

BirdLife Shoalhaven Magazine Autumn 2023



Photo by Peter Noakes

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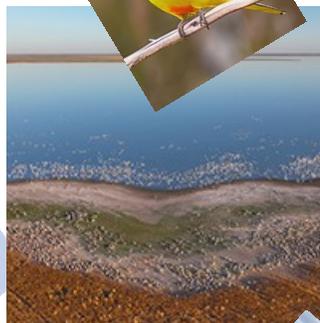
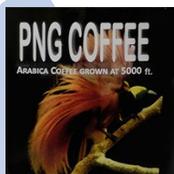
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Contributions

Any article about birds - from anyone - is most welcome ... !!! Email it to communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

Cover Photo: Eastern Spinebill by Peter Noakes

Acknowledgment: BirdLife Shoalhaven acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the Shoalhaven, their care of country, birds and habitat, and pays respects to all Elders.

What we're up to ...

- by Rob Dunn, President of BirdLife Shoalhaven

1. We're bringing Prof. Martine Maron back to speak again, three years after the bushfires

I am delighted that Martine Maron, President of BirdLife Australia, is coming back to the Shoalhaven to speak at the Ulladulla Civic Centre on Saturday 29 April at 2pm.



Martine is an eminent conservation scientist with decades of experience in research and policy. She is Professor of Environmental Management at The University of Queensland.

Her research group works on problems at the interface of environmental policy and ecology, particularly the conservation and recovery of Australia's threatened birds and woodland bird assemblages.

Martine chairs the IUCN's Impact Mitigation and Ecological Compensation Thematic Group, is a member of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists and a Board member of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

Martine will talk about latest research into tracking the health of woodland bird communities. Woodland bird communities in Australia are increasingly under threat. Martine will demonstrate why it is important for us to measure and track the condition of entire bird communities – not just individual species.

She will describe current research to identify and map all the different types of Australian bird communities and how we can measure their health and condition.

With thousands of Australians contributing data through citizen science, and the rapid expansion of acoustic monitoring, we may not be a long way from being able to measure and track the condition — and, let's hope, the recovery — of bird communities right across Australia.

Martine last spoke in Ulladulla in March 2020 soon after the bushfires. That event brought together over 120 people at such a difficult time. It was one of the first gatherings of its kind to do this.

Three years later, we hope to get an equally good turnout. Hopefully you will have already registered for this free event, but it is not too late - **just register by going to - <https://events.humanitix.com/martine-maron>**

2. We're finalising the BLS Bushfire Recovery Project



BLS is currently working on its final report of our Bushfire Recovery Project ready to be released next month. Straight after the Black Summer 2019-20 bushfires members of BirdLife Shoalhaven started surveying birds as part of their contribution to the recovery process.

The increasing amount of data that was submitted to BirdLife Australia's Birddata evolved into BLS's Bushfire Recovery Project. Three years later, BLS is preparing its final report for the project drawing on 750 volunteer surveys from sites across the Shoalhaven.

The report analyses changes in species richness and abundance since the bushfires across sites of different fire severity. It also outlines the impacts on certain bird species and who the winners and losers might be into the future. While the report focuses on birds, it is also about people.

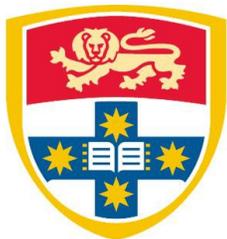
The report covers the human story behind the project and how it became a catalyst, bringing birders, non-birders, landowners and groups together across the Shoalhaven.

I will be giving a presentation entitled "The BirdLife Shoalhaven Bushfire Recovery Project – the birds and the people" in Manyana next month. This event is being organised by Manyana Matters and will be on Saturday 13 May at 4pm in the **Yulunga Public Hall**, 195 Sunset Strip, Manyana. If you would like to attend you need to send an email to Tanya Excell at Manyana Matters via this email address - tanyaexcell@bigpond.com.

Plans to also give the same presentation in Kangaroo Valley and Huskisson will be announced soon.

3. We're supporting the scientists of the future

We are delighted to have awarded the BLS Student Research Grant of \$4,000 to Shanaz Masani to support her PhD at the Behavioural Ecology and Conservation Research Group at University of Sydney.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Shanaz completed an Integrated Masters in Biological Sciences in the University of Birmingham in the UK, gaining a first-class mark, and holds a prestigious Northcote Postgraduate Scholarship.

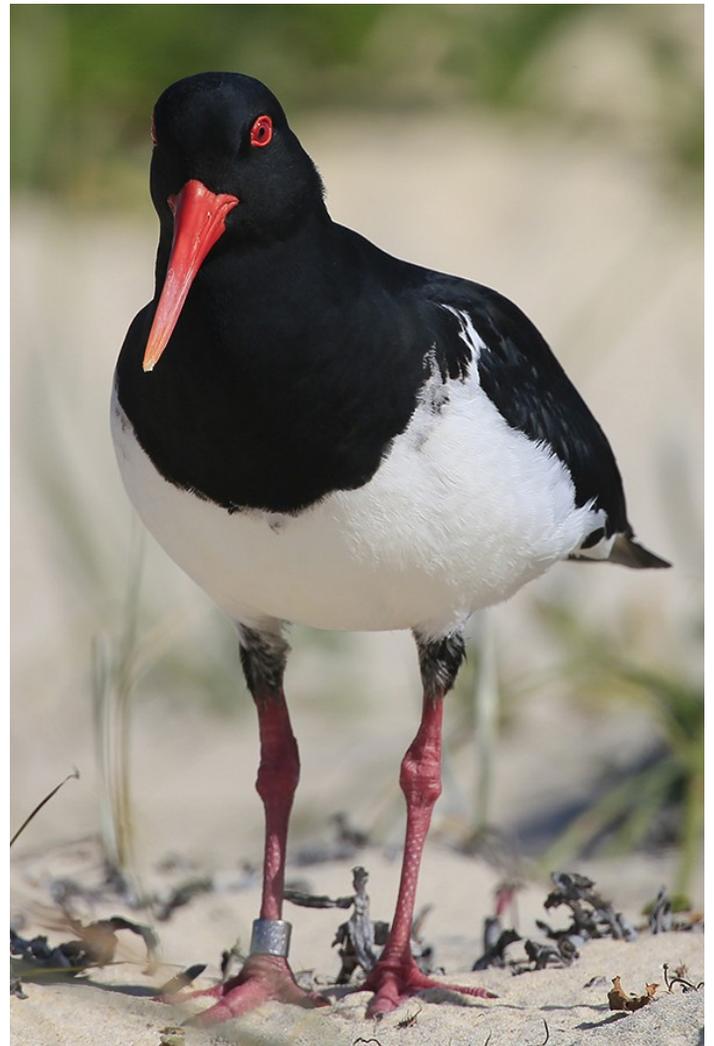
Her PhD is looking at the impact of olfactory misinformation on predators' behaviour.

One of Shanaz's supervisors is Dr Catherine Price, ARC Discovery Early Career Research Fellow, who spoke at the Bird Haven Festival Conference in Shoalhaven Heads in October - to download her presentation, click this link - <http://birdlifeshoalhaven.org/pdfs/2022bhfcatherinepricepresentation.pdf>

At the Conference Catherine talked about her work in New Zealand, which reduced nest predation of ground-nesting shorebirds, using olfactory misinformation, and led to improvements in their breeding success.

Shanaz's PhD will build upon this research, specifically looking at the spatial and temporal learning of predators in response to this approach to bird conservation.

These insights will assist in the development of more efficient and more effective techniques to help conserve a range of ground-nesting shorebirds - including the Pied Oystercatcher and the Little Tern - and their predation by foxes.



This means her research will be able to assist in the conservation of endangered birds in the Shoalhaven and so we are especially excited to be able to provide this support. You can read more about Shanaz's research project in her article later in this magazine.

4. We're helping members have fun on bird walks

Bird watching is not just about the birds. It's an opportunity to mix it with like-minded people in some of the most beautiful parts of the Shoalhaven. Like our recent trip to Yalwal when the valleys were veiled in mist and, as it lifted, an impressive number of 56 species of birds were identified from four quite different sites. It was a great day out, finishing with lunch at a picturesque property by the Shoalhaven River.



Bird walks are for birdwatchers of all levels, who want to learn more about the birds in the region, get that special photo or just enjoy a relaxing day in a beautiful and peaceful place.

If you want to join in, you need to sign up as a member of Birdlife Australia by going to [Membership - BirdLife Australia](#) and then email Sue Mitchell, BLS Bird Walk Co-ordinator, at smmitch7@gmail.com. Sue will then include you on our email list and send you the link to our program of upcoming bird walks.

5. We're looking forward to the year ahead

We held our AGM at the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum on 23 February. I always think that the sign of a healthy community group is a straightforward meeting, where the committee nominations have been resolved ahead of time. This was achieved on the day with plenty of opportunity to chat informally about BLS looking forward during a bird walk beforehand and afterwards over drinks at the Jervis Bay Brewery.

I am delighted that the 2022 Committee members will be continuing in 2023 ...

- President - Rob Dunn
- Vice-President - Phil Hendry
- Secretary (and Communications) - Brett Davis
- Treasurer - Karen Davis
- Conservation Officer - Emily Dyball
- Media Officer - Yolande Cozijn
- Bird Walks Coordinator Sue Mitchell
- General Committee member - Oisín Sweeney



Rufous Whistler seen on a recent bird walk

I would stress that anyone who wants to get involved in what we do, does not need to wait for the next AGM. Also, you do not need to be on the Committee to take something on. There is space for anyone who knows their birds, has the time and is keen. Just give me a call.

