

# BirdLife Shoalhaven Magazine Winter 2023



*Phil Hendry*

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### Contributions

Any article about birds - from anyone - is most welcome ... !!! Email it to [communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org)

**Cover Photo:** Australian Hobby by Phil Hendry

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

# The final BLS Bushfire Recovery Project Report

- by Rob Dunn, President of BirdLife Shoalhaven

In June we completed our three-year Bushfire Recovery Project, which looked at the recovery of bird populations from the peak period of the 2019-20 bushfires in January 2020 to December 2022.

This is one of the most important projects that BLS has carried out since we started back in 2014 and makes an important contribution in trying to understand the impact on birds of this catastrophic environmental event.



**BIRDLIFE SHOALHAVEN**  
**BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PROJECT**  
**FINAL REPORT**

June 2023



The primary aim of the project was to examine changes in bird species richness and abundance by analysing 750 bird surveys recorded by some 50 volunteers in the three-year period at different fire-affected sites across the Shoalhaven.

The primary findings from the project were that:

- In terms of species richness, more bird species were recorded on average at unburnt survey sites, compared to burnt sites, though there has been a gradual reduction in this difference over the three years - see graph 1 on page 4.

- However, in terms of species abundance, while greater numbers of birds were recorded in unburnt survey sites, compared to burnt sites, there was no reduction in this difference over the three years - see graph 2 on page 4.

This could suggest that, while more species are moving back into burnt areas from unburnt areas, this is still not occurring in high numbers of birds.

These findings support an emerging view, that after three years, while the dawn chorus may now include more individual bird calls in some areas, it is still not at the same volume that was the case before the fires.

This could be explained by habitat in burnt areas not having recovered sufficiently after three years to support the same abundance of birds as in unburnt areas.

The report expands on this and looks at the impacts of the bushfires on both individual and groups of species, species considered by the Australian Government as bushfire recovery priorities and in the Shoalhaven's Key Biodiversity Areas.

While the aims of the project focussed on changes in bird species richness and abundance, it also delivered social outcomes. The project evolved over the three years and became multi-faceted, making casual bird observations, completing surveys, preparing reports, helping landowners, supporting arts events, running bird courses, organizing bird walks and giving presentations.

Importantly, new connections were made through a long period of slow recovery. In many ways, these social outcomes have been just as important as the primary focus of the project.

This report is one of the few reports in Australia that looks at the impact of the bushfires on all birds. Government funding has been directed almost exclusively to monitoring the impacts of the fires on threatened species, and specific birds whose distribution areas were most impacted by fire. While of course this is important, this does not answer questions about the future of wider bird communities.

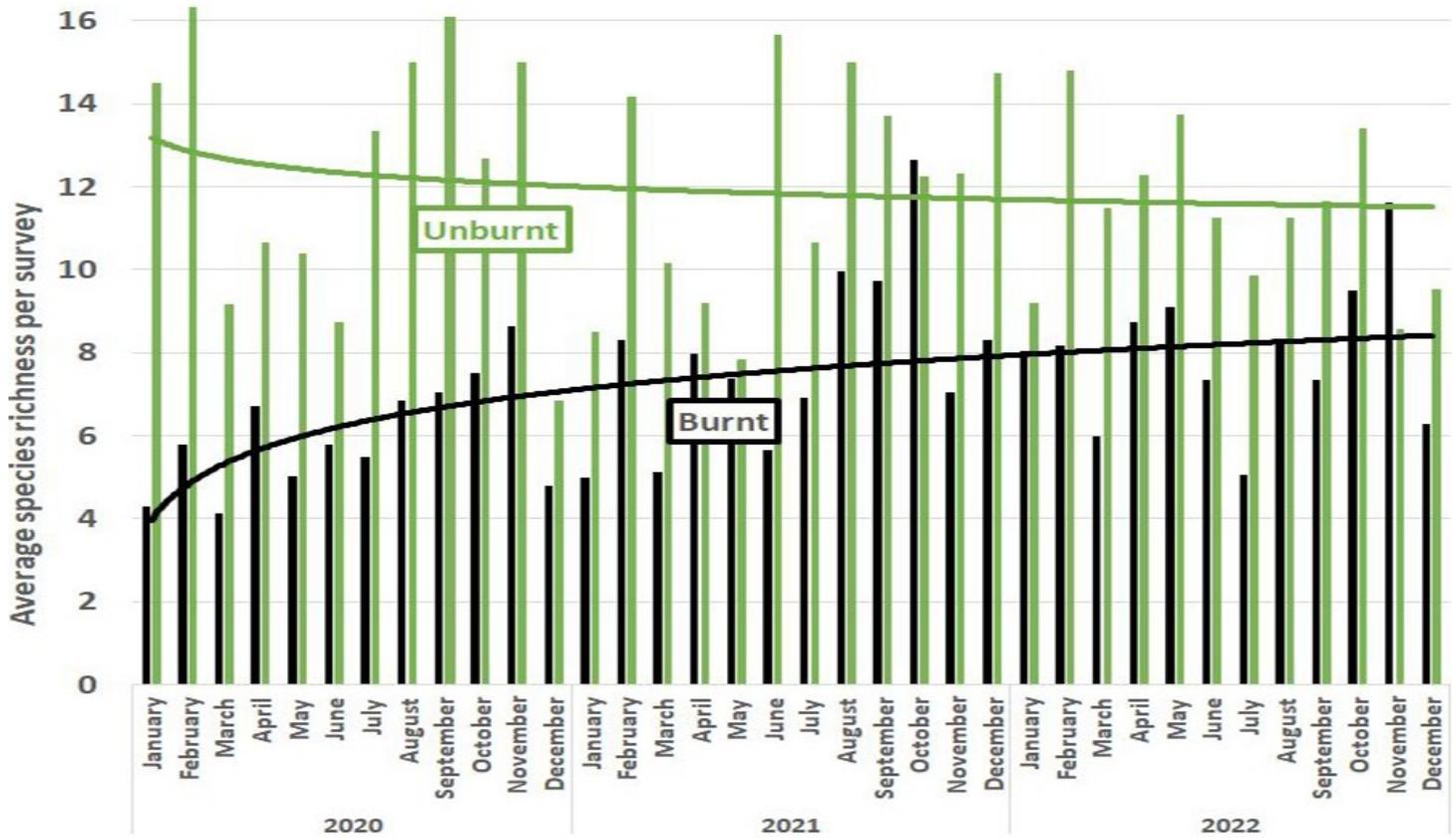
The recovery of habitats across the Shoalhaven has marked contrasts from dense regrowth in areas of fertile soils to minimal regrowth in the sandy soils in large parts of the Currowan mega-fire burn area across some 500,000 hectares.

This means that trying to understand what might make up the relative diversity and abundance of bird communities in the future has not been looked at in any depth.

This is one of very few reports that scratches at the surface on this complex issue.

