

# BirdLife Shoalhaven Magazine



## Spring 2023



PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
*Peter Noaker*

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**Contributions:** Articles about birds - from anyone and everyone - are most welcome!!! Send all contributions via email to [communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org)

**Cover Photo:** New Holland Honeyeater 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.



So that nobody thinks BLS does not take Bird Week seriously, we also held a bird walk specifically for beginners in the Jervis Bay National Park near Vincentia. 25 people showed up and it was great to help people make the best out of their binoculars, find their way around a bird guide and get some help doing an Aussie Bird Count – see report on page 19.

Once again, the annual Aussie Bird Count has helped build the skills of our birders of the future and, sharing a few beverages with birding friends, has certainly added to the fun of Bird Week in the Shoalhaven!



### **Expanding our partnership with Shoalhaven Landcare**

Over the last few years BLS has developed a close relationship with the Shoalhaven Landcare Association (SLA), particularly as part of their bushfire recovery projects. Landcare delivers critical conservation and land management outcomes on private land through weed and feral species control and plantings.

Their fox control project is just one example – learn more from their video on their website at [www.shoalhavenlandcare.org.au/fox-control-program.html](http://www.shoalhavenlandcare.org.au/fox-control-program.html).

BLS's support of Shoalhaven Landcare projects has been through giving bird talks, leading bird walks and doing bird surveys at Landcare sites. These has been enthusiastically received by landholders and has also introduced our members to property owners, some of whom have planted 1000's of trees or attacked acres of invasive weeds, like lantana.

This work often goes unnoticed by the wider community, but it is making a real difference to bird conservation.

BLS's latest support of SLA's projects is as a partner in their four-year project funded by the NSW Environmental Trust, which focusses on areas around the Budderoo Plateau, Kangaroo Valley and Budgong. This will include on-ground works to restore and extend native vegetation, expand pest control and involve and educate local landowners and volunteers.

The long-term aim of the project is to assist in the survival of endangered species in the area, which includes three bird species - the Glossy-black and Gang-gang Cockatoos, and Powerful Owls.

Recently BLS's Yolande Cozijn has given talks on these species to about 50 landowners at two events in Kangaroo Valley and Budgong. At the last talk, BLS's Kim Touzel also talked about what she has found from her bird surveys since the bushfires on the property of Barbara & Adam Acworth, where the talk was being held. SLA will be inviting BLS members to this series of talks next year.



Yolande Cozijn - speaking to Landcarers on endangered bird species



Kim Touzel (left) and her pictures of the birds she recorded at the back

Both Landcare and Bushcare make a real difference for the protection of birds and other fauna and flora. If you want to increase your involvement in bird and nature conservation, consider volunteering - go to [Shoalhaven Landcare](#) and / or [Shoalhaven City Council Bushcare](#).

## Changes in the BLS Committee

- by Rob Dunn

Unfortunately, Brett Davis has stepped down from the BLS Committee. Brett, along with Barry Virtue and Karen Davis, established BLS back in 2014 as a branch of BirdLife Australia and he has made a major contribution to the BLS Committee since then. Through his positions of Communications Officer and Secretary, he has helped promote BLS's work across the Shoalhaven, especially through his development of the BLS website and editing the quarterly BLS Magazine. He will be missed at our meetings.

Though no longer on the Committee, in the coming months, Brett will continue to maintain our website, produce our flagship Magazine and contribute to Facebook. I'm delighted that Brett will still be supporting BLS in this way, as these channels of communications are vital for all facets of BLS - research, conservation, education and recreation.

Another change on the BLS Committee is the role of Conservation Officer after the resignation of Emily Dyball a few months ago, who has now taken up a position in the office of Penny Sharpe, MLC, the NSW Minister of the Environment.

To replace Emily on the BLS Committee, I'd like to welcome our new Conservation Officer, Deb Callister-Carter. As well as having birding as a hobby for decades, Deb has a long professional background in the conservation and environment space. This includes over a decade as a senior executive in the federal environment department prior to her retirement. She has experience in many areas that should be helpful to BLS, including wetlands, threatened species listing and Australia's national environmental legislation - the EPBC Act.

With these changes the current BLS Committee is -

- President** – Rob Dunn
- Secretary** – Phil Hendry
- Treasurer** – Karen Davis
- Conservation Officer** - Deb Callister-Carter
- Media** – Yolande Cozijn
- Bird Walk Coordinator** – Sue Mitchell
- General Committee** – Oisin Sweeney

I am always keen to talk to anyone who would like to join the Committee, especially now with Brett's absence. But you do not need to be on the Committee to support our work. Leading bird walks, writing for the magazine and posting on Facebook are just some of the ways you can help!

