

CAPE CHATTER

Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 22

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*Patersonia (Purple Flag) are starting to flower
in the streetscapes around The Cape*

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*

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Constructed habitat is working well ...

Spring has arrived despite the winds and some wild, wet weather, and so have the birds. This week I have been focussing on some of the newly constructed habitat areas within **The Cape**. Despite early days, there is plenty happening in the street landscapes, down the new creek line and the open grassy spaces nearby.

Planting of thousands of indigenous flora has begun in the habitat areas and a community planting day is to be held this Sunday in the new creek line.

Birding "101" ... how about a 'chat' ...

Birding highlights for me this week were *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos*, *Black-fronted Dotterel*, flocks of *European Goldfinch* (I know they are feral but they are a beautiful bird), an *Eastern Rosella* flock, and *Little Corellas*. However, another new species grabbed my attention and it was a first timer for me. A small group of four *White-fronted Chats* (two pairs) were spotted along the grassy edges of the new creekline and also on the new mini-oval. They have also been seen on some vacant lots in Stage 3 amongst the dandelions. That brings our total to **101** species observed at **The Cape** since August 2019. The Bird List has been updated and you can check it out or download it from the **Cape Chatter** website: <https://capechatter.com>



Above: White-fronted Chat (male)

The **White-fronted Chat** is a little bird, weighing 11-17 grams, and is slightly smaller in size compared to a *House Sparrow* and *European Goldfinch*, the latter which were feeding not that far away from the *Chats* today. The photo above is a male and you can see his size against the grass in which he was feeding.

Although classed as part of the *Honeyeater* family, they do not have any of the key features of the more recognisable honeyeaters (especially the long, curved bills) and they are not nectar feeders. The *Black-fronted Chat* diet is primarily one of small insects which they gather by chasing prey quickly across the ground – they are very agile and quick movers, which is how I first noticed them near the new creek line.



The female *Black-fronted Chat* (pictured above) has a grey head, which distinguishes it from the male which has a clean, white face with a black crown and chest band. Another good indicator of its size is shown here against the dandelion flower.



Above: Female *White-fronted Chat* at The Cape, on a rock overlooking the new mini oval

European Goldfinch (below) are also around in good numbers at the moment and enjoying the emerging grasses and weeds in the open spaces where they can be spotted foraging on seed heads.



SOME LOCAL CHATTERINGS

Thanks to resident Joe Spano for a couple of interesting links he sent through to me about the *Short-tailed Shearwater* (Mutton Bird) and *Peregrine Falcons*, both birds we have around **The Cape**.

It looks like the *Shearwater* migration from Alaska is behind schedule again for the second year in a row. These birds have nesting colonies on Phillip Island and can often be seen “feeding on the wing” in their thousands along our Bunurong coast. It appears climate change and impacts on their Alaskan feeding grounds are to blame. See the article <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-03/short-tailed-shearwaters-late-for-second-breeding-season-running/12726040>

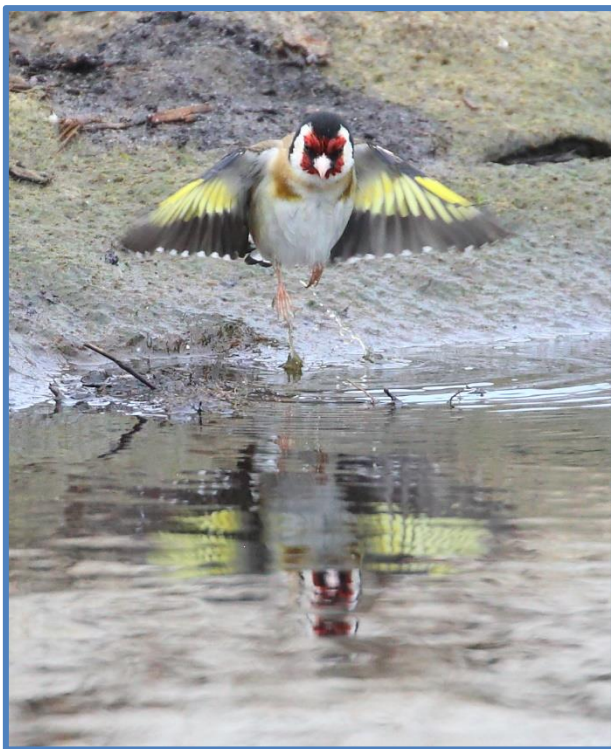
Lovely virtual camera footage of new chicks in the famous *Peregrine Falcon* nest on a Melbourne skyscraper – to get a dose of cuteness – see <https://www.367collinsfalcons.com.au/>

Resident Peter Watkins is a keen follower of wader birds. He alerted me to the fact that the local *Hooded Plovers* are starting to pair up for the breeding season and nesting areas have been roped off. Please observe signage and keep dogs on leads!!