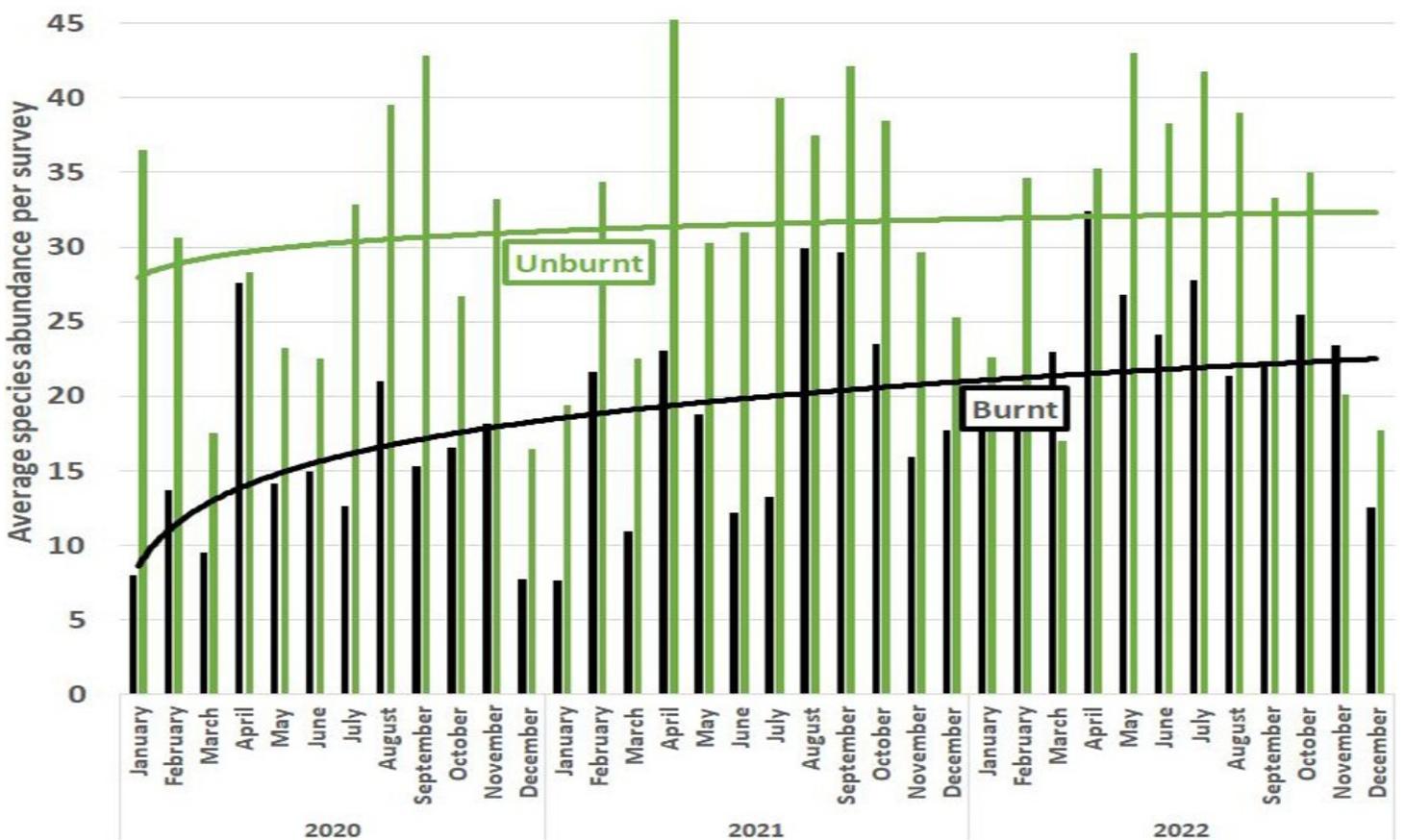
**Graph 1**

**Average richness per survey - burnt v unburnt sites**



**Graph 2**

**Average abundance per survey - burnt v unburnt sites**



You can download and read the full report by going to [www.birdlifeshoalhaven.org/pdfs/blsbrpfinalreport.pdf](http://www.birdlifeshoalhaven.org/pdfs/blsbrpfinalreport.pdf)

You can also watch a 45 min. presentation by Rob Dunn, BLS Shoalhaven President, called *'BirdLife Shoalhaven Bushfire Recovery Project – the people and the birds'* by going to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sC7YrxG83b4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sC7YrxG83b4)

The BLS quarterly magazines since the fires also include case studies, interviews, updates and reports relevant to the project:

[2023 Autumn magazine](#) – Yatte Yattah and Little Forest case studies follow-up - pp 13-14

[2022 Winter magazine](#) – Two year project report – pp 5-7

[2021 Summer magazine](#) – New Leaves New Lives art exhibition – pp 16-19

[2021 Spring magazine](#) – Bushfire Research Project update – pp 5-7

[2021 Winter magazine](#) – First year project report – page 4 - and Yatte Yattah and Little Forest case studies - pp 13-14

[2020 Summer magazine](#) – Early observations – pp 3 - 15

[2020 Spring magazine](#) – Interview with Nic Carlile – survey site owner at Budgong – pp 6-10 - and Bendalong case study – pp 11-12

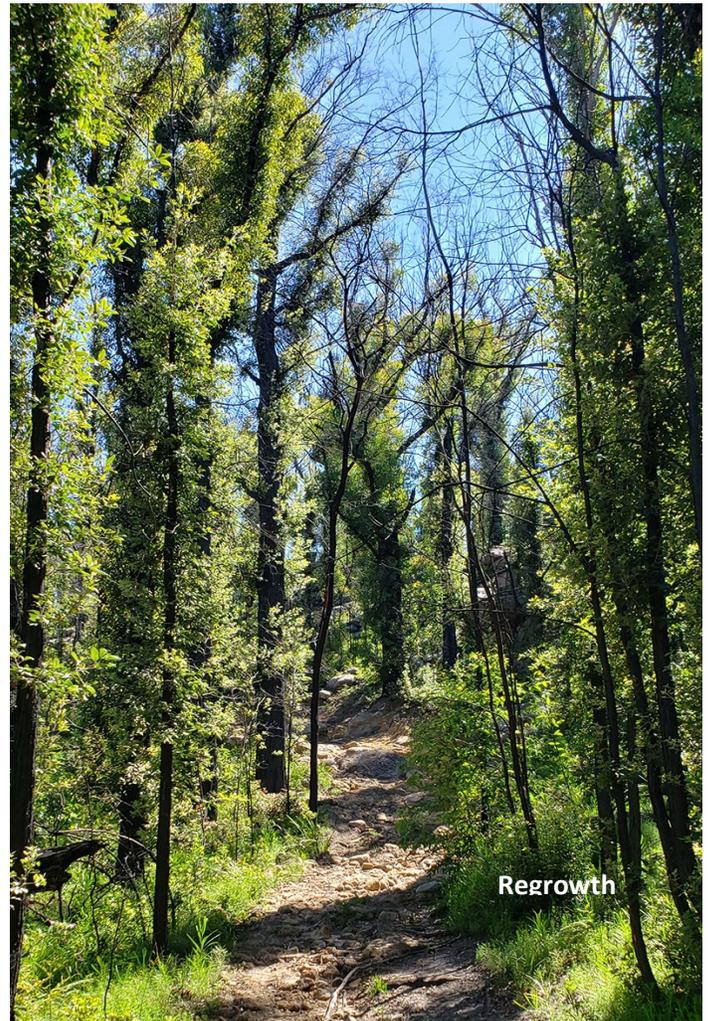
[2020 Winter magazine](#) – Interview with Fiona Stewart, landowner at Yatte Yattah - pp 9-13 - and West Braidwood / Bawley Point case studies – pp 14-18

[2020 Autumn magazine](#) – Early observations - Pages 3-12

BLS appreciates the commitment to the project shown by local birdwatchers, who have contributed many hours of effort in the field to complete bird surveys, as well as bird photographers, event organisers and speakers, private

landowners and many more. Without their support this report would not have been possible.