So, if you want to get more involved in BLS, email me on [president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org) and we can have a chat.



## It is more than a Numbers Game

- by Chris Grounds, Conservation Correspondent

- We are not alone with our Shoalhaven bird species profile.
- We are clearly on a parallel path with the nation for threatened species.
- There is a challenge to our bird interests with development in the Shoalhaven.

The **2020 Action Plan for Australian Birds** was produced by BirdLife Australia [BLA] and Charles Darwin University. It drew on the expertise of hundreds of researchers who have studied and catalogued both the threats facing Australia's birds and the actions needed to recover those teetering on the edge of extinction. The once-in-a-decade study found that 216 out of 1,299 species are in danger, an increase from 195 in 2011.

The Action Plan examines the state of Australia's birdlife, how individual species are faring, what actions can be taken to halt and reverse declines, and where there have been conservation successes.

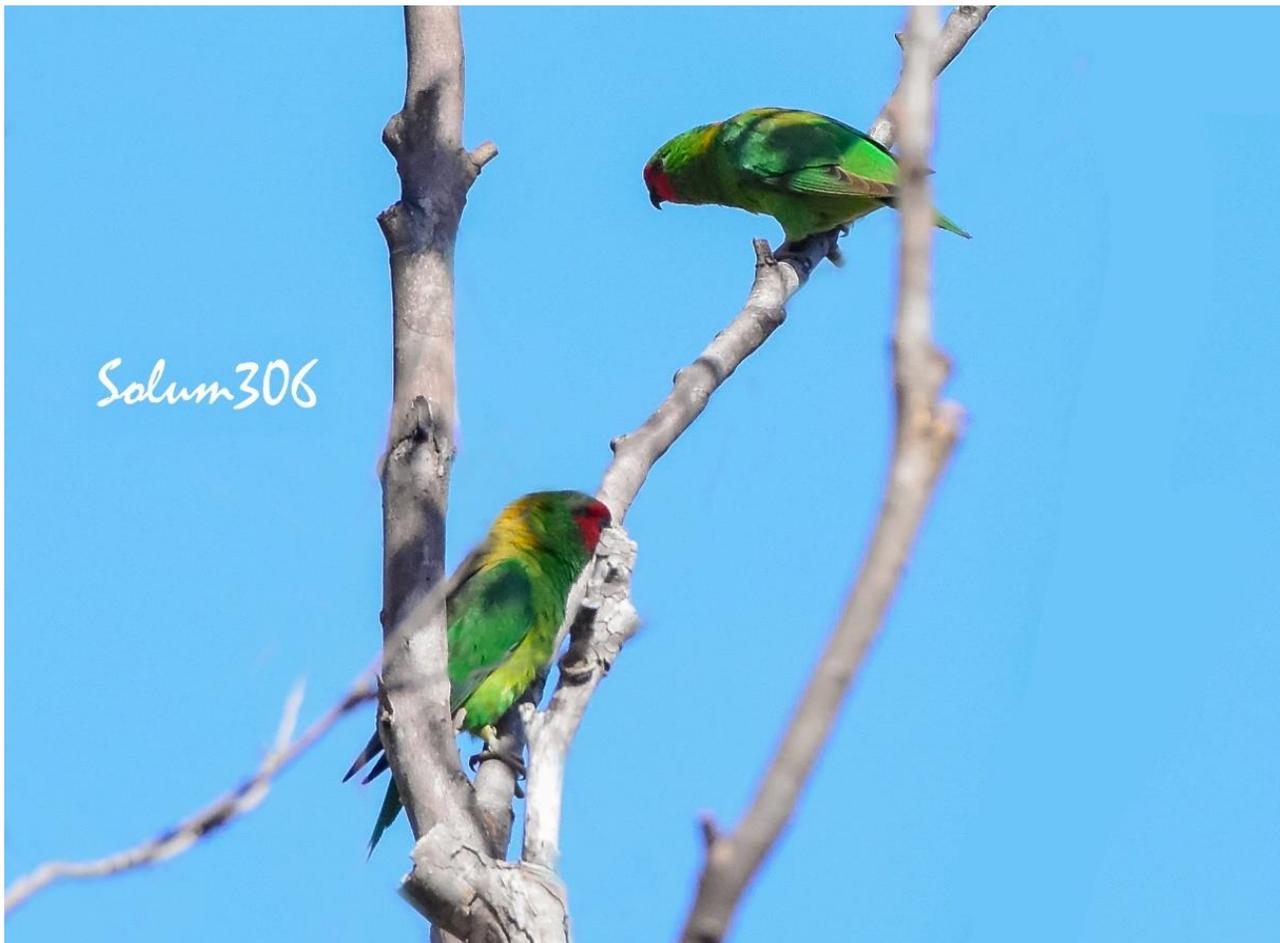
According to the study: One in six Australian birds are now threatened!