Above and Below: Splashes of colour and water coming from a small group of *Goldfinch* near the Top Dam



Above: *Goldfinch* about to take off from the edge of the creekline after washing and preening itself.

Along the creek line ...

The *European Goldfinch* are really enjoying all the dandelion flowers and seed heads which are everywhere at the moment. There is a flock of around 20 birds about. They have also been enjoying a drink and some preening/cleaning time in the fresh water of the overflow pond of the Top Dam in the new creek line.

Also, still active on the Top Dam is the pair of *Black-fronted Dotterel* (not to be mistaken for the *White-fronted Chat* or in fact the *Hooded Plover*).



Above: Black-fronted Dotterel on the banks of the Top Dam

More finches ...

More observations from residents Chris (he seems to be getting into this birding stuff) and Gabi of the *Red-browed Finch* (pictured below) in good size flock numbers in the South East Sector near the exit track to 2nd Surf.

These are native finches and are more likely to be seen emerging from the coastal reserve. I have yet to see them in the more open grassy spaces, unlike the *Goldfinch*.





Above: Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo perched near the corner of Trumpeter and Sunlight in the Stage 2 area of The Cape.

The Cape street habitat is getting a workover ...

The lovely sound of a small flock of *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos* last Sunday morning really got me going. A flock of six birds has been around over the last few weeks, and on this morning, they took to the *Coastal Banksia* in Stage 2 on **Sunlight Blvd** for a feed. Great to see the streetscape habitat working well for these birds along with the ever-present *Wattlebirds*.



Looking at the facial colourings of this bird, I wonder whether the yellow facial patch is a representation of the *Coastal Banksia* flower, one of its major food sources??

Did you notice they are all left-footed when holding food!!

W(h)at is that on the Temple home??



Full moon time ... Speaking of **Sunlight Blvd**, a lovely full moon rose above the boulevard looking up from **Moonshadow Ave** during last week ... stunning!



As the light started to fade last Saturday evening, the now familiar sound of the screeching *Little Corella* flock emerged from a distance. Suddenly, a mass landing of these birds occurred on the 'Temple' and 'Keech' houses on the high side of **Sunlight Blvd** in Stage 2 and then they settled down to preen, play and get up to mischievous behaviour.

Particularly funny were the birds on the roof of the northern side of the 'Keech' house. Because of the greater roof pitch and the fact that they could not get any grip on the roofing steel, they were sliding down the roof into the gutters – bit like a playground slide ... then try it again. Great fun to watch!

More terrestrial invertebrates in the garden as weather warms...

Spring is bringing out more invertebrates such as caterpillars and spiders...great food for birds and other vertebrates.

I found a **Badge Huntsman** (below) in one of our citrus plants. These spiders do not construct webs but build silk 'retreats' in which they lay their eggs.



Awe Walks ... taking time to take in nature ...are really good for your wellbeing.

Read the article:

<https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellness/how-awe-walks-could-do-wonders-for-your-wellbeing-20201007-p562oj.html>



Creek line habitat plantings

Many thousands of aquatic, ephemeral wetland and local shrubs and trees are to be planted along the restored creek line as part of a major habitat restoration project at **The Cape** which is aimed to attract a range of fauna, particularly birds, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals.

The landscape team have been busy getting into the job this week, planting out the southern end of the area and filling in some gaps around the central wetland complex, before **the community planting session this Sunday (11 Oct) at 10.00 AM.**

Above: Joel, Brendan and James planting into the jute mat at the southern end of the creek



Above: James – always smiling!

Great work by the landscaping team led by **Joel** along with **James, Jay and Rod**, who have done a wonderful job completing the hard landscaping and now pitching into the planting (with no big toys!) along with the helping hands of **Brendan, Dave and Clint**.



Pictured above (top): **Dave** and above, **Joel** planting some of the thousands of new plants