We would welcome any feedback you may have on the project, which you can email to me at [president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org).



## What else has BirdLife Shoalhaven been up to?

- by Rob Dunn, President of BirdLife Shoalhaven

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### Visit by Prof. Martine Maron, BirdLife Australia President

In April, Prof. Martine Maron, President of BirdLife Australia, came to Ulladulla to talk about the latest research into tracking the health of woodland bird communities. About 80 people showed up on the day. This was three years after she was last in the area when she spoke at the Mollymook Golf Club soon after the 2019-20 bushfires.

Martine covered how woodland bird communities in Australia are increasingly under threat and why it is important for us to measure and track the condition of entire bird communities – not just individual species. She described current research to identify and map all the different types of Australian bird communities and how we can measure their health and condition.

She highlighted that with thousands of Australians contributing data through citizen science, including our own Bushfire Recovery Project, we may not be far away from being able to measure and track the condition - and hopefully the recovery - of bird communities right across Australia.

Martine was joined by Erin Farley, BirdLife Australia Campaigns and Participation Team Leader, who talked about the new national laws to protect nature and what can be done to make sure we get the best outcome for birds.

and recipient of a BirdLife Australia Distinguished Services Award for her work over 25 years to help protect this vital Key Biodiversity Area. Frances was a bit disappointed that there were not too many shorebirds and Black Swans on the Lake to show to Martine and Erin, but this was more than made up for with at least 10,000 Eurasian Coots. Lake Wollumboola never disappoints!



### Supporting the campaign to contain cats indoors

Along with many other groups, BLS has written to Shoalhaven Council to draw their attention to the imperative to control domestic cats, and to prevent the loss of birds and native wildlife in the Shoalhaven and across NSW. NSW and Western Australia are the only States that have no provisions on cat curfews or their containment indoors.



It was also great to have Fiona Phillips MP, Member for Gilmore, provide an opening address at the event. She also spoke at the event in Mollymook in 2020, so the event had a certain symmetry with the release of our three year Bushfire Recovery Project.

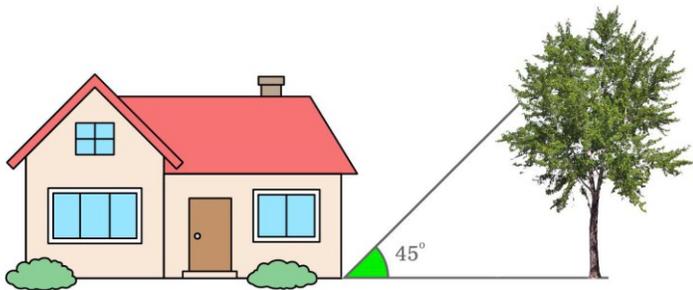
On their way to Ulladulla, Martine and Erin dropped into Lake Wollumboola to meet with Frances Bray. Frances is President of the Lake Wollumboola Protection Association

This is directly impacting on the loss of birds and native animals across the State. The current NSW Companion Animals Act means that Local Governments are unable to act to control the containment of domestic cats. This campaign has been driven locally over many years by BirdLife Shoalhaven members Norm and Maureen Webb. You can read about in an interview with Norm reproduced in our Summer 2019 magazine by following this link [interview with Norm Webb](#).

Maureen expands on this important issue for bird conservation later in this Magazine - see next page. It is an important issue that will be an increasing focus for BLS. Watch this space!

### The 45 Degree Rule

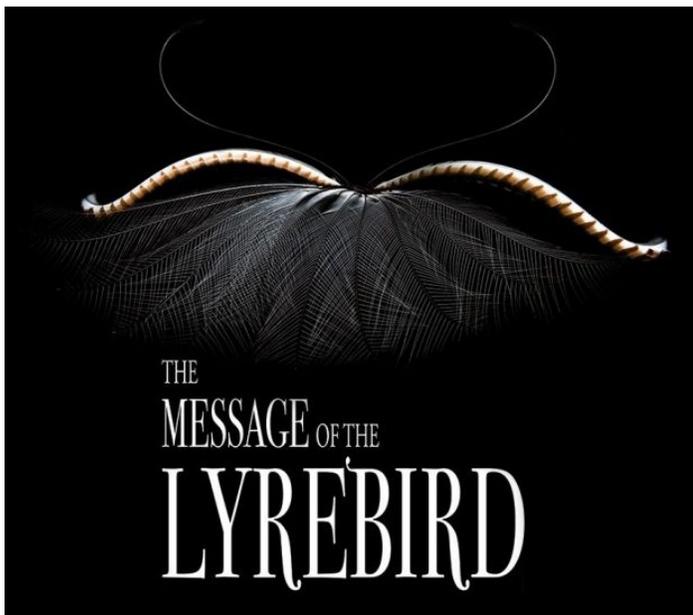
BLS was part of the concerted campaign to oppose the 45-degree rule, urging Shoalhaven Council to scrap the rule and replace it with a comprehensive urban greening program.



The campaign was successful after a lengthy debate in the chamber in front of a packed gallery at the May Council meeting and again at the June meeting as part of a rescission motion.

It should be stressed that what has been approved is a one-year trial on the changes, so we can expect to have to re-ignite the campaign next year, though we should all enjoy this success in the meantime.

### Supporting "The Message of the Lyrebird"



In June last year BLS ran a fundraiser showing to the award-winning film "The Message of the Lyrebird". The event filled the Huskisson Movie Theatre with 130 showing up. The producers of the film have just launched an edu-action drive to get the film into the Australian and NZ school curriculum, which is likely to bring the film to Shoalhaven schools.

BLS has just contributed \$1,500 from what we raised at the showing in Huskisson to support this exciting initiative. To help raise funds for the edu-action drive, the film was shown on-line with an hour Q&A session afterwards featuring some of the scientists in the film. You can see this on - [youtu.be/ZcDZdEF1vZA](https://youtu.be/ZcDZdEF1vZA)

### Continuing our partnership with Shoalhaven Landcare

BLS has built a great partnership with Shoalhaven Landcare over several years. This has included bird talks and walks on private properties, tree planting and weeding field days and bird surveys, as part of our Bushfire Research Project.



The group has recently been successful in winning a major four-year grant from the NSW Environmental Trust for nature conservation projects across the Budderoo Plateau to Budgong in the northern Shoalhaven. This will include weed control at key habitat sites, replanting beside flood damaged waterways, building habitat corridors, and expanding the Shoalhaven Fox Control program.

As part of their focus on endangered species and community engagement, BLS will be giving talks on the Glossy Black-cockatoo, Gang-Gang Cockatoo and Powerful Owl.