The more the merrier and the better BLS will be!

Understanding predator hunting to decrease nest predation of ground nesting shorebirds

- by Shanaz Masani

(winner of the BLS Student Research Grant)



Shanaz Masani

My career as a behavioural ecologist and conservationist began in the UK where I undertook an Integrated Masters in Biological Sciences at the University of Birmingham.

I have always been interested in Australian wildlife, with the aim of pursuing a career in research and conservation.

In 2021 I successfully applied for the prestigious Northcote Postgraduate Scholarship, a scholarship awarded by The Northcote Trust (and administered through the Britain-Australia Society) which supports UK students to undertake a postgraduate degree in Australia by funding flights, tuition fees and a stipend.

I moved to Australia in late 2022 to start my PhD at the University of Sydney with the Behavioural Ecology and Conservation Research Group to help in their goal to use non-lethal misinformation tactics to better manage predation on birds' nests.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank BirdLife Shoalhaven for awarding me their BLS Student Research Grant, for which I am extremely grateful, and I hope this is reflected in my work to come.

Overview of my project

Populations of Australia's threatened birds have, on average, halved since 1985, with severe reductions in shorebird populations.

Nest predation by invasive mammalian predators is a major cause of avian population declines but lethal predator control is often impractical, ineffective, or socially unacceptable. New cost-effective approaches are urgently needed.

The Behavioural Ecology and Conservation Research Group at The University of Sydney has developed olfactory misinformation as a non-lethal approach to manage predator impacts which decreases the conspicuousness of prey to predators.

Pre-exposing predators that hunt by smell to unrewarding prey odour before the prey are present, (e.g., before nesting season), leads them to habituate to the prey odour.

Once prey appears in the system, predators don't find them as quickly because the predators are no longer motivated to follow the prey odour.

Odour pre-exposure as a tool to decrease predation was proven to be effective during a proof-of-concept trial conducted by Prof Peter Banks and Dr Catherine Price of The Behavioural Ecology and Conservation Research Group, which decreased nest predation by black rats by 62%.

This method was then successfully used in New Zealand to create an olfactory refuge for endangered shorebirds, such as the South Island pied oystercatcher, reducing predation by invasive mammals (ferrets, feral cats, stoats, rats, hedgehogs) to double nesting success over two nesting seasons.



You can find out more about this research in an article and video in The Conversation in which Prof Peter Banks and Dr Catherine Price explain olfactory misinformation and talk about their research in New Zealand - <https://theconversation.com/scientists-used-fake-news-to-stop-predators-killing-endangered-birds-and-the-result-was-remarkable-152320>

However, for this method to be rolled out as a conservation management technique more widely, managers need to know how long the pre-exposure period needs to be and how long the refuge effect might last once birds arrive. These parameters determine the field effort needed and are required for developing the most cost-effective approach possible.

How individual predators vary in their response to olfactory information about their prey is not well known. Individual predators also vary in their impact on prey, for example a single fox was reported to have killed nearly 30 Penguins in North Head.

These 'problem individuals' are difficult to manage because of a significant gap in our understanding of how and why individual predators vary in their response to predator control.

Rats will be trapped, uniquely fur marked for identification on camera, measured, weighed and a handling bag test will be performed to assess behavioural state. On treatment sites, prey odour (quail feathers) will be placed in all nests for seven days (Figure 1). The date and time of all rat interactions with odour will be recorded. Prey (quail eggs) will be added to all nests and visitations will be recorded. Dishabituation, the response once the rats eventually realise the odour cue is rewarding and predation commences, will also be recorded. Re-trapping will then commence to assess individual rat personality by repeating the handling bag test.

Expected outcomes of the project

Nesting season is a critical life period, especially for vulnerable shorebirds, which ultimately acts as the crucial point at which avian populations may increase or decrease.

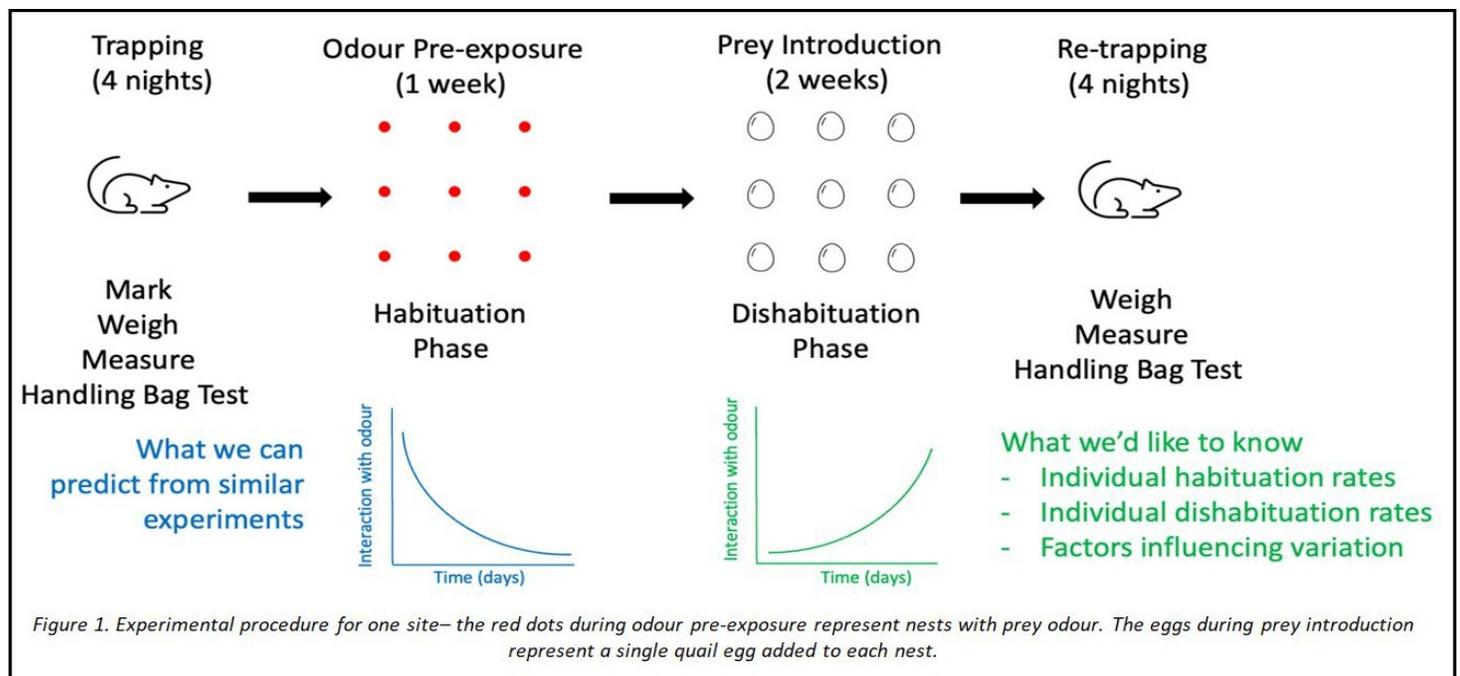


Figure 1. Experimental procedure for one site—the red dots during odour pre-exposure represent nests with prey odour. The eggs during prey introduction represent a single quail egg added to each nest.

My research plan for this year

My PhD with University of Sydney will investigate habituation and dishabituation rates of black rats in response to odour pre-exposure and whether these rates are influenced by an individual's behavioural, physiological, and informational state.

My aim is to describe the shape of the habituation curves to determine inflection points at the time when most individuals have habituated. This will inform when odour pre-exposure is needed for it to be effective and how long its effect will last.

The first year of research will be conducted in Lane Cove National Park (Sydney) at 25 spatially independent sites (20 treatment, 5 untreated control), each a 3x3 grid with artificial nests and cameras on each grid point to record rat behaviour.

Increasing nesting success is crucial for population recovery of most endangered bird species. Thus, nest predation by invasive predators during this period can have huge ramifications for long-term species viability. The Pied Oystercatcher and Little Tern, for example, are now endangered in New South Wales. Nests of these and other species, found in the Shoalhaven and along the east coast of NSW, can be devastated by a single fox, despite ongoing predator control programs.

My PhD project is examining individual predator rates of habituation to odour pre-exposure to inform managers as to how long pre-exposure needs to run and how long the effect will last after nests are occupied. This will fill in significant knowledge gaps around the temporal aspects of odour pre-exposure to optimise this technique's use as a conservation management tool for ground-nesting birds.

As ground-nesting avian populations [like the birds shown on this page] continue to decline due to nest predation by invasive mammals, in Australia and globally, odour pre-exposure may provide a desperately needed solution to a global conservation problem.

How the grant will help my research

BLS's generous grant will provide me with essential support for the costs of my daily travel to and from Lane Cove National Park, which is the major cost for my project and essential for data collection. Importantly the grant will help drive this project forward in reducing one of the major factors threatening native ground-nesting birds; nest predation by invasive mammalian predators, such as the red fox.

It will help to develop olfactory misinformation as a commonly used control technique which could be used to protect Shoalhaven's birds during nesting season, not only allowing us to better understand how invasive mammals are threatening shorebirds, but also contributing to the conservation of vulnerable native shorebird populations on the NSW South Coast and beyond.

I am very excited to be conducting this research with the support of BLS. I look forward to being able to come to the Shoalhaven at the end of the year to talk about my results from my first year of field work and to thank BLS members for your support in person.

Little Tern



Little Tern Chick



Sooty Oystercatcher



Hooded Plover



Treading Lightly for BirdLife

- by Miffy Stephen

Keeping plastic pollution from our environment is just one of the things that Milton Ulladulla group Treading Lightly Inc. is focussing their attention on in 2023.

