

CAPE CHATTER

Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 4

11th May 2020



The Cape is on the traditional land
of the Bunurong people

*"When we tug at a single thing in nature,
we find it attached to the rest of the
world..."*

John Muir

All photographs by David Hartney

A week of natural delights

The past week certainly dished up some beautiful twilight skies, a full moon, and golden late afternoon sunlight. Sadly, high cloud prevented us witnessing the comet and meteor show but you can't have everything. May 5th was a stunning day with calm weather and clear blue skies and Dave (our Cape gardener and long-time Cape P resident) told me he saw unbelievable ocean colours he has never seen before. And yes, come the weekend, the good old cold Cape Paterson squalls returned, just to remind us of this invigorating, yet beautiful environment.



Above: Sunset over the Stage 3 open space

Below: A near-full moon balanced on one of the new tree stags

Left: Male Eastern Grey Kangaroo basking in the golden light



Bird Observations for the Week

Apart from the usual permanent suspects (Galahs, Ravens, Magpies, Wattlebirds etc), my walks during the past week revealed some lovely little birds along the edge of the coastal reserve, including **Red-browed Finch**, **Brown Thornbill**, **White-browed Scrubwren**, **Crescent** and **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, **Superb Fairy-wrens** and **Eastern Yellow Robin**. **Eastern Spinebills** have been seen in old Cape, so keep an eye out for them particularly along the walking track to 2nd Surf where I have previously seen them. They are noticeable by their long, slender, down-curved bill and black, white, brown, and chestnut plumage.

A small flock of **Yellow-tailed Cockatoos** also flew over, so it was good to see them back around The Cape. A couple of **Eurasian Skylarks** have re-appeared singing in the skies along with an **Australian Pipit** 'strutting' around on the ground.



Above: Red-browed Finch – gathering nesting material?



Above: White-browed Scrubwren (weighs about 10 g)

OUR LOVELY WEE LITTLE BIRDS



Above: Brown Thornbill (weighs about 7 g)



Above: Male Superb Fairy-wren, in non-breeding plumage. It retains a bright blue tail and has a black bill - the female has a red bill

Patience is required to see and photograph these tiny birds. They are remarkably quick and flit amongst thick vegetation where they feed and hide for protection. Occasionally, they will inquisitively pop up and expose themselves to check things out.

These are the type of birds we hope to attract to our house gardens by creating vegetation stepping stones from the coastal bush to The Cape homes.

What's with all the silky web?

On our gorgeous 5th May day, there was an explosion of fine silky web blowing all about and woven into the grasslands of The Cape (see picture below taken into the setting sun).



'Cape Chatters' trusty Research Fellow, Jeannie (who happens to be my lovely wife), shot off an enquiry to Museum Victoria to find out what it was and what causes it.

In a very timely reply, Simon from the Museum explained "...it seems the most likely explanation is a natural phenomenon called '**ballooning**'. The process of ballooning is where invertebrates (not just spiders) release strands of silk and are carried away by the wind. A number of spider species can use it for different reasons. Often it is used by recently emerged spiderlings to disperse. Some spiders can also 'balloon' to higher ground in the event of river rises and conditions caused by higher than average rainfall (which is the case at the moment)."

Spiders put out silk threads which are caught by the wind, carrying them up and away. Many land close by, sometimes swathing the landscape in gossamer silk; but others may travel long distances across land or sea. Ballooning helps maintain and extend the distributions of these spiders. Spiders as different as orb weavers and wolf spiders disperse by ballooning.

Many thanks to Museum Victoria – what a great resource!

Our Wattlebirds...noisy, pugnacious, and conspicuous

I have had a few people ask me about our local wattlebirds which are quite common at The Cape, regularly seen amongst the coastal Banksia. We have two types: the Red Wattlebird and Little Wattlebird. Both these birds are aggressive and protective of their breeding and feeding territories.



Above: Red Wattlebirds are distinguished by a white face triangle, red tissue flap (the wattle), and a pale, yellow belly.



Above: Little Wattlebird, lacks the wattle and has dense white streaks and spots in its plumage.

Stage 3 Open Space Reserve

Last week saw the stags, snags, rock placement, and pond shaping take place, along with the installation of boxed concrete culverts which will provide bridge crossings for the walking tracks over the creek. The landscaping team (Paul, Joel and Jay) are doing a fantastic job and are in their element.



Above: View south down the creek line from the top dam



Above: The landscaping lads 'reflecting' on the installation of the culverts in the creek line.

Email: dwhartney@bigpond.com

Instagram: @dwhartney

Masked Lapwings are gathering

I have noticed a few more **Masked Lapwings** around the open spaces and nearby paddocks recently. A resident pair are seen regularly within Stage 2 and 3 areas and their noisy, grating calls can be heard both day and night (not sure when they sleep!!). Rob (7 Periwinkle) has seen evidence of nesting on the ground in the open spaces in the past so we should keep an eye out – breeding starts around June. They are also very aggressive and protective of their breeding territory.



Aggressive behaviours include erect threat postures (above), noisy alarm flights and direct dive bombing. Humans are seen as potential predators and Masked Lapwings will attack, so be warned!!