We will send out the details of these talks and Landcare field days, so you can all help build on this important partnership. You can visit the Shoalhaven Landcare website at [www.shoalhavenlandcare.org.au](http://www.shoalhavenlandcare.org.au)

# Keeping Cats and Wildlife Safe

- by Maureen Webb



**ARE YOU KEEPING YOUR BEST MATE SAFE?**

Help get your cat or dog home safely by registering them - visit [www.petregistry.nsw.gov.au](http://www.petregistry.nsw.gov.au)

In 1998 the NSW Companion Animals Act combined cats and dogs within the one policy. This Act did not give local councils the ability to act for their own requirements to control the domestic pet cat.

Since that time many things have changed. It is believed by some NSW Councils and groups that now is the time (2023) to review the Companion Animals Act specifically to ensure the safety of our suffering wildlife. The feral cat is a pariah and it seems that actions to control the feral cat can be utilised using humane methods for catching and / or euthanizing.

Research is showing that the pet cat is causing great harm to our wildlife including birds.



## Bushfire

The 2019 bushfires are estimated to have burned over 97,000 sq km of habitat for native species.

Over four billion animals were killed, harmed or displaced including a myriad of native Australian birds.

17 species of birds have been identified as requiring urgent management action.

While our birdlife is struggling to survive in remnant bushland and unburnt havens, the domestic cat is permitted to roam free.

## Research

It is known that roaming (domestic) cats kill 390 million animals per year in Australia, including reptiles, birds and mammals. This represents an average of 186 animals, mostly native species, per roaming domestic cat each year. This data comes from a University of NSW survey from 2020.

Research highlighted in the Sydney Morning Herald on 9th June 2023 titled "The staggering death toll of roaming pet cats finally revealed" shows "pet cats kill 30 to 50 times more native animals per square kilometre than feral cats kill in the bush".

"Domestic cat wildlife killings to surge unless tougher regulation introduced" - ANU study (smh.com.au) - the article also stated research carried out by the Australian National University was conducted for the Biodiversity Council, Invasive Species Council and Birdlife Australia and that in NSW, 14 Councils - including Hornsby Shire Council, Blue Mountains and Wollongong City Council - have supported the introduction of stricter regulations since 2018.

Blue Mountains Council Mayor Mark Greenhill said councils had no power when it came to implementing regulations on cat curfews.



As reported in the BLS Newsletter (Summer 2022) two of our members were part of the first Zoom meeting of stakeholders for the NSW RSPCA project "Keeping Cats Safe at Home Indoors" (KCSH Indoors) with their aim to "Encourage cat owners to keep their cats safe at home and reduce cat predation on wildlife". The project was commenced over 12 months ago.

“ 2 in 3 cat owners have lost a cat to a roaming-related accident; 1 in 3 to a car accident! ”

With this project many Councils across NSW applied for \$92,000 each to implement actions for local residents to keep their pet cats safe from harm by keeping them indoors. Only 10 Councils were accepted (Shoalhaven included) but their application - to acquire the \$92,000 for the KCSH Indoors project - shows clearly that the free roaming domestic cat is an issue covering many areas of NSW.

Actions carried out by the RSPCA and the other Councils have all been shown as positive with less kittens being dropped at Animal Shelters and knowledge gained from education. RSPCA representatives have spoken at conferences across NSW plus put into place information on social media and a variety of other actions. Shoalhaven City Council rangers have implemented actions - giving veterinarians pamphlets to get the word out that it was safest for pets and wildlife if the pet was kept indoors.



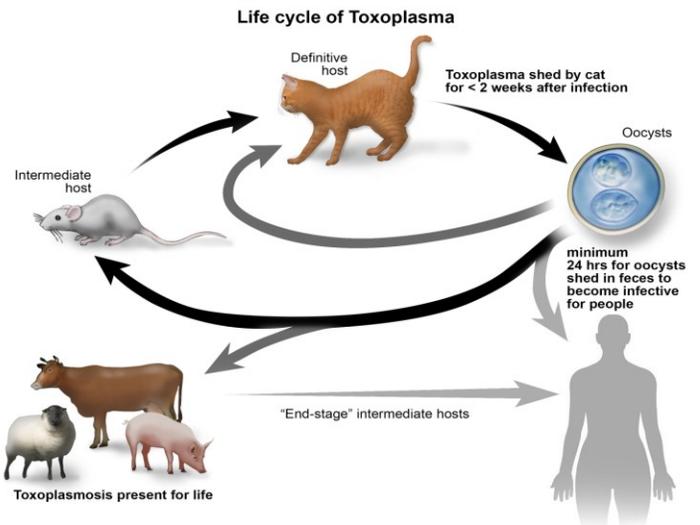
Also, a targeted, funded desexing project has been part of Shoalhaven Council's input into the KCSH Indoors program.



Cat runs provide good alternative cat accommodation

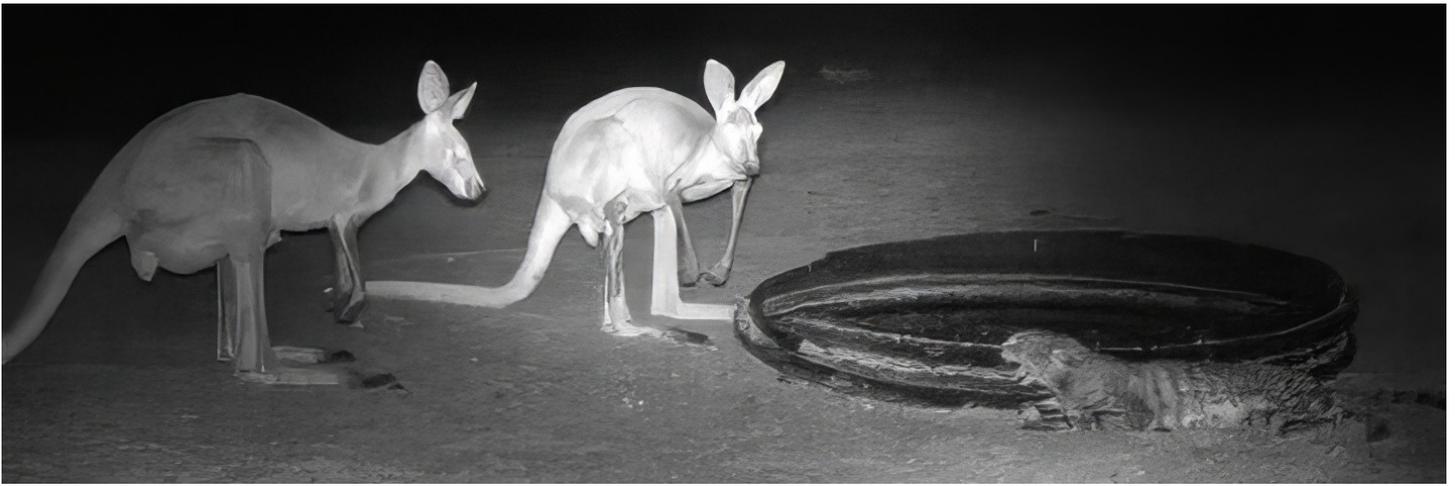
While BirdLife Shoalhaven sees all these actions as positive it cannot be taken as sufficient to stop free roaming pet cats from preying on the birds and wildlife still able to hang on since the bushfires and floods. Regulations for control must be sought.