The recent news of a newly classified disease called **plasticosis**, found in seabirds, has placed even greater importance on removing harmful microplastics from our environment and preventing ingestion by seabirds.

Seabirds ingest plastics when collecting food, and the sharp plastic particles have now been shown to form extensive scar tissue in the bird's stomach. Plastics also take up precious stomach space which should be reserved for nutrient rich fish and squid!

Click this link to see an ABC article about the new disease - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-06/plasticosis-disease-lorde-howe-island-seabirds-researchers/102058266>



Treading Lightly Inc. run monthly "Tidies" focussed on removing microplastics before they enter our waterways. Each month a team of passionate locals spend one hour picking up rubbish from various coastal locations. The support from the community is wonderful and the strength of the "Tidy team" is growing each month.

These regular Tidies offer a quick and easy way for young and old to get involved and do something positive for their community. There is much shared satisfaction as results are weighed and tallied each month, and there is always entertaining discussion around the funniest waste item found.

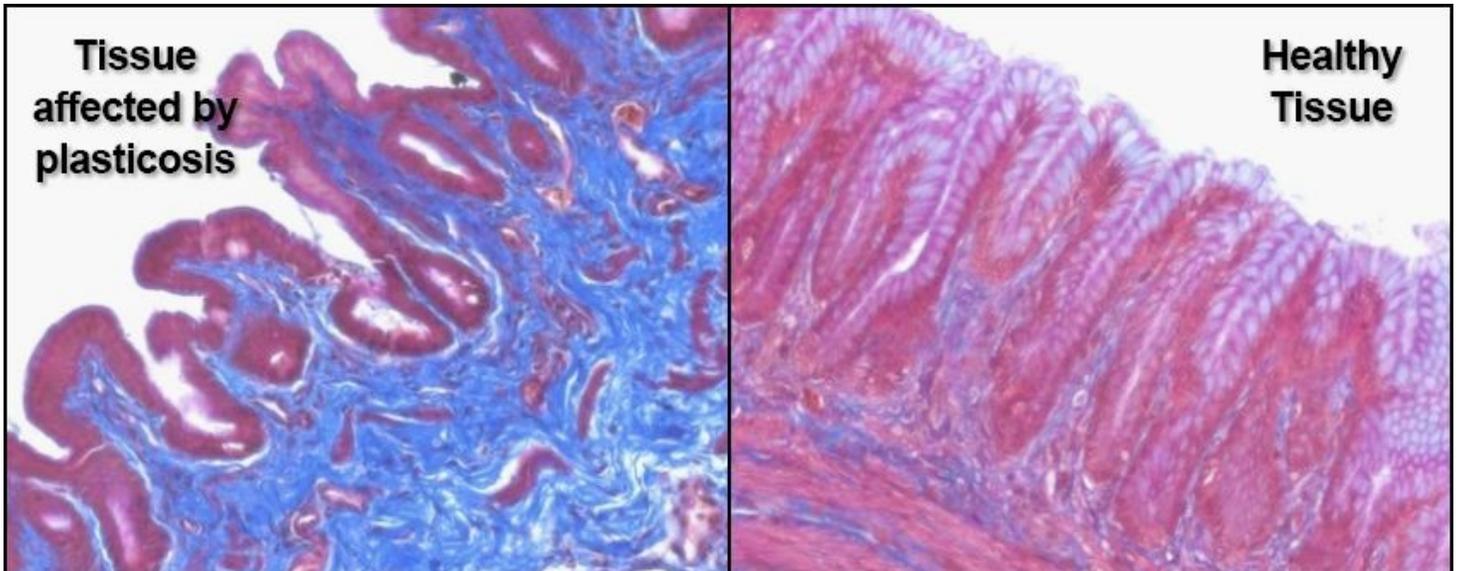
In 2022, the team removed 212 kg of waste from the environment and were able to recycle much of the objects found. So far, the 2023 tally stands at 286kg and over 119 volunteer hours.



In the coming months, the Treading Lightly Tidy team are planning to head down to Narooma, to work with the Nature Coast Marine Group to run their first Tidy. Expanding the reach of the "Tidy" trend, this collaboration will remove more waste from our environment before it reaches our waterways, and serve to improve the natural environment for our birdlife on land and sea.

Of course, stopping the plastic use at its source is an even better solution, which Treading Lightly is also working on.

Treading Lightly Inc. is a grassroots environmental organisation that brings people together to build resilient communities and make positive, long-lasting change towards a sustainable future.



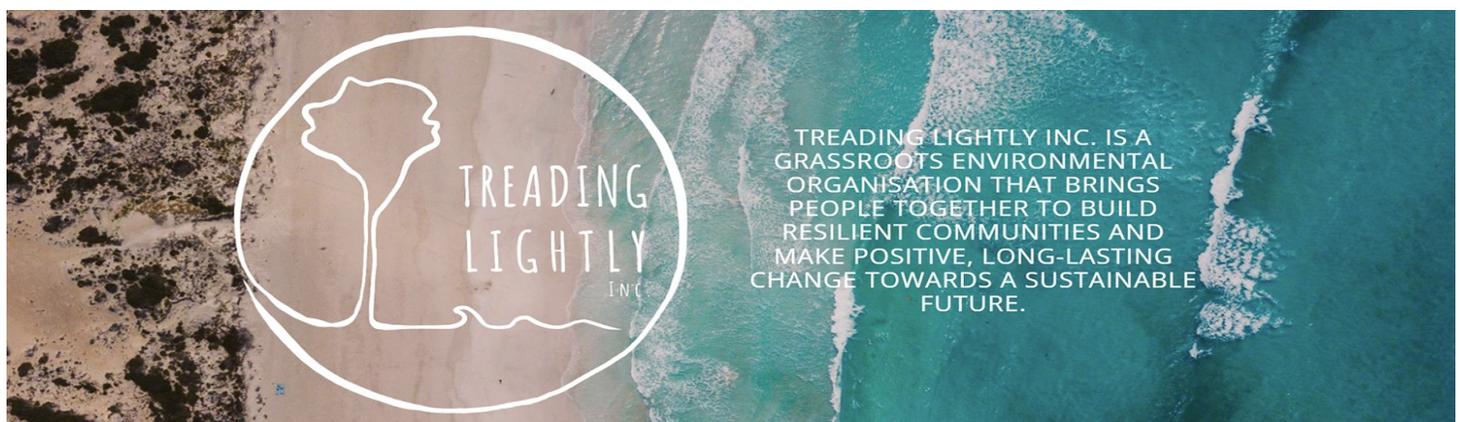
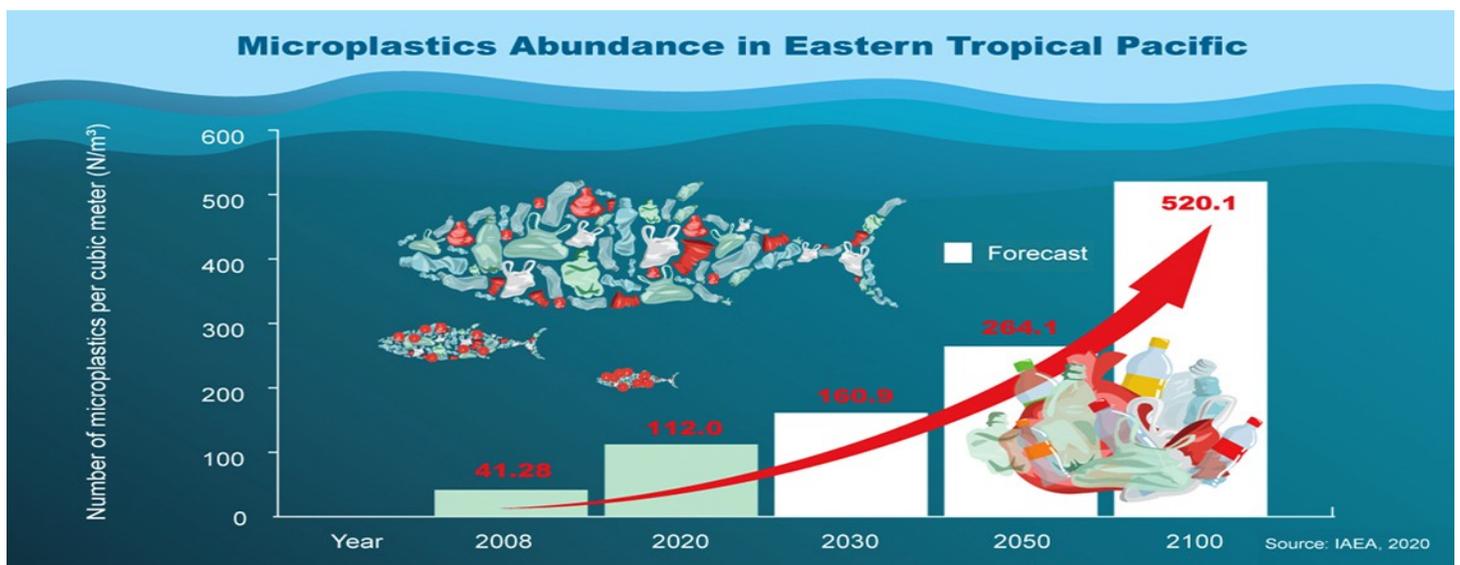
Their strategy is formed around caring for earth and connecting community and they are involved in projects around wildlife rehabilitation, bush regeneration, environmental clean ups, youth advocacy and sustainability awareness. Since the devastating Currowan bushfires, Treading Lightly has doubled their focus on building a more self-sufficient, regenerative community in the Milton Ulladulla area. Incorporating the wisdoms of local first nations people they strive to connect people more closely with nature and encourage a greater understanding and protection of the environment.

