



Several members undertook training to maintain the club's upgraded website and our thanks go to Kimberley Beattie for running those sessions for us.



**Painted Honeyeater  
Phillip Williams**

When the birding site referred to as 'The Winery' on the Whitton Stock Route Road was sold after Terrell's winery closed a year or so ago, the club approached the new owners, Casella Family Wines, in order to ensure the area was protected from future winery expansion. This was guaranteed by the new owners so the valuable nesting site for the threatened Painted Honeyeater will remain undisturbed.

Fivebough Wetlands was closed to the public in late April but due to the winter rains access for heavy machinery to rebuild the walking tracks had to be postponed and no date has yet been fixed to start the work on the upgrade. The wetlands in the meantime have been finally reopened 'officially' to the public by the removal of the barricade across the foot bridge.

Congratulations to the two teams who went into the recent NSW Twitchathon. The In the Absence of Max team of Nella, Penny and Phil T got a very creditable 145 species whilst the Carefree Curlews of Sue, Virginia and her Dad, John Tarr, got 98. They were given the wrong information about Fivebough not being open so missed adding quite a few more to their list.

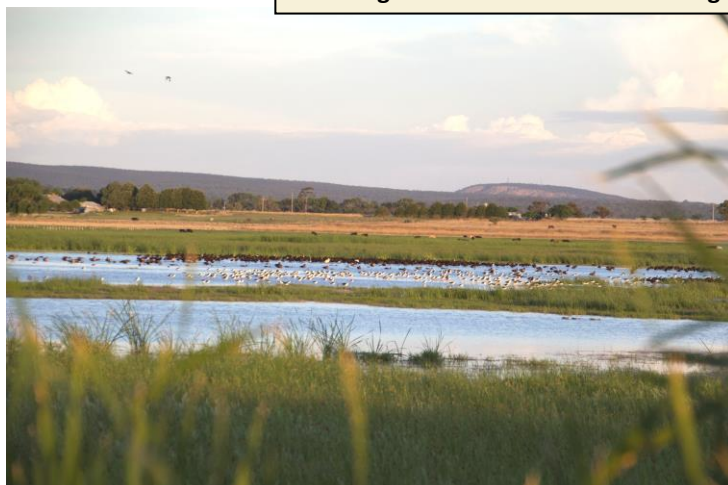
I wish to thank Rowena for her continued dedication to the club newsletter. It has maintained such a high quality over the year and receives well deserved praise from other clubs for its breadth of articles and beautiful photographs. Such a high standard is not an easy task and I

**Fivebough Wetlands - Rowena Whiting**

thank her for her continued contribution.

A big thank you also to the Environment Grants Committee for their efforts over the year.

Finally, thanks to all club members for your support throughout the year and in particular to Penny Williams, our club secretary, Phil Tenison, our treasurer, and Andrew Thompson the club auditor for their major contributions to keeping the club running smoothly particularly during my three months 'disappearance' to Far North Queensland.