Recent research has also established serious health risks for both people and native wildlife from the cat-borne Toxoplasmosis.



While this article may seem anti-cat and while our focus must be on protecting wildlife, it is recognised that cats hold a special place in many families. This focus on preventing cats from roaming must also be seen as protective for domestic cats.

Other research has shown the dangers for free roaming cats including motor vehicles, dogs and other cats. The cat curfew being called for is many faceted - to better control domestic pet cats, reduce wildlife predation, human health risk and also assist with the safety of the pet cat.



Birdlife Shoalhaven has contacted Shoalhaven Council and the relevant NSW Ministers to suggest urgent action is required from the NSW government to ensure the domestic cat is adequately controlled and kept within their owner's property and to give NSW Councils the power to ensure control of the domestic cat - control that will require a Domestic Cat Policy that could include a 24 hour cat curfew to assist the cessation of predation on our birdlife.



NSW and WA are the only two states where councils don't have the power to enact their own Domestic Cat Policy.

In Victoria, many local councils have already introduced cat curfew laws. These include Bayside, Bendigo, Darebin, Knox Council, Mitchell Shire, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.

In the ACT, the Government has introduced legislation to help Canberra's cats live longer and healthier lives, while better protecting native wildlife.

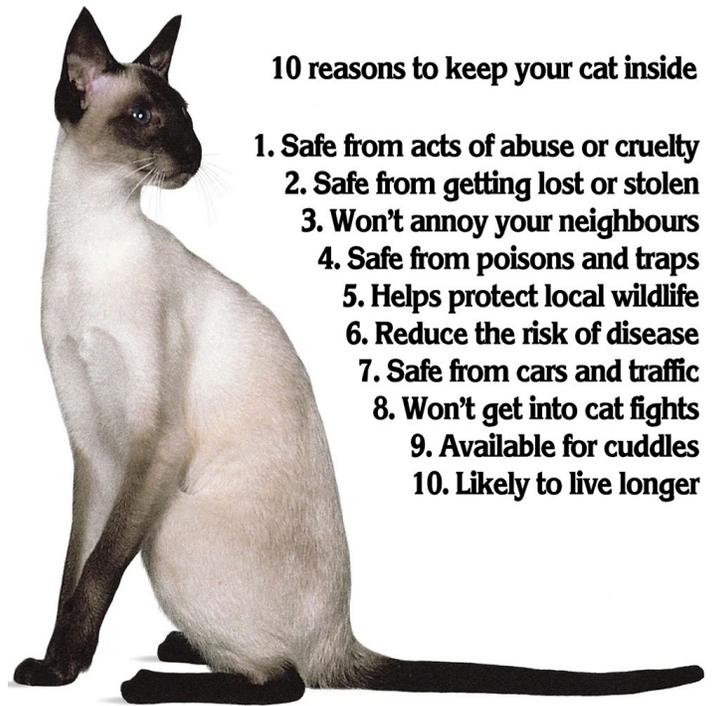
The ACT legislation also expands cat containment across Canberra for cats born from 1 July 2022. Cats born before this date will continue to be allowed to roam, unless they live in one of Canberra's 17 declared cat containment suburbs.

Given the recent publicity re pet cats, it seems NSW councils cannot act on their own but can only lobby the NSW Government.

There should be an urgent review of the NSW Companion Animals Act by the NSW government to give councils the power to act for our Australian birds.

It would seem the more voices heard the more likely action will be taken. Any person wishing to voice their own concerns re cats and birdlife can write to:

- NSW Minister for the Environment Penny Sharpe
- NSW Minister for South Coast Liza Butler
- Shoalhaven City Council for the attention of the CEO, The Mayor and all Councillors (PO Box 42 Nowra or email [council@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au) )
- The RSPCA for the attention of the CEO Stephen Coleman at [mail@rspcansw.gov.au](mailto:mail@rspcansw.gov.au)



### 10 reasons to keep your cat inside

1. Safe from acts of abuse or cruelty
2. Safe from getting lost or stolen
3. Won't annoy your neighbours
4. Safe from poisons and traps
5. Helps protect local wildlife
6. Reduce the risk of disease
7. Safe from cars and traffic
8. Won't get into cat fights
9. Available for cuddles
10. Likely to live longer

**“If you love your cat,  
you'll keep it indoors ...”**

## Grand Designs at Sanctuary Point

- by Chris Grounds

There are a number of elements that comprise threat to particular species but none more so than the success of nesting, best defined as producing fledglings.

We at BLS have visited our threatened species friend the Eastern osprey (*Pandion cristatus*) a number of times over the years in our magazine and even more in Bay and Basin and beyond.

The Osprey is a Vulnerable threatened species in NSW so nesting is critical. However, successful nesting is not their forte in the Bay and Basin and perhaps not in the entire Shoalhaven and south coast.

## Grand Designs

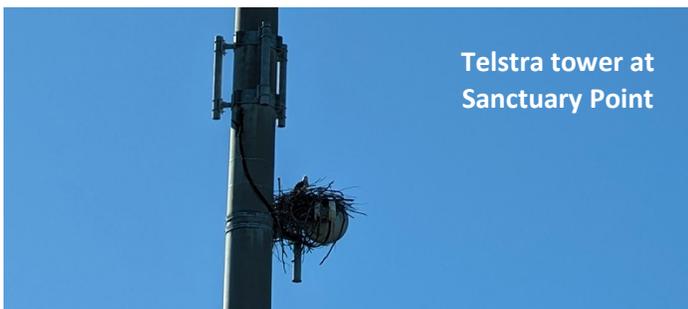


*All the attributes for flying and hunting but perhaps not nesting*

Osprey favour the top of tall, exposed human-made structures, open in all directions.

Three fledglings from 7 breeding seasons on the radio tower at Basin View was the best that high elevation site could produce.

Another "poorly engineered" nest site known from at least 2020 was built on the side of a Telstra phone tower at Sanctuary Point (see photo below) and it has been singularly unsuccessful though it is unusual as Osprey favour the top of human structures such as towers and poles.



Remarkably, another pair of Ospreys built a new, substantial and impressive nest a mere kilometre away atop a lighting pole smack in the middle of suburbia and adjacent to substantial traffic - both pedestrian and vehicle - see photo top right. It is a mere short glide to the St Georges Basin feeding waters like both other nests.

This pair are not the same birds from the Telstra site.

Both birds were very busy in breeding activities, bringing fish to the nest site and, as always, a continuous supply of sticks to replenish the composite stick nest.

What seemed a pathway to success was quickly reversed, probably by two severe wind storms in early July, just a week apart. Whilst the nest held - with some attrition - the Osprey pair have been seen only the once in the subsequent two weeks and the nest appears abandoned for the moment at least.

The irregular but continuous sightings of Osprey - and these nesting attempts - speaks to the importance of St Georges Basin or "Bherwerre" to the presence of this threatened species on the south coast of New South Wales.