Treading Lightly Inc provides a hub for community initiatives that encourage positive change. They work together with local businesses, community groups, schools, charities and NGOs towards a more sustainable future for all. The Treading Lightly Inc physical Hub building is located in Milton and is available for use by like-minded community organisations.

Want to become a member of Treading Lightly? Follow this link - <https://tlinc.org.au/become-a-member/>

With your help, Treading Lightly will create a future for our community that includes:

- Environmental conservation and sustainability
- Community connection
- Resilience
- A sense of belonging & identity
- A place where our youth have a positive voice and a supportive network of mentors and leaders to help them build pathways for THEIR future
- Support to grow your own food sustainably
- Pathways to life learning and growth in a sustainable, conscious way
- Respectful connection to traditional custodians
- Stewardship of our natural environment
- Collaboration between community groups to strengthen grass roots initiatives
- A happy, healthy, prosperous & vibrant outlook for the future



Pacific Baza at Tomerong 2022 and 2023

- by Phil Craven

The Pacific Baza (*Aviceda subcristatus*) is a member of the Hawk, Eagle and Osprey (*Accipitridae*) family and the sole member of its genus in Australia. It has also been known as the Crested Hawk, the *subcristatus* in Latin referring to "somewhat crested" (HANZAB Vol. 2).

The accepted common name Baza is a modern Latinisation of "baz", a Hindi word for "goshawk". Baza is the standard group name in South-east Asia, where the genus is best developed. (HANZAB Vol. 2).

The ecology of the Pacific Baza is somewhat unusual for a bird of prey. Groups of more than 10 birds may occur, often in response to high food availability. Similarly, Black Kites also congregate in large numbers and prey on abundances of food items such as animals fleeing from fire fronts. The Baza takes stick insects, and other insects are also favoured such as cicadas. Tree frogs, snakes, nestlings, small birds (Silvereye) and small mammals are also taken (HANZAB Vol. 2).

Observations of Bazas in the Shoalhaven can occur at any time of year but very few are recorded in winter (Atlas of Living Australia) so seasonal migration is likely.

Observations at Tomerong

The Pacific Baza was observed on three separate occasions in the same locality in the warmer months near Tomerong in the past year.

The first observation in Autumn 2022 was of two birds calling, flying and perching around the canopies of spotted gum and grey ironbark trees. They stayed in the area for about an hour and headed off to the north-east toward Woollamia.

The second observation was in January 2023. Two birds were observed calling, flying and perching in the forest canopy. It took some time to identify the birds, but eventually the distinctive short crest and barring across the belly was spotted.

Sealing the birds' identification was the undulating flight display the pair put on. A bird would climb steeply upwards and seemed to stall and in a controlled way descended to a low point and commence to climb then plunge again repeating the pattern. Apparently, this is pre-breeding and / or pair bonding behaviour. This display occurred above the canopy but not more than 100 feet above, the low point of the trajectory being about tree height (30 metres).

In March 2023 three birds were observed calling to each other and hunting preferentially in the canopy of tall Grey Ironbark trees - seeming to ignore nearby Spotted gums other than for perching.

One bird was consuming a large winged, leggy insect - possibly a phasmid. The other two birds were quiet and perched nearby while the insect was consumed by the other bird. One bird was observed hanging upside down on a leaf bundle looking for prey. One bird was considered to be an immature, i.e. a young bird where the rufous chest patch had faded to a darker colour.



The birds completed a forage 'circuit' of about 2-3 hectares over 45 minutes and headed south. 20 minutes later four birds were observed soaring and calling at several hundred feet above the canopy. One undulating flight was observed but mostly the birds soared and circled around. Presumed to be the three previously observed, they had been joined by another PB. The birds appeared to head west from our observation point.

Breeding in the Shoalhaven

For the Shoalhaven about 45 observational localities of Pacific Baza have been recorded on the Atlas of Living Australia (that includes iNaturalist, eBird, Bionet and Birddata and other source observations). Birddata records 58 sightings at 11 locations. 25 of those observations were made in one locality in Kangaroo Valley (2002-2009). Most Birddata observations are north of the Shoalhaven River.

Breeding nodes of Pacific Baza are concentrated from northern NSW to north Queensland and the Northern Territory. (HANZAB Vol.2).

I can find three breeding records of Pacific Baza for the Shoalhaven but there may be more. One is inferred for the Berry Mountain area and two are at the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum in Huskisson - in December 2020 and January 2022. Three developed pre-flight juveniles were observed on the nest in 2020 and in 2022 there were 2 chicks observed.

Anecdotally, this species has been observed south of the Shoalhaven River more frequently since 2010, with about 70% of records south of the River occurring since then.

This can be interpreted as either that Bazas are more frequent south of the River than previously - or more people are recording Bazas whose abundance has not changed.

Pacific Baza - photo by Brett Davis



Fire Effect II

- by Chris Brandis

[Editor's Note: the BirdLife Shoalhaven e-magazine in Winter 2021 contained an article by Chris Brandis titled "Fire Effect" which described the effect of the 2019/2020 fire on bird populations at two Shoalhaven sites. This is an update of that article almost two years later.]

Bird populations were recorded regularly at the low altitude site of Yatte Yattah Nature Reserve and a higher altitude site of the Little Forest walking track since 2016. The number of species and the number of individuals were recorded, mostly in eBird and others in Birdata, and now some 3 years on from the 2019/2020 mega fire the data was re-examined to assess the effects on the bird population that were recorded at these two areas.

Yatte Yattah NR has a 500 m Birdata transect through the forest to the rainforest edge which takes about an hour, but over the last 3-4 years access has been limited due to the weed *bidens pilosa* (AKA hitch hiker, farmer's friend and cobbler's peg - though observations from the paddock side were made with the cattle keeping the weeds down.

Since the fire the NR fence was moved some 20 metres north and as no grazing could then occur, the weeds proliferated and access was difficult with no access through the fence to the more open paddock. Currently the weed level has fallen and a mown access track along the fence has been made.

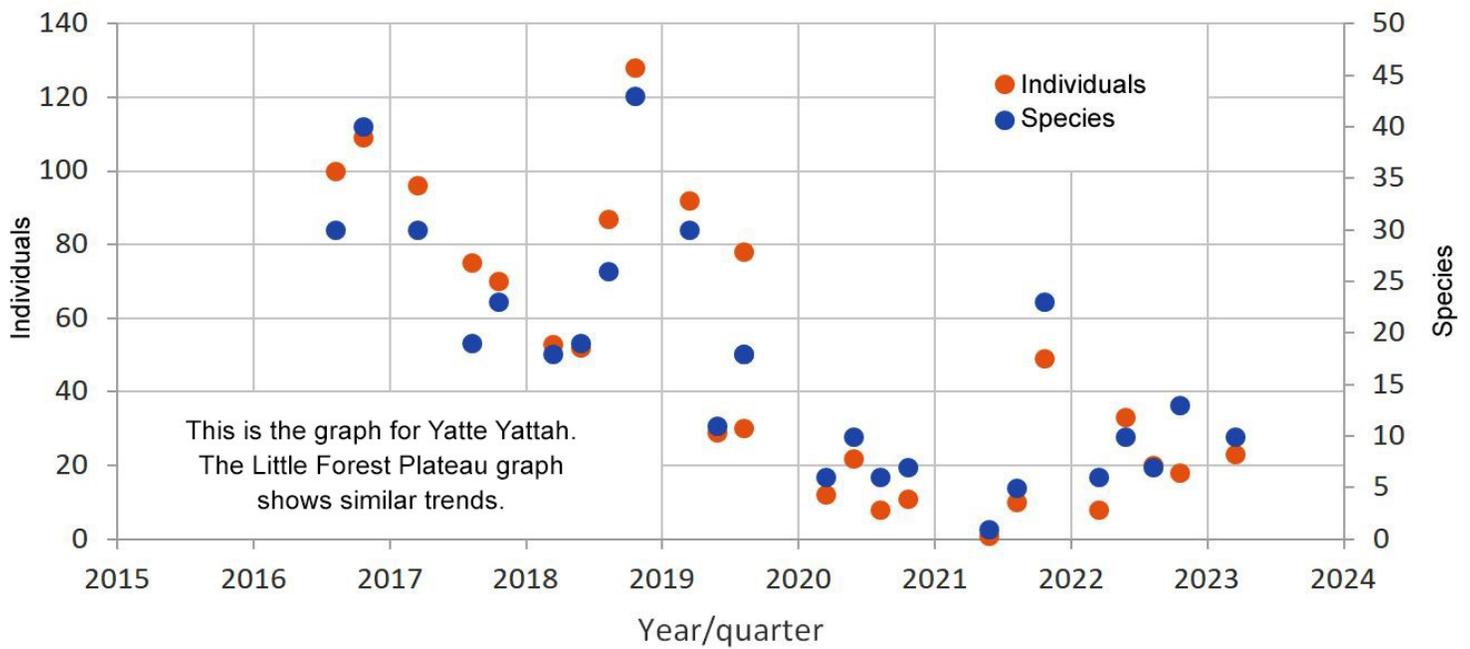


As shown in the graph on the next page the number of bird species and individuals show a dramatic decline since the 2019/2020 fire with little sign of improvement. The small birds like Thornbills and the summer migrants like the Leaden Flycatchers and Rufous Whistlers are virtually absent. Many of the mature eucalypts have died and saplings in the adjacent paddock have been thinned while the access down into the rainforest is limited to bush bashing. There are some patches of dense wattle growth that have attracted some small birds.