The study links this to the "climate emergency", which is pushing species closer to extinction.

In August this year James Matcott, a BLA conservation campaigner, was advocating for changes in federal environmental laws and BLA member contact with our local pollies but was given to comment in this advocacy that:

1 in 6 Australian birds faces an uncertain future, as our current laws are broken!

Sean Dooley, also of BLA, said it was estimated there were 6 million fewer individuals across those 17 species than there were in 2011 and "that is almost unequivocally due to climate change. What really stands out from the action plan is how quickly climate change is impacting our birds."



Threatened species - Little Lorikeet - at the Chessel Road site

In New South Wales, eight bird species were found to have become more threatened as a result of the 2019-20 bushfires, including the south-eastern Glossy Black-cockatoo, one of the iconic birds of the Shoalhaven.



Male and Female 'Glossies' have been a common sighting at Chessel Road

Clearly, there is some alarm and concern about the increase in threat to Australian birds in the national context and in relation to climate change and federal law reform.

### **The Shoalhaven Situation**

There is however an irony in the threat status for our Shoalhaven interest, given that the Shoalhaven position is also that: *one in six species are threatened with 61 species on our BLS threat list.*

This is a situation I have put forward with BLS for a number of years now. There is a little flexibility in the total number of bird species in the Shoalhaven but that doesn't really warp the 'game stats'.

Our Shoalhaven birds reflect a threat status that is parallel to the broader national position. The Shoalhaven of course cannot be and is not immune from climate change nor from habitat damage and destruction. Nor is it immune from the impact of development.

### **The Development Filter**

Neither are natural environment assessments, including birds, excluded from evaluation and critical thinking in the various Development Applications that traverse Shoalhaven Council planning.

A reference to the further, second DA for a crematorium at Chessel Road in St Georges Basin, for which BLS has opposed any Council Consent, shines some light on the issue.

Surveys of the natural area bushland at and around the crematorium site established with professional verification this year that the presence of the Eastern Bristlebird, which is listed as Endangered on both the NSW and national threatened species list, exists around the site. That is unknown to the proponents of the new DA and does not figure in the actual support of the application. It is now public knowledge with the provision of submissions to Council, all of which have "Objected" to the DA.



Eastern Bristlebird habitat Chessel Road

It is important as it suggests that Eastern Bristlebird numbers have grown but also expanded spatially and impose on decisions about the site and the DA. Remember that this species is the “trigger species” for the Jervis Bay KBA, which looks like it may need extending. A population of the species is thriving in the Booderee National Park and the Jervis Bay National Park corridor and this has been a source of a translocation project of a number of local birds to support a much less healthy population at Wilson Promontory in Victoria.



Eastern Bristlebird - Endangered on both NSW AND Commonwealth lists

The original and the further crematorium proposal are a real test case as the lands are privately owned, subject to Shoalhaven Local Environment Plan [SLEP] provisions and zoned for Rural 2



#### Biodiverse and significant natural area bushland

These same lands are categorised with SLEP Overlays for Biodiversity Corridor, Significant Vegetation, Sensitive Regulated Land and Riparian Corridor.

Not only is the area of high value for the biodiversity of birds but specifically for the threatened species that have now been documented by independent BLS members for that area.

This is not land in national parks or reserves and it reminds us that high value environmental land exists outside national parks forest protection. Each category - National Parks and Reserves and private land holdings - are vital to the ecological integrity of the other.

## My Bird Photography

- by Robert Irving

Looking at the Birdlife Shoalhaven website, we were impressed by the quality of the magazine, both photographs and articles, and decided to contribute some of our bird photographs.

My photography started seriously in the early 1980s with the purchase of a Canon SLR and a 70-210 lens, specifically for wildlife photography whilst walking in the Snowy and Dividing Range. Carrying that gear in addition to a 20kg pack and water convinced me that long lenses were for the dedicated photographer.