Solum306



## Join the Ecodots

- by **Chris Grounds** (Conservation correspondent)

Local knowledge is one of the most important attributes that underpins community conservation campaigning in the Shoalhaven.

That local knowledge for BLS members has its focus on birds and improving and extending the known profile of Shoalhaven birds though this always occurs in a broader context. This profile has a major contribution to make on all occasions in conservation campaigning.

An encouraging recent example concerns the Eastern Bristlebird. There is clear agreement and substantiation from National Parks staff of birder observations that the population of the species in Booderee and the Basin has increased and the spatial distribution extended over the last two to three years in fire refuge areas.



*Bristlebird habitat JBNP*

This applies especially to the Heritage and Erowal Bay Estates, which are now part of the Jervis Bay National Park and a Bherwerre corridor.

A consequence of this has been the translocation of captured birds to Wilsons Promontory to enhance the genetic variety of the species in that location.

There is also an encouraging association with the successful conservation of lands such as the above 'paper estates' in the Bherwerre Peninsula to JBNP.

Another local and encouraging example of this progress relates to the same location in a very different manner and a shift in the avian suite.

**The Erowal Bay village and the associated Biodiversity Corridor within the village and the adjacent Erowal Bay Natural Area Waterway are key elements of St Georges Basin.**

**The Basin itself is currently undergoing Coastal Management Plan Stage 3 development. Both areas border the Jervis Bay Key Biodiversity Area.**



*Erowal Bay-JBNP Source: Google Earth & Edit – Chris Grounds*

This Cool season brought a bird event to Erowal Bay, a relatively small but highly eco-sensitive part of St Georges Basin.

This involved an aggregation of 25 species on and around the waterway, an event that had locals wondering if they had ever seen such a gathering.

Erowal Bay drains Worroving Creek from the Heritage Estate and an unnamed creek from the Erowal Bay village, adjacent to the Erowal Bay Estate.

The latter creek is associated with a formally recognized biodiversity corridor and a special ecology of winter flowering Swamp Mahogany (*Euc.robusta*), a vital Cool season flowering source for bush birds.



*Erowal Bay Waterway - Swans and Coots*

By far the most numerous bird species was the Eurasian Coot, which seemed to cover the 0.8 sq.km waterway at times, exceeding anything previously known in the waterway.

Black Swans were also a major component and numbers exceeded a spectacular 170 with the list including the various Cormorants, Royal Spoonbills, Pelicans, Grebes, the stock species of Basin ducks, Great Egret, Sea Eagle and Osprey.



*Eurasian Coot visitors to Erowal Bay*

The survival battle between Coots and hunting Sea Eagles was both visually spectacular and noisy with the Coots rafting close together and kicking up a water screen. The tactic was successful on every occasion observed.

**A 1km radius search focused on Erowal Bay village in the CSIRO Atlas of Living Australia database reveals a substantial biodiversity in that range, which embraces the area under consideration.**



So the association noted with the Eastern Bristlebird is raised again. Was this waterway aggregation a consequence of successful conservation of neighbouring and ecologically associated properties in JBNP? Was this conservation for cause and effect or simply correlation?

It should be noted that the waterway involved is bordered on a further edge by the Bherwerre Wetland, a "Community" property of Shoalhaven Council now reserved for nature and passive recreation.

Cockcrow Creek drains through this area to its delta at Erowal Bay and one of the most valuable areas of saltmarsh, mangrove and aquatic vegetation, particularly seagrasses, in any Shoalhaven waterway.

The local CCB, Basin Villages Forum, have submitted a proposal to Council to rezone the biodiversity corridor from a very inappropriate "Rural 2" to Conservation / Environment 2. The same rezoning occurred with both the Heritage and Erowal Bay Estates. We wait!

In part that submission related to the recognizable biodiversity of this precinct.

There are **105 bird species recorded** including the threatened species Powerful Owl, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Osprey and Gang Gang Cockatoo, now Federally listed as Endangered. Regular observations are made of the Eastern Bristlebird, and the threatened Square-tailed Kite appears regularly across the village.

The Glossy Black Cockatoo, now listed as a Federal Vulnerable threatened species is a regular sighting, particularly on the margins of the village.

Mammal records also include threatened species, Yellow-bellied Glider, Grey-headed Flying Fox and the Eastern Pygmy Possum. The threatened species Melaleuca Biconvexa has multiple records.

Local knowledge embellished with local experiences and research is our powerful tool.

*(Chris is an Erowal Bay resident of 26 years, Co-ordinator of the Heritage Estate Network, Member of the Bherwerre Wetland BCR-SCC Management Committee, Committee member of the Basin Villages Forum and former BirdLife Shoalhaven Conservation Officer.)*

## Channel Country Birding - Mt Isa to Bedourie

- by Yolande Cozijn, BLS Media Officer

It's 5.30am and as we leave Winton we have to drive carefully in the dark avoiding the many kangaroos, nightjars and long haired rats on the dirt road to Opalton.

We have timed our arrival so that we can set up to hopefully photograph the Striated Grasswren and the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren. Quite frankly, I would be happy just to see them as the wrens can be quite tricky to find!



Rufous-crowned Emu-wren

Fortunately we are travelling with Laurie Ross from Tracks Birding and he has eyes that see and ears that hear every bird!

Success ... we see an Emu-wren flit in and out of the spinifex, it's so fast and so small. Its Australia's smallest bird weighing in at 4 grams!



Striated Grasswren

The channel country of Western Queensland has a stark beauty and yet was so different to what I expected. The rain in the Gulf of Carpentaria in January / February had made its way to western Queensland and it was amazing to see the incredible birdlife feasting on the lush grasses and enjoying the abundant water in the channels. This was such a contrast to the harsh gibber plains, spinifex country and rocky, desert landscapes.

The channel country's unique habitat provided an opportunity for us to observe a wide range of bird species. We encountered large flocks of Woodswallows and Varied Lorikeets at waterholes.



Varied Lorikeets

Meanwhile, Painted, Zebra, Plum-headed and Long-tailed Finches flitted amongst the grasses, their melodic calls creating a symphony of sound. They added splashes of vibrant colour to the arid landscape.



Long-tailed Finch

However I think one of the true highlights of the trip was to see Letter-winged Kites. I couldn't believe that we encountered them 3 times and saw a total of 66. It must be a great season for them as we saw lots of their favourite food – long haired rats! Queensland's channel country is a long way from the south coast but it's well worth a visit.



Letter-winged Kite

**Editor's Note:** Yolande's article prompted me to visit the websites of Laurie Ross and Tracks Birding - and I was gob-smacked! The photography is amazing, and the information on the Grass Wrens page is superb. I am amazed it is given out so freely and I will certainly be referring to this page many times in the future! See [www.tracksbirding.com.au](http://www.tracksbirding.com.au) and [laurieross.com.au](http://laurieross.com.au)



Letter-winged Kites

We left the channel country with a profound sense of awe and appreciation.

The experience has deepened our understanding of Australia's diverse birdlife. The resilience of its avian inhabitants, perfectly adapted to thrive in this remote and unforgiving environment is amazing.