The fire was particularly severe through the open eucalypt forest and along the ground in the rainforest with mainly the bird species recorded soon after the fire being those in transit like Rufous and Grey Fantails. A family of Superb Fairy-wrens are now regularly seen in the woodland area and several of the fig trees have bounced back with two fruiting heavily in Jan 2023 attracting Topknot Pigeons.

A MUDB outing in spring 2022 of 12 members over 3 hours did record 33 species and 176 individuals, 100 Red-browed Finches improved the count, including venturing down into the rainforest to find a Green Catbird.

The Little Forest Walking Track was surveyed from the car park, along the Little Forest Walking Track, then 500 m along both Florence Head and Rusden Head Walking Tracks, up to the communication tower and down to the car park, generally taking about 2 hours.



The area was severely burnt and the heath decimated with only a small area about the communication tower remaining unburnt. The severity of the burnt heath is shown in the 2021 photos below.

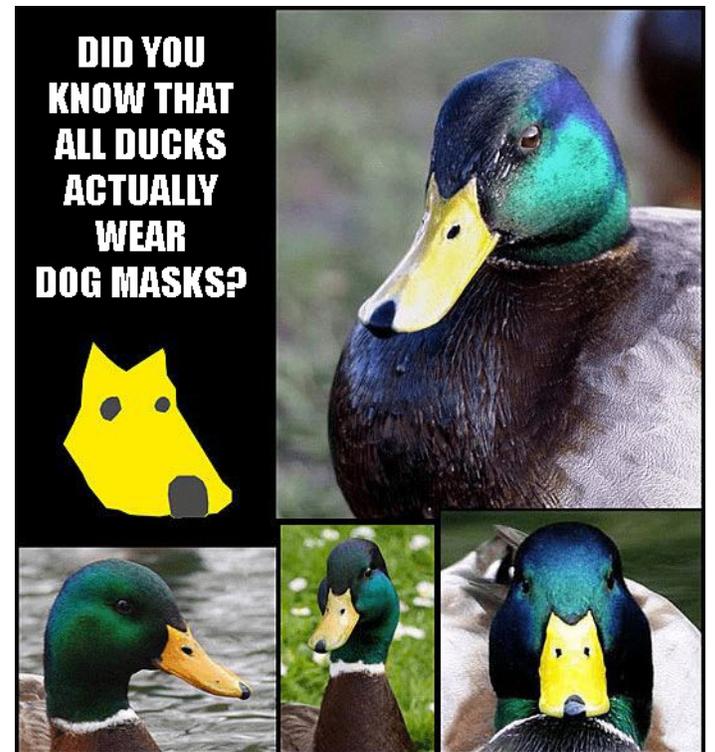
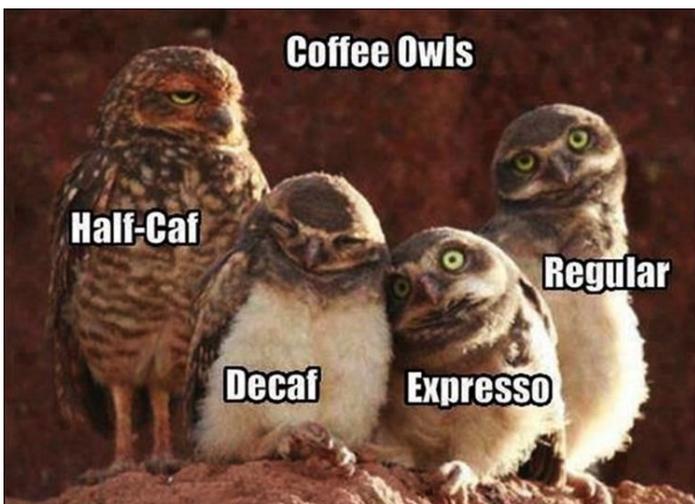
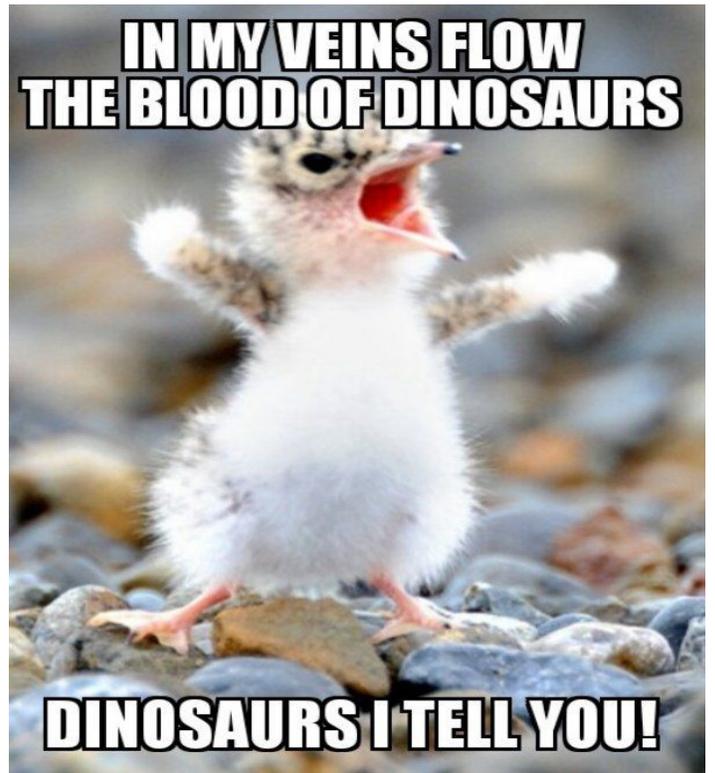
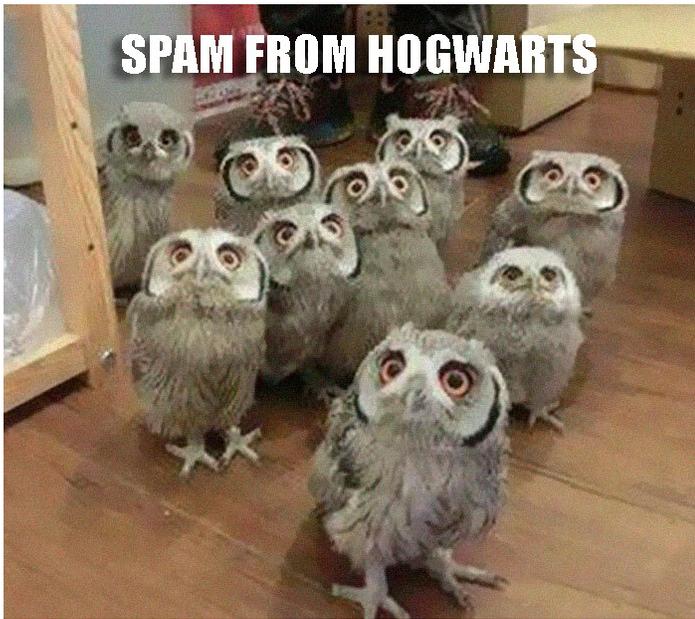
Before the fire high numbers of individuals were reported, especially during the honeyeater migration in autumn and spring, supported by the banksia flowerings, but during summer numbers could be very low with little flowering happening.

Since the fire species such as the Rockwarbler, Beautiful Firetail and the large cockatoos have not been recorded at this site, though there are records nearby. On the first two surveys the Olive Whistler was observed, but as the ground cover increased it has not been sighted.

Now after some 3 years since the fire the banksia seedling recovery is generally less than 1 metre in height with no flowering, which may mean the area will not be suitable, especially for migrating honeyeaters, for a few years yet.



Bird Memes



Birding around Leeton and Griffith

- by Phil Hendry

In March, I had the opportunity to detour to Leeton and Griffith on my way to play golf down on the Murray River. The golf was great - thanks for asking! It was the 30th anniversary tour of a group of my ex-colleagues from the CSIRO. We played at Yarrawonga, Cobram and Tocumwal - but I'm getting distracted ...

On the drive out to Leeton, I kept myself amused by keeping a bird list of observations made at 100 km/h. I recorded 26 species, but the tricky part was trying to remember what I had seen in between each opportunity to make a note. The Milton-Ulladulla Birdwatchers have been planning to visit Griffith and Leeton for the last 3 years, but have been thwarted each time by various pestilence and floods.

On the way in Leeton, I paused at McCaughy's Lagoon near Yanco and was treated to a good view of a group of Diamond Doves sitting on the powerline near the carpark. It was early afternoon and the birds were a bit quiet, but managed 17 species in about 20 minutes including a young Yellow Crimson Rosella which had me thinking for a little while.

I arrived in Leeton about 2:30 pm and checked out the Visitors centre, where the desk was very helpful with information and directions. I went straight to Five Bough Swamp and set off at about 3 pm. Heading east from the carpark, you walk about 700 metres to get to the swamp, seeing lots of bush birds along the way.

The water level was quite high, almost up to the path at several locations. On reaching the main circuit around / through the swamp, I was a bit disappointed to see only a wall of reeds and not many birds.

A few hundred metres along however, the wall opened up to give a view into an expanse of shallow open water and exposed flats. This little opening revealed Little Black Cormorants, Royal Spoonbills, Silver Gulls, Black-fronted Dotterels, Brown Quail, Dusky Moorhen, a possible Little Grassbird, Eurasian Coots and Reed Warblers.

Spinning around I was treated to a tree stump hosting five juvenile Nankeen Night Herons, Purple Swampphen, White and Straw-necked Ibis. I may have damaged my neck spinning around to try to see everything!