After moving to the Jervis Bay area, the need for longer reach for whale photography caused a trial with a bridge camera a few years ago, finally settling on a Nikon P950 as a camera more likely to be carried due to its portability. The variety of backyard birds in the area increased interest in bird photography and the chance of sea eagles and kites in Booderee, where we walk several times a week, is a challenge.



The Maned Goose (Australian Wood Duck) photo (above) is part of a series. The large gum tree in a neighbour's yard has attracted inspection for several years by a pair of geese each early spring. We notice them because of their chatter as they explore the hole. Other residents in the tree, particularly Rainbow Lorikeets are also interested in the potential new neighbours, and challenges occur from these feisty tree dwellers. The upshot is the geese don't move in, whether from bossy Lorikeets or problems with the accommodation - we don't know.

Living in St Georges Basin, we walk in Booderee several times a week, tide and weather permitting, usually carrying a camera and always carrying binoculars. Around two years ago we followed a pair of Whistling Kites who nested between Scottish Rocks and Hole in the Wall. They defended their stretch of beach against cruising Sea Eagles, driving them several hundred metres offshore - see next page.

White-bellied Sea-eagle



The Southern Boobook Owl (below) was photographed sheltering in a palm tree in our garden, the Channel-billed Cuckoo (next page) was photographed in a neighbour's mulberry tree.

Southern Boobook





Channel-billed Cuckoo

We were also lucky to find a pair of Pied Oystercatchers with a juvenile near the creek next to the Hole in the Wall track, photographing the juvenile as it was escorted to the water.



Pied Oystercatcher

Young Pied Oystercatcher

## A Trip to Western Australia

- by Ann Millard

A comment in the last great magazine said, "One of the inevitable consequences of travelling all over Australia looking for birds is that the more species you see, the less species there are left to see."

I can relate to that and have decided to fill a few gaps in my Australian bird list. Some people have told me that every new bird could cost more than \$1000. I'm not going to calculate the cost but look to go to interesting places where I may have been before, but this time with specific birds in mind.

Firstly, I had a few days in Perth and engaged a guide for the day to help find the recently split Western Shrike-tit. We found it by 9.30am and then had a relaxed day of birding in Wandoo Forest not far from Perth seeing some of the endemics.

After that, I joined a trip with 6 others to go from Perth to Newman in the Pilbara with stops at Geraldton, Monkey Mia, Mount Magnet and Sandstone. We saw a huge variety of habitats but they were predominantly very dry and varying from rocky, harsh landscapes to sand and spinifex.



The first new bird for me was another new taxonomic split yielding the Western Fieldwren at Kalbarri. It was happy to sit out in the open for us despite freezing conditions and strong winds. From there we travelled to Hamelin Pool and Monkey Mia where the usually shy Western Grasswren was almost running over our feet through the car park. The added bonus at both those places was the Chiming Wedgebill - also abundant in the right habitat!

So much of chasing new birds is recognising habitat and knowing their call but there is also luck involved. The only Western Quail Thrush we saw during the 3000km trip flew across the road in front of us, and obligingly didn't go too far away. Another tick! We spent a lot more time looking for it again on the rocky hills of Mt Magnet - to no avail!



Western Quail-thrush

Grasswrens are notoriously cryptic little creatures, and our next targets were two subspecies of the Rufous Grasswren. The Sandhill Grasswren (*Amytornis oweni*) being the first and, yes, it lives in sandhills and spinifex. After stopping in about 8 different places and walking around 14km amongst the spinifex and over logs, I decided that I wasn't too worried about ever seeing the sneaky little creature. Perhaps, it was too cold or too windy or we had negative thoughts after being in difficult terrain all day?? The result of the exercise was that I am resigned to NEVER having it on my Aussie list. It doesn't really matter, does it?

Unlike the Sandhill Grasswren, the Pilbara Grasswren (*Amytornis whitei*) jumped onto logs and shrubs in front of us at the lookout in Newman. Of course, if they were all as easy as that, we wouldn't be bothered with the search!



Pilbara Grasswren

Birding is a great hobby whether you have a list or not. It is an opportunity to see special places in Australia and meet some other bird nerds, most of whom are truly wonderful people.



Southern Scrub-robin



Whistling Kite

## Rails and Crakes in the Southern Shoalhaven

- by Phil Hendry, Chris Brandis, Mike Jefferis and Charles Dove

Rails and Crakes are small to medium-sized wetland birds - according to the Australian Bird Guide (ABG). They are typically very shy and run to cover if startled. Consequently, although many are widespread in Australia, they are not often sighted.