We can really appreciate the delicate balance between the unique bird species and the fragile ecosystems that sustains them.

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# The Broome Bird Observatory

- by Brett Davis

My wife Karen and I recently enjoyed a three night stay at the Broome Bird Observatory (BBO) on the shores of Roebuck Bay in northern Western Australia.



Although the BBO is affiliated with BirdLife Australia, it is financially independent and it raises its operating revenue by providing tours, accommodation, camping and educational courses, along with sales in their shop. You can support the BBO by visiting, or by donating via BirdLife Australia (mention BBO in the comments).

Accommodation includes a self-contained cottage, basic single, double and family units, and a small campground. BirdLife Australia members are entitled to 10% off accommodation rates.



Amenities include flushing toilets, hot showers, a BBQ area and the Shadehouse - a fully-equipped bush kitchen with a gas stove, oven, refrigerators, pots, pans, utensils and lots of seating. It also provides excellent views of nearby birdbaths where finches, honeyeaters and bowerbirds are frequent visitors.



Karen and I took advantage of return transfers from Broome which are available for guests staying for 2 nights or more - and the cost was quite reasonable.

Hundreds of thousands of shorebirds migrate to Roebuck Bay each year from their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere, returning during the northern Summer. Although we visited out-of-season, many birds choose to over-winter in Oz so the experience was still worthwhile.

We paid for a Shorebird tour with BBO staff who provided telescopes and their invaluable expertise in identifying the birds we saw, as all shorebirds look identical to me!



The birdlist for our tour included a variety of Terns, Red-necked Stints, Eastern Curlews, Whimbrels, Red and Great Knots, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Pied Stilts, Curlew Sandpipers, Grey-tailed Tattlers, Reef Egrets, a Terek Sandpiper and an Asian Dowitcher!



Shorebirds at high tide



Covered mud flats and mangroves

It is not only shorebirds that can be seen at the BBO. The beaches of Roebuck Bay are fringed with stands of mangroves where Yellow White-Eyes, Mangrove Fantails, Mangrove Gerygones, Mangrove Golden Whistlers and White-breasted Whistlers can be seen.

The BBO is also surrounded by woodland (as can be seen on the map below) where a variety of walks are available. We saw Red-winged Parrots, Great Bowerbirds (and a bower), Little Friarbirds, Mistletoe Birds, Double-bar and Zebra Finches, Brolgas flying overhead, and many species of honeyeaters including Brown, Singing, Rufous-throated, and White-gaped.

A short distance north-east of the BBO is a large flood-plain that drains into Roebuck Bay via Crab Creek to the south-east of the observatory. The plain is covered by open areas of clay interspersed with low stands of salt-bush and samphire.

The BBO conducts plain tours, as well as a separate tour to some freshwater lakes on the plain as well. There is also a very specific tour that goes in search of one of the plain's iconic birds - the Yellow Chat.

Karen and I were lucky enough to spot 19 Yellow Chats during a long day-walk from the BBO out onto the plain!





Floodplain



Yellow Chat

Another tradition associated with the Birdlog was the "Twitchers Tax" - a coin jar where BBO visitors are taxed 50 cents for every lifer they see at the observatory, or \$2 for every BBO "premium species" - the Yellow Chat, Asian Dowitcher, Common Redshank and Australian Painted Snipe!

Each night at 6:30pm everyone staying at the BBO gathers to report on the birds that they have seen that day. All sightings within a 70km radius of the BBO are valid. This "Birdlog" has been a tradition at the observatory for over 30 years. Despite visiting for three days during the "off-season", the lowest daily total of birds seen during our stay was 85, with the other two days having totals of over 100 bird species!



Karen and I didn't have to contribute to the tax as we did not see any "lifers" at the BBO. We have seen all of the "premium species" before - with the exception of the Common Redshank. We also haven't seen a Common Tern - so just how "common" can these birds be?!



The Broome Bird Observatory is totally worth visiting, and its tours are recommended as well. Unless you've been birding for a long, long time, you are almost certain to contribute something to the Twitchers Tax jar!

## Lyrebird and Eagle Identification

- by Brett Davis

You'd think that a couple of birders with over 600 Aussie bird species on their life lists and with more than 30 years of birdwatching experience each would have no trouble easily identifying the two biggest raptors on the continent, would you?

You would also think that this very same couple could not possibly mis-identify one of the most distinctive and iconic Australian songbirds either!

On our recent trip to the Kimberley in Western Australia, my wife and I were walking along a dirt road just south of the Broome Turf Club near Gantheaume Point - famous for its rock formations, lighthouse and fossilized dinosaur footprints.

A hundred yards ahead of them, a dark bird with a very long tail darted across the road, running fast and low before disappearing into the scrub.

"A lyrebird!" said Karen, and I immediately concurred with a "Yep!"



Then reality reared its ugly head with both of us quickly remembering that lyrebirds are only found on the east coast of Australia and that there wasn't a Lyrebird within three thousand kilometres of Broome! The bird we had seen was a Pheasant Coucal.



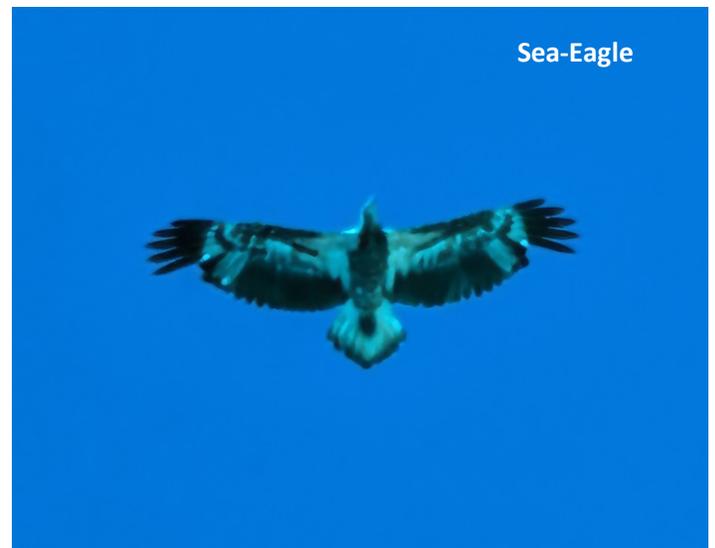
Admittedly, the bird had been quite distant, it had only been visible for a couple of seconds, it had been moving quickly at the time, and Karen and I were about 20km into a 30km walk in hot conditions only recently having arrived from a southern winter!

Still, how could anyone mis-identify a lyrebird!

Fast forward two weeks. Karen and I had acclimatized to the heat and been incredibly pampered on an amazing and relaxing scenic cruise up the Kimberley coast. There was no way we could make a similar mistake, right!?

At the Broome Bird Observatory we spotted a large, dark raptor high overhead, with a distinctively shaped tail. The ID was a no-brainer - Wedge-tailed Eagle - and I took a couple of photos with my phone to prove our sighting. We even reported it that night during the Birdlog!

Here's the photo ... as good as I could get with a phone ...



I showed the photo to a number of birders including one of the Broome Bird Observatory wardens and a twelve year old kid named Atticus. Both informed me that my ID was wrong - it was a juvenile White-bellied Sea-Eagle!