**Max O'Sullivan**

# MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

|                                                                                                                   |                                     |           |                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| <b>Spotted Nightjar</b>                                                                                           | Narrandera Hills                    | 23/10/15  | Nella Smith     |
| <b>Variiegated Wren</b> [4]                                                                                       | Palla St, Griffith                  | all month | Virginia Tarr   |
| <b>Red Wattlebird</b>                                                                                             | Cutler Ave, Griffith                | all month | Virginia Tarr   |
| <b>Latham's Snipe</b> [4]                                                                                         | Five Mile, Narrandera               | 07/11/15  | Nella Smith     |
| <b>Brown Quail</b> [2]                                                                                            | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 08/11/15  | Keith Hutton    |
| <b>Magpie Goose</b> [15]                                                                                          | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 10/11/15  | Keith Hutton    |
| <b>Pallid Cuckoo</b>                                                                                              | Tharbogang Swamp, Griffith          | 10/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Red-bellied Black Snake</b>                                                                                    | Narrandera Common                   | 11/11/15  | Warick Bradney  |
| <b>Glossy Black Cockatoo</b> [7+]                                                                                 | 'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton             | 11/11/15  | Andrew Thompson |
| <b>Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo</b>                                                                                  | Evans Smyles Rd via Leeton          | 13/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Budgerigar</b> [6+]                                                                                            | Evans Smyles Rd via Leeton          | 13/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Marsh Sandpiper</b> [58]                                                                                       | Settling pond at Fivebough Wetlands | 15/11/15  | Keith Hutton    |
| <b>Sharp-tailed Sandpiper</b> [>500]                                                                              | Settling pond at Fivebough Wetlands | 15/11/15  | Keith Hutton    |
| <b>Superb Parrot</b> [3]                                                                                          | 'Arcadia', via Narrandera           | 16/11/15  | Jan Strong      |
| <b>Plumed Whistling-duck</b>                                                                                      | 'Arcadia', via Narrandera           | 16/11/15  | Jan Strong      |
| Jan reports two adults with 5 ducklings on their dam.                                                             |                                     |           |                 |
| <b>Budgerigar</b> [15]                                                                                            | Campbell's Swamp, Griffith          | 19/11/15  | Neil Palframan  |
| <b>Magpie Goose</b> [8]                                                                                           | Campbell's Swamp, Griffith          | 19/11/15  | Neil Palframan  |
| <b>Black-eared Cuckoo</b> [4]                                                                                     | Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest      | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo</b> [4]                                                                              | Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest      | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Shining Bronze Cuckoo</b> [1]                                                                                  | Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest      | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Restless Flycatcher</b> [1]                                                                                    | Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest      | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>White-winged Triller</b> [6]                                                                                   | Wattle Dam, Binya State Forest      | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Australasian Bittern</b> [34]                                                                                  | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Nankeen Night Heron</b> [3]                                                                                    | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Magpie Goose</b> [10+]                                                                                         | Campbell's, Wyangan and Fivebough   | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Plumed Whistling-duck</b> [6]                                                                                  | Dam on Petersham Rd, Leeton         | 20/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Chestnut Teal</b> [pr]                                                                                         | Binya State Forest                  | 21/11/15  | Keith Hutton    |
| <b>Freckled Duck</b> [4+]                                                                                         | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 21/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Buff-banded Rail</b>                                                                                           | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 21/11/15  | Nella Smith     |
| <b>Brown Honeyeater</b>                                                                                           | Binya State Forest, southern end    | 21/11/15  | Keith Hutton    |
| <b>Little Grassbird</b> [1]                                                                                       | 11 Pendula St., Leeton              | 23/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| This was unexpected and I had to get my bins to be certain. It spent the day at the bird bath.                    |                                     |           |                 |
| <b>Latham's Snipe</b> [4]                                                                                         | Rice crop Murrumbidgee area         | 23/11/15  | Peter Draper    |
| Peter reported that this is the first time he has seen more than a single snipe in the one spot.                  |                                     |           |                 |
| <b>Glossy Ibis</b> [11]                                                                                           | Campbell's Swamp, Griffith          | 23/11/15  | Neil Palframan  |
| <b>White-bellied Sea-Eagle</b>                                                                                    | Campbell's Swamp, Griffith          | 23/11/15  | Neil Palframan  |
| <b>Spotted Harrier</b>                                                                                            | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 23/11/15  | Keith Hutton    |
| <b>Crimson Chat</b> [pr]                                                                                          | Evans Smyles Rd via Leeton          | 28/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Nankeen Kestrel</b> [3 chicks]                                                                                 | Koonadan Historic Site              | 28/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| Three chicks in nest at the entrance to Koonadan with a pair of <b>Zebra Finch</b> nesting in the same structure. |                                     |           |                 |
| <b>Painted Honeyeater</b>                                                                                         | Apostle Yard Rd via Leeton          | 28/11/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Ground Cuckoo-Shrike</b> [8]                                                                                   | Five Mile, Narrandera               | 28/11/15  | Nella Smith     |
| <b>Magpie Goose</b> [20+]                                                                                         | Campbell's Swamp, Griffith          | 29/11/15  | Neil Palframan  |
| <b>Baillon's Crake</b> [2]                                                                                        | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 30/11/15  | Sydney visitors |
| <b>Spotted Crake</b> [3]                                                                                          | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 30/11/15  | Sydney visitors |
| <b>Black-tailed Native-hen</b> [1]                                                                                | Fivebough Wetlands                  | 02/12/15  | Max O'Sullivan  |
| <b>Diamond Firetail</b> [2]                                                                                       | Wattle Dam Binya State Forest       | 05/12/15  | Neil Palframan  |

# \*\*\*\* COMING EVENTS \*\*\*\*

- 10 December Thursday**      **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.  
**Topic:** First Aid Talk by Mat Simpson from the local ambulance service.  
**Contact:** Penny Williams 6953 3524  
**Email:** [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)
- 12 December Saturday**      **Christmas Break up**  
**Venue:** "Yarrabimbi" – Ana and Andrew's place  
**Meet at the house at 6pm** for a late afternoon walk followed by a meal. Catering will be a communal effort with everyone to bring a dish – nibbles, meat and salads or desert. BYO drinks. Please let Penny know what you will bring so she can co-ordinate by 9 December, then we can finalise it at the December meeting.  
**Contact** Penny Williams on 6959 3524 or preferably **Email:** [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)
- 14 December Monday**      **Due date for booking your spot on the summer camp at Falls Creek**  
**See below for details.**
- 2016**
- 15-17 January**                      **Summer Camp at Falls Creek**  
**Friday to Sunday**                      **Staying at the Australian Alpine Lodge**  
We will leave on Friday morning and return on Sunday afternoon.  
The campout will be for 2 nights and will be at a cost of \$40 per night per person plus possibly \$30 for catering. You will need to bring your own bed linen and towels. Own transport is required, but we will car pool where possible. Further details will be sent out separately after Thursday's meeting.  
Please contact Max O'Sullivan if you intend to go; **numbers and money for accommodation are required to secure our booking by 14 December.**  
Phone Max on 6953 4726 or Email: [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)
- 1 February Monday**                      **World Wetlands Day**
- 3 February Wednesday**                      **Copy for the February newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**  
Email: [ericwhiting4@bigpond.com](mailto:ericwhiting4@bigpond.com). Phone: 6953 2612.
- 11 February Thursday**                      **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.  
**Topic:** to be decided,  
**Contact:** Penny Williams 6953 3524  
**Email:** [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)
- 14 February Sunday**                      **Rocky Waterholes, Narrandera**  
A twilight meeting for a walk along the channel bank followed by nibbles at the area by the bridge.  
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 6953 4726  
Email: [murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com](mailto:murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com)

**Results of the Aussie Backyard Bird Count, held during National Bird Week in October.** With more than one million birds counted and 563 species sighted during the week-long count, the colourful bird with the brilliant-red beak, the Rainbow Lorikeet beat off Noisy Miners and Australian Magpies to claim the top spot again.

**Top 10 species:** Rainbow Lorikeet, Noisy Miner, Australian Magpie, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, House Sparrow, Galah, Red Wattlebird, Common Myna, Welcome Swallow, Silver Gull.

The Aussie Backyard Bird Count is another great example of citizen science in action, with more than 42,000 Australians contributing valuable data to BirdLife Australia. Birds are an integral part of the environment,

To see the full results from the count, visit [aussiebirdcount.org.au](http://aussiebirdcount.org.au).