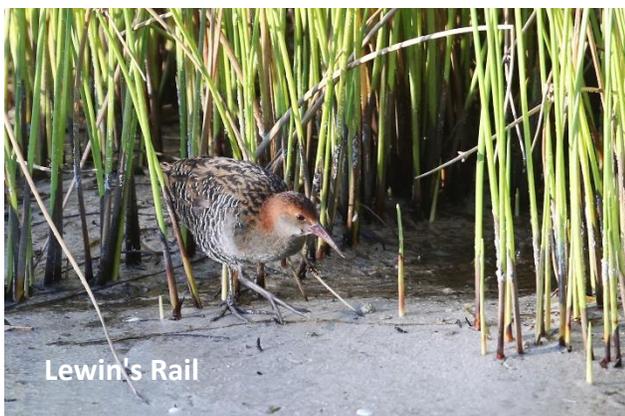
In mid-July, Mike Jefferis sighted this bird (left) just below the cliffs near Florance Head to the west of Milton. We concluded that it must have been a Lewin's Rail despite the unexpected location.

A quick look at the ABG says that in addition to their typical habitat of reeds and saltmarsh, they can also be found in wetlands in rainforest, woodlands and heathlands.

Chris Brandis reported that he had seen one recently in a more typical setting in the reeds and saltmarsh at Burrill Lake. Charles Dove had also sighted them in the inlet of the small creek in the Lions Park at Burrill Lake until the work began on the new bridge in 2017 - see photos below. He has also recorded sightings at Narrawallee and the Lake Conjola sand mine.

Back to the present, the Lewin's Rail has been re-sighted a few times at the Rackham Crescent reed beds in Burrill Lake. At that site, while searching for the Lewin's Rail, we have frequently seen the Buff-banded Rail (BBR).

On one occasion, while photographing the BBR, a Spotless Crake wandered into view (both birds on next page). Prior to this, there have been only 3 records of this species in Birdata in the Shoalhaven - all around Nowra; Worrige, Lake Wollumboola and Comerong Island.



Lewin's Rail



Lewin's Rail



Buff-banded Rail



Spotless Crake

Buff-banded Rail



Lewin's Rail



Spotless Crake

## Birdwatching for Beginners

- by Sue Mitchell

Bird Week (October 16 – 23, 2023) in the Shoalhaven is a week to celebrate the beautiful and varied birds in the area. There are approximately 400 different species to keep a budding bird watcher busy. In an effort to help people of varying bird watching abilities, BirdLife Shoalhaven hosts 'Birdwatching for Beginners'.

This year it was led by Yolande Cozijn, Karen Davis, Brett Davis and Sue Mitchell. Due to its popularity, we split into two groups to explore part of the White Sands Track and the inland Sclerophyll forest near Greenfield Beach. We had an enjoyable afternoon tea to kick off the proceedings, learnt how to use binoculars, and added data to the BirdLife Australia bird count app which is used throughout Bird Week.



After, we described how people - if they were interested - could take part in our local bird walks from Shoalhaven Heads to as far south as Bawley Point and access our Bird Walk program. Some of the lucky ones went home with a six pack of posters describing our Shoalhaven birds.

We hope to see some of today's people on the track sometime soon.

Birdwatching is one of the most pleasurable activities we have on offer here in the Shoalhaven and beyond. Despite a mid-afternoon start and the early arrival of a fairly strong nor-easterly breeze - not the most ideal conditions for birdwatching - we still managed to put together a pretty good list of birds (below) ...

- Australasian Gannet
- Australian King-Parrot
- Australian Raven
- Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
- Brown Thornbill
- Crested Tern
- Crimson Rosella
- Eastern Yellow Robin
- Great Cormorant
- Grey Fantail
- Grey Shrike-thrush
- Laughing Kookaburra
- Little Wattlebird
- Lewin's Honeyeater
- Pied Cormorant
- Rufous Whistler
- Sacred Kingfisher
- Shining Bronze Cuckoo
- Spotted Pardalote
- Striated Pardalote
- Superb Fairy-wren
- White-bellied Sea-Eagle
- White-throated Treecreeper
- Yellow-faced Honeyeater



## The Last Page – and how you can help BirdLife Shoalhaven

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 BirdLife Shoalhaven 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!

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

Send all correspondence by email to [communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org)

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## The Fine Print

**Contributions** - if you have any bird photographs, articles, conservation issues, birding experiences, anecdotes or sightings that you would like to share with fellow members, please send to [communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org). Requests for re-publication of articles must be referred to the BirdLife Shoalhaven committee for approval.

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