Juvenile Nankeen Night Herons

The next opening added Intermediate and Little Egrets, Grey and Chestnut teals, Swans, Black Ducks, Australasian Grebes and Great Cormorants. About half-way around the main loop, you come to the lookout called the Australasian Bittern shelter, where I was able to get a good look at some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and about 20 White-headed Stilts.



Sharp-tailed Sandpipers

At the next lookout / shelter there was a small pond with a good number of Whiskered Terns on the wing. The walk was rounded off with a Black-shouldered Kite hovering over the wetland and an Australasian Bittern flying over (which on reflection was almost certainly a juvenile Night Heron).





Not an Australasian Bittern



Striped Honeyeater

On the walk out, I spotted a lineup of herons sitting on a bridge over an irrigation canal that included White-faced and White-necked Herons, Intermediate Egrets and Nankeen Night Herons. In total I identified about 40 species in my two hour walk.



Hérons and an Egret

The following morning I had a few hours to spare and went up to Cocoparra National Park just north of Yenda and spent an hour of so on the Jacks Creek Walk. It was cool and overcast and not very birdy, but I was delighted to see a few birds uncommon on the coast, notably Double-barred Finches and a Striped Honeyeater.



Double-barred Finch



Intermediate Egret?

During the golf later, I added Apostlebirds, Striated Pardalote, White-throated Tree-creeper, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Black and Whistling Kites, White-plumed Honeyeaters and a mystery rail / crane which scooted across a path at the Black Bull Golf Course in Yarrawonga.

Overall, a great trip and I'm looking forward to returning later in the year!

Narran Lakes

- images Shot by Harro for UNSW

There is a current waterbird breeding event happening at Narran Lakes.

The lakes are about 50km east of Brewarrina in north-west NSW and recent flows, including water for the environment, have led to waterbirds breeding at the Ramsar-protected Lakes (also known as Dharriwaa) for only the second time in 10 years.

This season's cohort included two Australian Pelican colonies, a species that has not bred at the site since the 1990s.

You can read more about the breeding event and the UNSW-CES/CEWO monitoring by clicking on this link - <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/science-tech/pelicans-breed-north-western-nsw-narran-lakes-first-time-over-20-years>



Extinction - are we making a difference?

- Chris Grounds

There is considerable evaluation and assessment of conservation and its thinking and strategies at the moment, as it should be, if for no other reason than it is certainly needed though it must be expected that critical evaluation is always vital to the best conservation.

- Conservation needs change and improvement
- Criteria for threatened species can be revised
- BirdLife Australia (BLA) has a new conservation plan
- Research is challenging existing conservation paradigm

It is a primary tenet of our organization, BirdLife, that we work for bird conservation at an international, national and local level and if that is so, we may well ask, as should everyone involved in conservation, are we really making a difference? Is there a need for change and improvement?



Perhaps the trigger for the apparent increase of conservation "chat" has been the verification of the substantial concerns revealed by the release of the national State of Environment Report, which had been the subject of party political shelving until July 2022.

The Spring BLS magazine featured the federal government introduction of Action Plans following the release of the Report with focus species and places introduced as a new approach to conservation. These "Action Plans" nominated 22 bird species, 5 of which are found in the Shoalhaven.

There certainly appears to be significant, positive movement in evaluation and critical thinking, which suggests an acceptance that, given the state of the environment and the approaches in conservation, some change and improvement is certainly needed. This should help avoid doing the same old thing in the same old way for too long.

It does seem that BirdLife Australia is "across" the sort of conservation issues being considered. The latest BLA magazine headlines a new approach as "**Save Birds. Save Lives. Our part in the global fight to end extinctions**". BLA describes this as a "bold new plan - our **Bird Conservation Strategy**".

The broader perspectives required appear to be acknowledged with habitat decline and that is really encouraging. Change and improvement is in process! The BLA magazine article is an important and worthwhile read.

There are many similar non-government organizations (NGOs) like BirdLife involved in the same commitment.



Wilderness Society Instagram Post March 31

Threatened species have been a focus for so much conservation action and the effectiveness of this is being reassessed.

A number of recent developments at the research and scientific level provide stimulation and insight to the challenge of conservation of threatened species.

NEW THREATENED SPECIES

A just released group of species have been added to or upgraded in the Australian threatened species list including the Western Beautiful Firetail, Pink Cockatoo, Southeast Hooded Robin, Red Goshawk and Painted Button Quail.

The uncomfortable fact though is that the federal agency and media such as the Sydney Morning Herald were still identifying the Pink Cockatoo as the Major Mitchell Cockatoo. Some change and improvement is still needed!

The SMH accepted a suggested change.

EDGE : AUSTRALIAN BIRD SPECIES IN THE GLOBAL TOP 100

1	<p>Plains-wanderer <i>Pedionomus torquatus</i></p> <p>The Plains-wanderer is an Australian endemic of great scientific interest.</p>	 Conservation Attention Medium	
24	<p>Rufous Scrub-bird <i>Atrichornis rufescens</i></p> <p>The Rufous Scrub-bird is a medium-sized ground dwelling bird found in small patches of high altitude rainforest on the east coast of Australia.</p>	 Conservation Attention Low	
24	<p>Noisy Scrub-bird <i>Atrichornis clamosus</i></p> <p>This small, essentially flightless bird is found in Western Australia.</p>	 Conservation Attention Good	
29	<p>Australian Painted-snipe <i>Rostratula australis</i></p> <p>This Australian endemic bird occurs widely but unevenly across the continent.</p>	 Conservation Attention Medium	
77	<p>Western Bristlebird <i>Dasyornis longirostris</i></p> <p>The Western Bristlebird is one of only three species representing an entire avian family, the Dasyornithidae, which are all endemic to Australia.</p>	 Conservation Attention Low	
78	<p>Eastern Bristlebird <i>Dasyornis brachypterus</i></p> <p>The Eastern Bristlebird is one of only three species representing an entire avian family, the Dasyornithidae.</p>	 Conservation Attention Medium	

THE EDGE OF EXTINCTION

A new, alternative but arguably also provocative scientific model has emerged, which pursues the very same argument in relation to threatened species. This is known by the acronym **EDGE**, which stands for "evolutionarily distinct and globally endangered."

The introduction to EDGE notes that we should "**Stop Saving Cute Animals - One million species are at risk of extinction, but a handful of charismatic creatures get all the hype. A new conservation strategy, EDGE, has a different focus.**"

The **EDGE model** argues there are many, many more species faced with extinction than we can realistically save and picking which species to protect and which to sideline is right at the heart of conservation, but we don't talk enough about how these decisions are made.

In 2007, conservationists devised a metric or mathematical model called **EDGE** as a way to prioritize species for conservation that represented a large part of evolutionary history. Rikki Gumbs, a conservationist at the Zoological Society of London, argues that we should be focusing more on species that are both evolutionarily distinct *and* endangered.

To rank highly in terms of EDGE scores, a species will:

- be evolutionarily distinct,
- have very few close living ancestors
- be extremely endangered.

The top 100 Edge bird species contains six Australian species with the Plains Wanderer as No.1 and the Eastern Bristlebird the sixth rank Australian species at #78.

The revised model, EDGE 2, was published in the journal *PLOS Biology* on February 28, 2023. This was adopted by the **International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN]** in their taskforce that considers genetic diversity. EDGE was also selected as one indicator by the UN for the 2022 UN Pact for Global Biodiversity. It is that group that produces the "Red List" of species 'at risk'.

BirdLife International is partner of the IUCN and lists 1 in 8 bird species as threatened with extinction worldwide. That is a disturbing parallel ratio with Shoalhaven birds.

So it seems that broader ecology based conservation thinking is moving in the direction of a revised perspective on threatened species.

The top ranked Australian bird, the Plains Wanderer, has been the subject of a special captive breeding program at Dubbo's Taronga Western Plains Zoo. In October 2021, 8 captive bred birds were released back into the wild from the Western Plains Zoo breeding program.



The Eastern Bristlebird, the trigger species for the Jervis Bay KBA, was subject to a recent selective capture in Booderee National Park and release at Wilsons Promontory. Both of these are very interesting stories in themselves.

Just out of interest, the No.1 ranked Mammal on the global EDGE list is our very own Mountain Pygmy Possum.

EDGE IS NOT ALONE

The very same sort of challenge has been proposed by a group of four Western Australian scientists who wrote in *The Conversation* of March 22 that:

"Conserving native wildlife is a challenging task and Australia's unenviable extinction record shows us we urgently need more sophisticated and effective approaches.

"To give native species their best chance of survival, we have to embrace ecosystem-based conservation, rather than focusing on rescuing individual species."

This work is WA-based and arises from work with marsupials, but in terms of the total fit for the conservation of threatened species of birds, it is absolutely relevant.

The Conversation authors consider that there is not one simple answer for ecosystem management as everything is connected and that complexity must be embraced. Only then can actions be identified that will make a difference.



The Endangered Eastern Bristlebird has benefited from conservation of habitat in the Bay and Basin area

The complication which arises of course is that different criteria and thus categorizations of threatened species will inevitably produce varied results, but that should interest and challenge us.

The WA science authors propose that *"conservation managers ... can help ecosystems survive by doing two things.*

"First, keep managing the threats within our control – such as invasive predators and ongoing habitat loss – to help reduce damage from other threats.

"Second, model and anticipate the effects of future change, and use that knowledge to be as prepared as we can."

RECOVERY

A group of five scientists led by John Woinarski from Charles Darwin University and published in The Conversation describe recovery of 29 threatened species, of which 8 were birds but very few of which have been taken off the threat list.

The researchers found recovery was greatest in mammals and birds but little for invertebrates and fish but note many threatened species are not adequately monitored and it is not known if conservation is working. As well, many species listed under the EPBC Act have had little or no attention once listed.