The Wedge-tailed Eagle is shown above. The biggest and most obvious difference? The black-lined white tail of the Sea-Eagle. Well, I know that NOW !!!!!

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## An Unexpected Lifer!

- by Brett Davis

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.

"Lifers" - a bird species when it is first seen and positively identified by an individual birder - become increasingly difficult to find as your life lists get longer.

On our recent trip to Western Australia, my wife Karen and I had not even considered that we would see a lifer while we were away. The Kimberley cruise was not focussed on birding; we would be confined to boats for much of the time; and we were unlikely to see anything new at the Broome Bird Observatory as most of its shorebirds had flown north for the Winter.

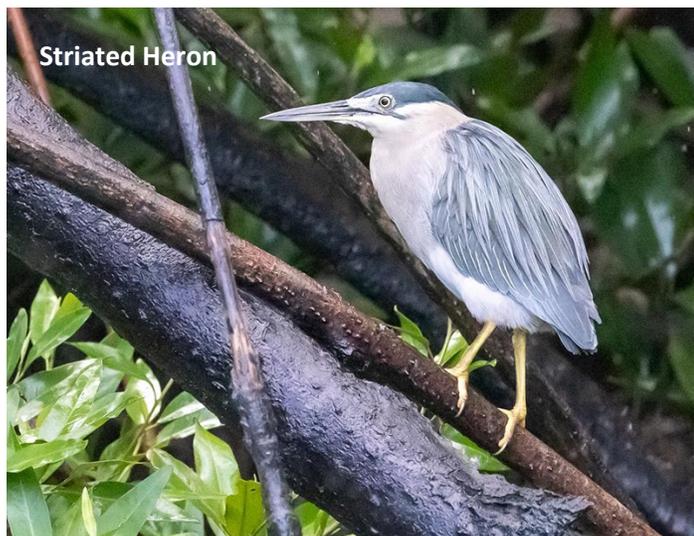
I hadn't even taken a DSLR with a telephoto lens for bird photography for the trip! The photos below - except the one in the bottom right - were all taken by a fellow traveller, Graham Lukins.



While on a short, cool, rainy trip up a mangrove-lined Kimberley creek in one of our boat's two tenders, the captain remarked that he sometimes saw Chestnut Rails on the edge of the mangroves.

Karen and I immediately perked right up - we had never seen a Chestnut Rail! Given that they are only found in mangroves across the north of Australia from Broome to the tip of Cape York - and those mangroves are inhabited by saltwater crocodiles which tend to discourage access - we thought it unlikely we would ever see one.

Five minutes after the bird was mentioned, a Chestnut Rail walked out of the mangroves in full view of everyone on the boat. How excellent - and lucky - was that !?!?!?



## Images from BirdLife Shoalhaven walks

The top four images below were taken by Marianne Cool.  
The two at the bottom are from Phil Hendry.



# How to save Australia's birds!

- by Brett Davis

One of the good things to come out of the coronation of King Charles III was the gift given to the new monarch by the Australian people.

Many of you would have seen the news reports at the time where our government gifted \$10,000 as a donation to the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot - a hard working conservation group desperately trying to save Western Australia's rarest bird - on behalf of the king to mark his coronation.

The Ground Parrot was once wide-spread from Perth to Esperance, but it is now confined to the Cape Arid National Park in WA's south.

The Friends of the Western Ground Parrot have tried captive breeding programs and relocations of birds to other areas to help preserve the species.

Now that the precedent of gifting donations for endangered birds on behalf of newly crowned monarchs has been established, it would be wonderful to see the practice continue.

All of Australia's endangered and vulnerable birds could be saved if the paltry gift of only \$10,000 could be increased substantially to a much more generous amount in the millions, and if the British Royal Family had the misfortune to suffer a spate of deaths and abdications leading to a huge increase in the frequency of coronations - not that we would want that to happen!



**8 CORONATION OF KING CHARLES III**

PM's coronation gift to save endangered WA bird

# 24-PARROT GOLD

**EXCLUSIVE KATINA CURTIS**

Fans of a rare, endangered parrot found only in southern WA have a huge reason to celebrate King Charles III's coronation after the Federal Government decided a charity helping the bird would receive Australia's official gift.

The \$10,000 donation in the King's name will help the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot group step up its work raising awareness of the bird, also known as Kyloring by the Noongar people, and aiding conservation efforts.

Paul Wettin, the group's chair, said they were truly honoured and delighted.

The Friends formed two decades ago in Albany when it had become obvious to locals that the parrot was in serious decline. It runs on the smell of an oily rag, Mr Wettin said, yet has contributed more than \$400,000 to recovery activities for the parrots.

"The birds are extremely challenging to attempt to avoid their extinction — and I don't think that can be underlined nearly enough."

"They are a huge challenge because they're very cryptic, they live in an extremely remote place that's very difficult to access... a lot of times that area can't even be accessed even to do firefighting."

It's now believed only about 150 of the parrots are left.

Their wild population has been particularly threatened by bushfires, which have destroyed much of their known habitat in recent years.

The green, yellow and black birds are described as very shy and secretive, spending most of their time close to the ground in dense heathland and only flying between roosting and feeding areas.

The Friends have helped the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions with two translocation projects, moving some of the parrots from Cape Arid to an area east of Albany where they used to live.

The group's newsletter details the trials and tribulations of a breeding program running within the Perth Zoo: the parrots involved were dedicated but sadly did not produce any chicks.

A significant part of the Friends' work is to raise awareness about Kyloring, including through a story competition for school students.

The royal contribution amounts to more than a third of the tiny charity's revenue from last year.

However, Mr Wettin said the Friends weren't sure how to acknowledge the coronation gift. "Our current life membership you have to pay for — and I don't think that would be quite fair to ask the King for \$250 to become a life member," he said.

"I'm sure it will be a major topic of our next meeting!"

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who is travelling to England for the coronation, said the donation would complement other conservation efforts under way to protect the endangered species.

"His Majesty King Charles III has long championed conservation and sustainability, so I am pleased to mark his coronation with a national contribution to the conservation of the Western Ground Parrot," he said.

Last week, Mr Albanese said the gift had been approved by Buckingham Palace.

## New BLS Conservation Officer needed

- by Rob Dunn

BirdLife Shoalhaven partnerships with an increasing number of local and active nature conservation groups which allows us to meet our branch's key objective of conserving birds.

Individuals, whether they be existing committee members or simply members of BirdLife Shoalhaven, are also championing specific causes that they are passionate about. The campaign to keep cats in-doors at all times as shown by the article from Maureen Webb on page 8 is a perfect example.

Unfortunately for BirdLife Shoalhaven, Emily Dyball has recently had to stand down as our Conservation Officer, as she has recently moved to an exciting new job.



Supporting other conservation groups and like-minded individuals will certainly continue to be part of our bird conservation focus, but having our own Conservation Officer allows us to do this more effectively.

If you are interested in taking on this position, please contact me at [president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:president@birdlifeshoalhaven.org).

P.S. You don't have to wear the badge!

## 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!

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](mailto:communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org)

## 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 Editor for approval.

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