The researcher also point to a "longstanding bias" and "public sentiment" toward iconic species.



Superb Lyrebird Morton National Park

Post the 2019-2020 Bushfires in the Shoalhaven there was an initial, constant alarm sounded over the survival of the Superb Lyrebird but monitoring found an incredible survival of the species. A similar alarm was expressed about the Rockwarbler but again, BLS monitoring established healthy surviving populations in their regular habitat on the escarpment.

Both of these instances were excellent news and heralded enhanced concern in debate over logging in state forests, development applications in the Shoalhaven, and the value of unburnt ecology in recovery.

ORANGE-BELLIED PARROT CAPTIVE BREEDING



Further research arising from the Australian National University had a focus on the Orange-bellied Parrot, one of the most endangered birds in the world.

These scientists have cast a careful eye over the "captive breeding and release" of threatened species, in particular the Orange-bellied Parrot, which they acknowledge is an important conservation tool but warn that if threats to wild populations remain unresolved, this tool may not guarantee population recovery in the long term.

Orange-bellied Parrots provide a stark reminder that there is no "quick fix" for most threatened species. Their recent research shows that we need to tackle the underlying threats to survival if we are to save species from extinction in the wild.

The EDGE, WA and RECOVERY studies and reports indicate the importance of an improving scientific basis in the evaluation of conservation efforts.

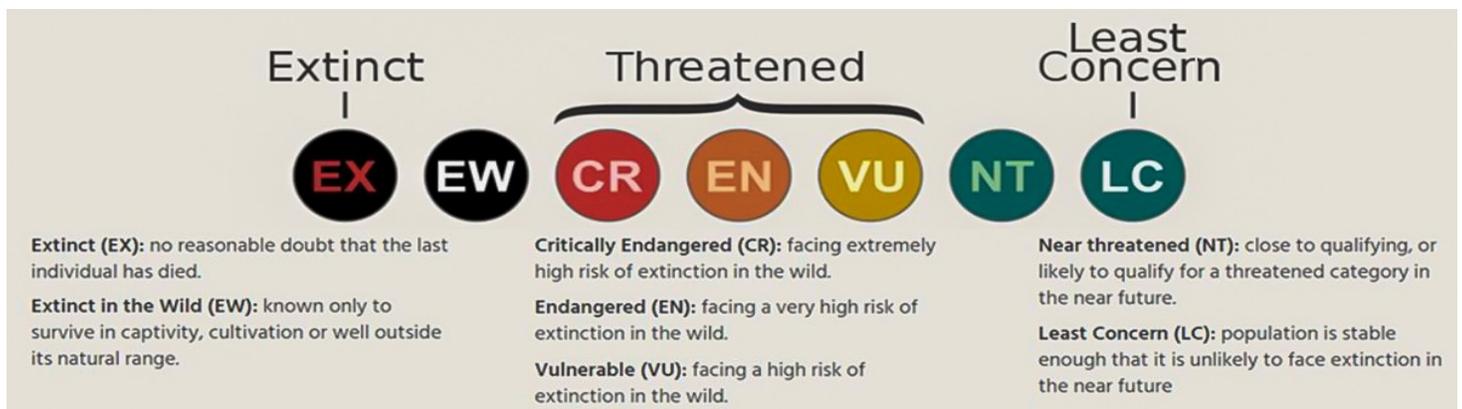
THE IUCN THREATENED SPECIES

The IUCN has identified 42,108 threatened species in its Red List of which 13% are birds.

Australian birds in the Critically Endangered Red List

English name	Red List Category
New Zealand Storm-petrel	CR
Buff-breasted Buttonquail	CR
Baudin's Black-cockatoo	CR
Swift Parrot	CR
Night Parrot	CR
Orange-bellied Parrot	CR
Coxen's Fig-parrot	CR
Regent Honeyeater	CR

The IUCN Bird Species Status Ranking



The Critically Endangered Plains-wanderer

The Plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) is an Australian endemic species of great scientific interest. It is an excellent example of the nature of threat of extinction, the reasons for this and the conservation response.



It is the sole member of the family Pedionomidae and has no close living relatives. We could say it is on the EDGE.

The Plains-wanderer is threatened due to loss of native grasslands; boxthorn - which provides perches for raptors; prolonged drought and overgrazing; predation by foxes and feral cats; increased frequency and intensity of fire; and rabbits that cause damage to the habitat.

There are estimated to be only 300 birds remaining in NSW and less than 1,000 in Australia.

The "Bringing Plains-wanderers back from the brink" project commenced in 2017 and since then 30 landholders have committed to managing nearly 14,000 hectares of primary habitat.

In addition to the property-scale baiting across the project area supported by the Paddocks for Plains-wanderer incentive program, three landscape-scale intensive predator control programs have been established. To date, it is estimated that over 7000 foxes have been removed from the landscapes.

It has been the subject of a successful captive breeding program at the Taronga Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo.

The birds of paradise of PNG

– by Rob Dunn, birder and scuba-diver

In February I spent two weeks in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

When I came back the first thing my birding friends asked was "So, did you see any birds of paradise?". My answer was "Of course, they are everywhere!"

But it was when they asked me to name the species that I had to admit that I had not actually seen any live and flying birds!

But, I did see birds of paradise on the Papua New Guinea flag. Only eight other countries have a bird on their flag*.



And all sorts of PNG products use birds in their advertising!



And birds are on Air Nuigini's planes. Only a handful of other countries' national carriers can claim this**. In Melanesian Pidgin the word for plane and bird is the same – "balus". Qantas may talk about their "Flying Kangaroos", but Air Nuigini call their planes "Birds of Paradise".



And I saw these two species of birds of paradise when I arrived in PNG at the reception of my hotel in Port Moresby ...



The reason for my complete lack of live birds of paradise sightings was that I went to PNG on a **scuba-diving trip** in the pristine waters of Milne Bay, staying on a live-aboard boat for the whole time. Everyone's focus was 100% on the marine environment, not the avian world, and we only went on land three times.

As I was underwater about three hours every day, I hardly used my binoculars. Once some villagers took me on a walk in the jungle, as they said they knew where birds of paradise could be found. But considering neither of them had their own binoculars, and they were noisily clearing the path for me with machetes, it was not surprising that I returned to the boat disappointed.

Still, I did see Eclectus Parrots, Hornbills and a huge Weavers nest, and later had fun training PNGs birdwatchers of the future.



This was enough to whet my appetite to go on a proper birding trip if I go back to PNG. If I did, I would certainly be expecting to return with an impressive bird of paradise list. Birds that are actually alive and flying that is!

Below is the first and potentially the last fish picture ever to be featured in the BLS Magazine – a Mandarin Fish in Milne Bay, PNG (photo by Craig Lambert).



*** Editor's footnote:**

Technically there are more than eight other countries with birds on their flags, but those generally accepted are: Albania, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Mexico, Moldova, Papua New Guinea, Serbia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This list is not definitive - there may be more.

See the next page for the flags of those countries listed.

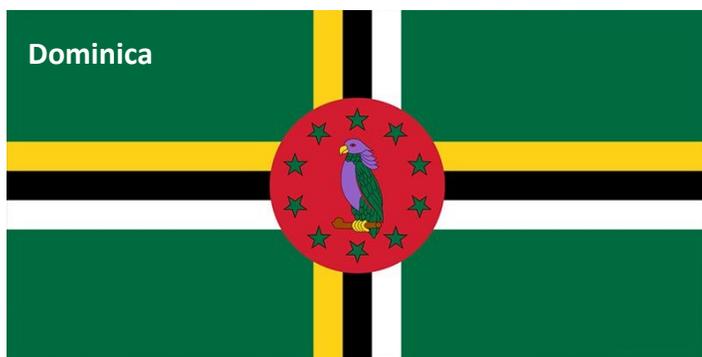
In addition, there are some territories that have birds on their flags, like American Samoa (below).

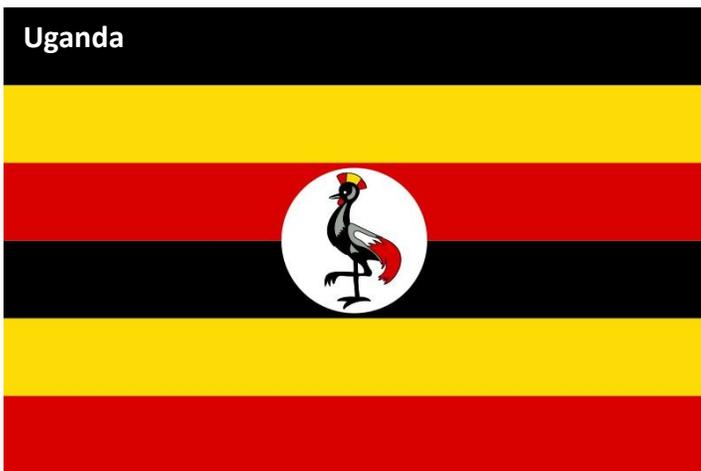


** And the other airlines and national carriers with birds on their planes are: Air India, Aerolineas Argentinas, Garuda, Mexicana, and Turkish, Japan. Singapore and Sri Lankan Airlines (see page 28).

And then there are some Australian states / territories ...

Countries with birds on their flags ...





Albania has a double eagle; Dominica has a Sisserou Parrot ; Ecuador has a Condor; Egypt has a Steppe Eagle; Guatemala has a Resplendent Quetzal; Kazakhstan - like Egypt - also has a Steppe Eagle; Kiribati has a Yellow Frigatebird; Mexico has a Golden Eagle (even though the national bird is a Crested Caracara); Moldova has an Eagle; PNG has a Raggiana Bird of Paradise; Uganda has a Grey Crowned Crane; Zimbabwe has a Fish Eagle; Serbia has a Serbian Eagle ; and Zambia has an Eagle ; but none of these are as cool as the flag of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands below which has a Macaroni Penguin!



Airlines with birds on their logos ...



AIR INDIA



Air Niugini



American Airlines



MEXICANA



**TURKISH
AIRLINES**



**Aerolíneas
Argentinas**



**SINGAPORE
AIRLINES**



SriLankan
Airlines



JAPAN AIRLINES



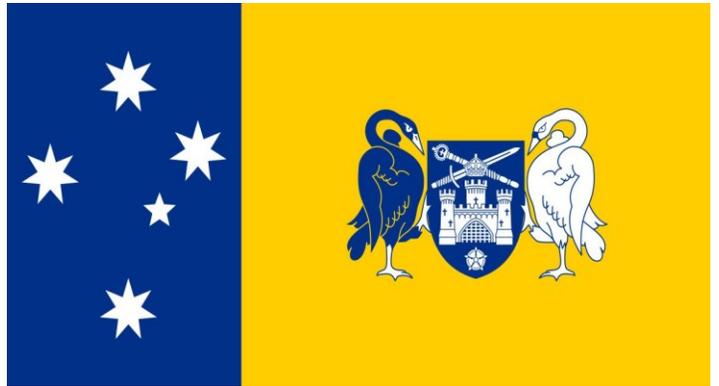
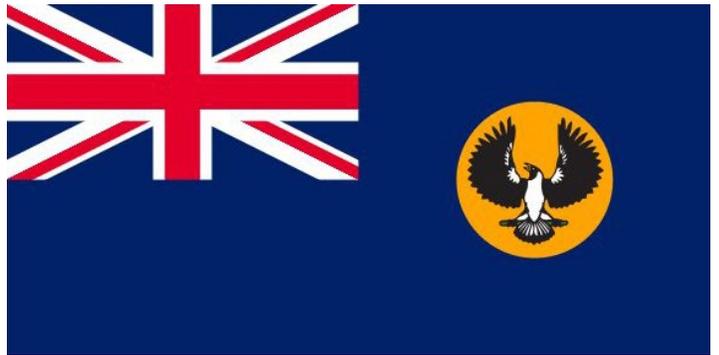
Garuda Indonesia

And has anyone ever noticed the similarity between the Garuda Indonesia logo above and the BirdLife Australia logo below?



birdlife
AUSTRALIA

Birds on Australian state flags ...



The South Australia flag at the top of this column has a White-backed Magpie. The Western Australian flag below it has a Black Swan.

The Australian Capital Territory flag has a Black Swan and a White (Mute) Swan - the latter being an introduced feral bird only found in Western Australia. **What were those politicians thinking?**

The Christmas Island flag below has a Golden Bosun Bird!



Nest Boxes – helping our backyard birds

- by Stephen Lawes

We are all rightly concerned about ongoing habitat loss and its impact on our native birds and other wildlife.

Bushfires and land clearing for residential, urban and agricultural purposes have had an adverse impact on nest sites for (particularly) cavity breeding birds. New tree plantings will take many years to reach the mature stage when cavities and hollows will naturally occur. One strategy to compensate for this habitat loss is the use of artificial nest boxes.

The Culburra Beach & Districts Men's Shed produces a range of nest boxes to accommodate these local target species:-

- Kookaburra (also works for Wood Ducks)
- Crimson (and Eastern) Rosella
- Musk and Little Lorikeet
- Australian Owlet Nightjar
- Brown and White Throated Treecreeper
- Spotted and Striated Pardalote

Of course, birds can't read, so Rainbow Lorikeets, Red Rump Parrots, Galahs, Owls and Little Corellas may also take advantage of these nest sites.

All boxes are made from recycled or FSC certified plywood or pine, with a thickness of 15-20mm for thermal insulation, and finished with exterior UV resistant paint. They are designed to prevent draughts and water entry, and keep eggs/chicks/occupants safe from (most) predators.

All nest box designs are based on the plans and specifications from the NestBox Tales Facebook group; an invaluable resource for anyone interested in this topic. Prices range from \$30 to \$50.

In areas where feral birds like common mynas and starlings are an issue, the Shed can provide baffles to exclude these pests. Rosellas, in particular, are quite adaptive and receptive to this modification.

Installation height should be about 4 to 5 metres, well within the range of most extension ladders. Safety first rules; never climb higher than you feel safe and always seek assistance when installing nest boxes. Nest boxes should face south-east to avoid exposure to the western sun as summer heat can be a killer for young chicks.

The Shed had some personal experience with nest boxes. We put up a kookaburra box outside our front door in 2020. It was immediately occupied and produced two fledglings that year. That experience has been repeated now for a further two seasons; each time resulting in two fledglings.



Our kookaburra box

Nest boxes in backyards should be augmented by clean water for bathing, etc and by planting endemic native shrubs and plants in the garden to provide flowers, insects, nectar and safe roosting places for the birds.



Nest boxes for local birds, possums and microbats

The Shed also supplies native bee/insect hotels and butterfly boxes to improve pollination in your garden and provide food for insectivorous birds. Also microbat boxes, for a natural means of combating summer mosquitoes.

Culburra Beach & Districts Men's Shed is located at 988 Culburra Road, Culburra Beach (entry via Fred Evans Lane) and is open on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9am to 1pm. Contact us via phone on 0499 452095 or via our Facebook page. You're more than welcome to call in, inspect the nest box range and join the members for a coffee and chat.

If Culburra Beach is too far for you, please ask your local Men's Shed for assistance. They'll be happy to oblige, but please ensure they're made aware of the NestBox Tales plans and specifications mentioned above.

Some photos from recent bird walks

- by Phil Hendry and Brett Davis

Golden Whistler



Magpie Lark and Australian Kestrel



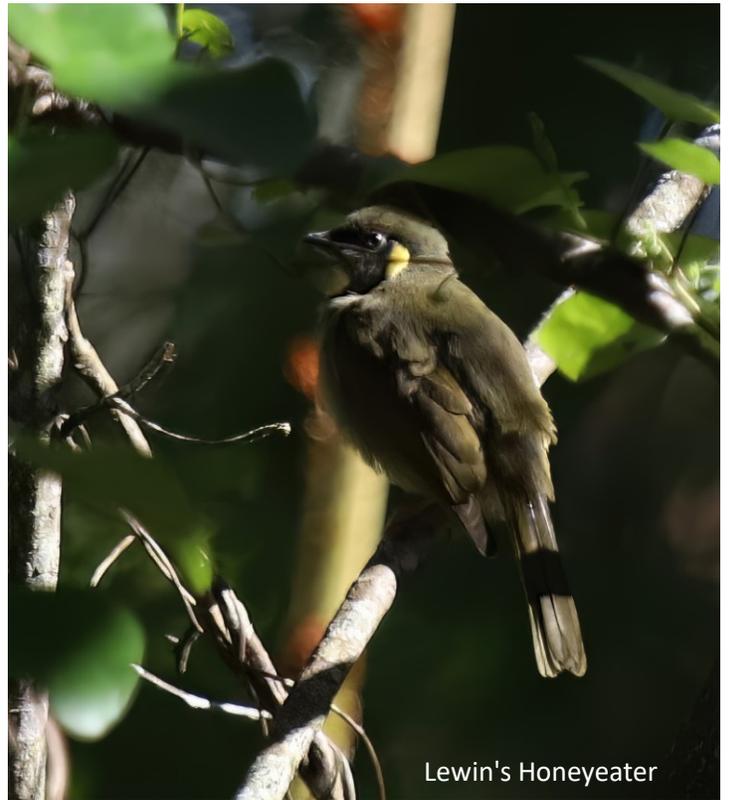
Australian Kestrel



Sooty Oystercatcher



Lewin's Honeyeater



Sacred Kingfishers





Assorted Loons



Yellow-tufted Honeyeater



Red-browed Finches



Jacky Winter



Eastern Yellow Robin



Bird Identification

How a non-birder describes a bird that they saw in their backyard - and they want you to identify it:



What they actually saw:



How You Can Help BLS

If you would like to get involved in bird conservation in the Shoalhaven, either as part of a specific BirdLife Shoalhaven project or by taking on a committee position, please let us know!

There are, however, a lot of other things that you can do. You could write an article (or articles) for this magazine. Or you could lead a bird walk in your local area, something that you might do on a regular basis anyhow, but something that no other BLS members usually do.

You could also become one of our Facebook editors, send us some photos, or tell us about conservation issues in your neighbourhood!

Just email communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

The Fine Print

Contributions - any bird photographs, articles, conservation issues, birding experiences, anecdotes or sightings that you would like to share with fellow members, please send to the editor (Brett Davis) at communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

Requests for **re-publication of articles** must be referred to the Editor for approval.

General Disclaimer - the information in articles in this magazine is accepted in good faith and although the editor has tried to verify the accuracy of all information, BirdLife Shoalhaven and BirdLife Australia accept no responsibility for any errors, inaccuracies or exaggerations in this magazine.

Errors - if you find any errors in this magazine, please inform the editor at communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

Acknowledgements - thank you all of this season's contributors.

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Apologies - to contributors and sources who have inadvertently not been acknowledged. Let us know of our oversight and we will acknowledge your contribution in the next magazine.

Opinions - the opinions expressed in articles in this magazine are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of BirdLife Shoalhaven or BirdLife Australia.

Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

birdlife.org.au

Add your voice



Enjoy the rewards of membership, making a real difference for our native birds



Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help



Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats