

CAPE CHATTER

Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 25

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Damselfly at 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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If the old tree could talk ...

I have been spending a bit of time this past week taking in nature around a lovely old *Coastal Manna Gum* in the south east sector of **The Cape**. In the past, there would have been many more of these trees along the coast, but sadly many have been cleared and there are few left to provide reasonable habitat for our native animals.

Every time I pass this gnarly old tree I have a look under its canopy to see if there are any koalas sitting in a fork – I have heard a koala call near by, but have yet to see one in this area. There is a small population of koala in 'old Cape' so I keep my fingers crossed that they will eventually spread into our nearby habitat as it is replanted and evolves. The tree though, is full of bird life which always grabs my attention as it provides food, cover and high perching spots with good look-outs over the surrounding area. Old manna gum is about to burst into flower, so hopefully some seed will be gathered to ensure its genes are passed on and its character and history remain for many years to come.

This past week, I have been captivated watching a *Spotted Pardalote* family go about its daily life in the old Coastal Manna. Last week I put a photo of this beautiful little bird in *Cape Chatter*. I have heard them many times calling in the bush but rarely see them. What a treat to see the adults foraging and feeding their young - a special privilege. It also confirms you can be rewarded with some wonderful natural sights by sitting, observing and having some patience.



Above: Female *Spotted Pardalote* in the old Coastal Manna Gum
with food for its juveniles

Read more about the *Spotted Pardalote* family on the next page. Other key observations to feature in this Issue 25 of **Cape Chatter** include the search for a nest by some *Eastern Rosellas*, the 'Kangaroo Nursery' in the central wetlands, and the return of our *Blotched Blue-tongue Lizard*.



Above: Female Spotted Pardalote

The difference between the adult sexes: the male has a yellow throat and white spots on the head crown. The female lacks the yellow throat and has yellow spots on the crown.

You only really appreciate the beauty of these birds when you are close (they can be confiding at times) or getting a few close up shots with the camera!

Spotted Pardalotes ...

There are four *Pardalote* species in Australia: the *Spotted* and *Striated* being the most common along with *Red-browed* (confined to northern Australia) and the endangered *Forty-spotted* which resides only in Tasmania.

Spotted Pardalotes are stunning little birds, and, in our area, we have the sub-species *punctatus*. They weigh in at about 10 g and are about 10 cm long – a tiny little bird!



Above: Male (left) feeding juvenile.

Below: Two juveniles soaking up the sun/ waiting to be fed.



From what I have observed, there are two juveniles hanging about in the Manna and mum and dad are busy feeding them, primarily insects, by leaf-gleaning amongst the canopy and lower branches. *Spotted Pardalotes* nest in a burrow/narrow tunnel drilled into a steep or vertical bank and may even nest in sand heaps! The burrow is about 40-90 cm long and ends in an enlarged chamber where the nest is built out of bark strips and softer material.

Eastern Rosellas looking for a nest???

Over the past few weeks, *Eastern Rosella* have returned to **The Cape** coinciding with the growth and flowering of the Capeweed Dandelion. I have seen a small flock of five birds and over the past couple of days, a pair have been particularly active feeding and exploring potential nest sites which are few and far between given the lack of old tree habitat with hollows. Today, the pair were seen checking out the microbat nesting boxes and a couple of stags in the creek line – so resident Graeme McAlpine is quickly getting on to building a nesting box for installation. Let's hope we can get the box up in time so they can get up to some "saucy" behaviour!

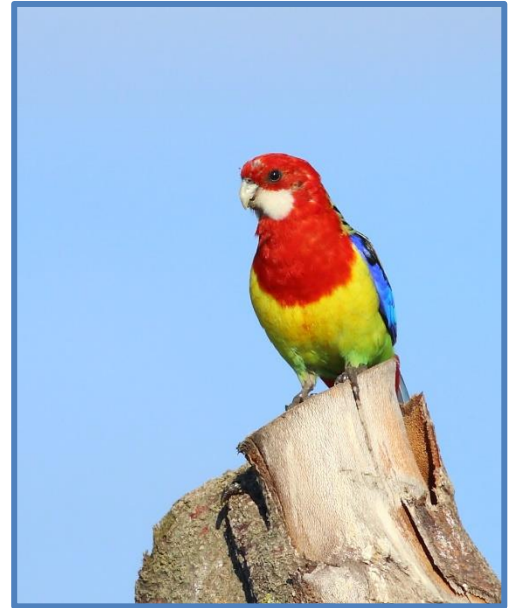


Above: Female *Eastern Rosella* exploring one of the few hollows in one of the stags in the creek line.



Above: Male *Eastern Rosella* watching his female mate search for a nesting site in the creek line.

The male and female *Eastern Rosella* are very similar in appearance: the male has deep red neck, head and breast with clear white cheeks and throat. The red on the female is duller and patchier on the breast.



Above and Below: Male *Eastern Rosella* sitting in our home garden tree stag – no hollows here!



Aussie Backyard Bird Count

My final species number for the count was 40, the most common bird being the *Welcome Swallow*. There were so many fledged Swallows around I had trouble keeping count! If the count was held this week, the *Common Starling* and *Blackbird* would win hands down – there are hundreds of them ferrying worms found in **The Cape** area back to their nestlings in 'old Cape'. Their feeding activity is frenetic, and the bush is alive with their calls.

Other Bird Activity

There are three *Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos* (pictured below) still flying over and checking out 'Lone Pine'. They must be the stragglers! Over the past two days, a *Collared Sparrowhawk* has been seen flying near the central wetland – in one instance it was flying away with a catch and the other was being chased away by a pair of *Masked Lapwing* – there may be a Lapwing nest around!



With plenty of nestlings around at the moment, the *Grey Butcherbird* (pictured below) has been very active hunting for its next meal. In one instance, we watched one seek out a *Welcome Swallow* nest in a nearby house. While several *Swallows* gathered to chase it away, they were no match for the *Butcherbird* who disappeared under the balcony for a feed – several feathers were seen coming out and then the *Butcherbird* looking pretty satisfied!



The wetland activity is subdued. There are occasional *Pacific Black Duck* and *Teal* visitors, and the *Little Grassbird* is still at home among the reeds.

Keen *Kangaroo* observers at **The Cape** may have noticed that the 'mob' quite often use the central wetland complex and surrounds as a resting area during the day. It is not uncommon to see many kangaroos lying about sleeping, grooming, and catching some sun.

Sometimes, you may see a lone joey running around by itself within the fence, making a 'barking' sound and you may think it is in trouble and distressed. More often than not, the joey has been put there by its mother while mum has a rest on the other side of the fence – she is using the fenced area as a form of safe nursery – but still keeping a close eye on the youngster.



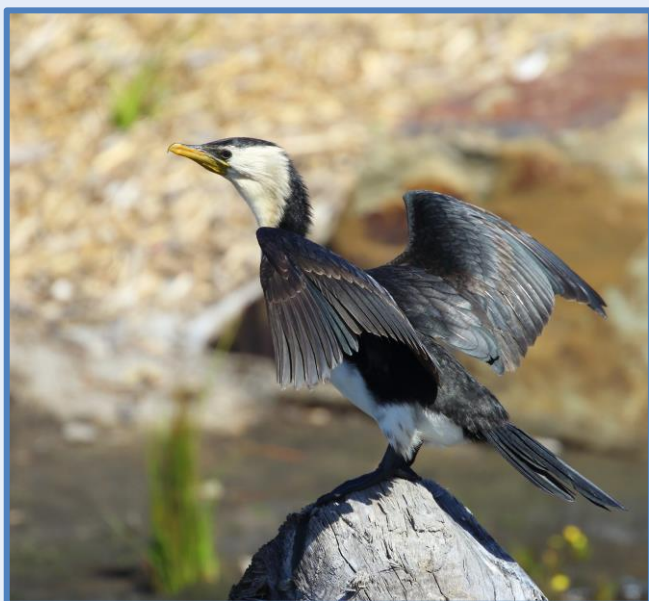
Please do not attempt to rescue the joey in these circumstances as it is normal behaviour. You are more than likely to cause more harm than good because the joey and mum will become agitated and skittish, possibly resulting in injury. If, however, you notice the joey still isolated after many hours and no adult is nearby, please contact Wildlife Rescue by following the resident procedures for injured kangaroos which all residents have been given.



Bird Activity continued ...

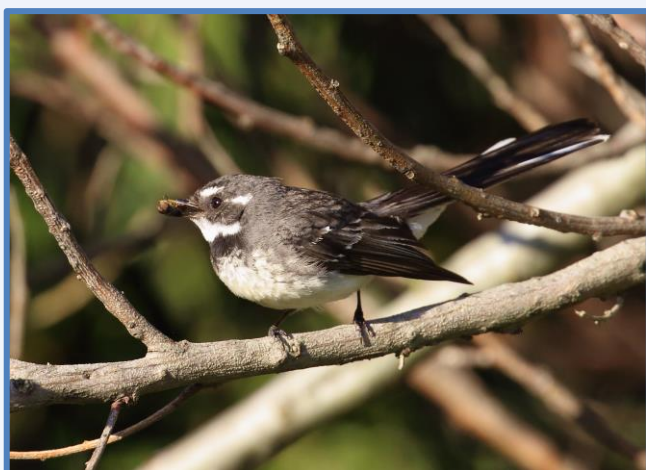
I wonder because there is so much water laying around the district that there are plenty of other spots to feed and breed and that they will return when the intermittent wetlands dry up. No sightings of *Latham's Snipe*, *Australasian Shoveler*, *Grebe* or the *Black-fronted Dotterel* either on my walks.

Thanks to Gabi, Chris and Levi for the observation of the *Little Pied Cormorant* (pictured below in the bottom pond) which has been spending quite a bit of time around the central wetland complex.



Lots of small songbird activity in the bush and the *Fan-tailed Cuckoo* and *Shining Bronze Cuckoo* are still calling. Thanks to Joe and Fran for alerting me to the *Fan-tailed* calling near Stage 1.

Grey Fantail (pictured below) are very busy flitting and dancing about, especially in the south-east sector. I managed to capture this one with a meal which it promptly flew to a nearby nest.



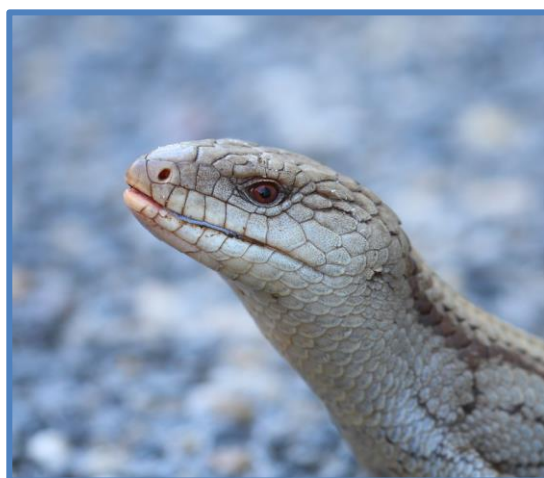
Reptile Ramblings

A couple of weeks ago I highlighted the emergence of reptiles, particularly a *Blotched Blue-tongue Lizard* in our home garden. Well, "Bluey" is still around and obviously happy in this habitat. He blends in very well with our concrete aggregate around the house so we are going to have to take care we do not stand or drive on him!



Above: A lizard scroll!!!

We also observed him drinking some water lying about the house on damp aggregate, so it is time we set up a couple of terracotta saucers with water for him to drink from.



As the weather warms, please be aware of these small animals around your homes and try to provide some shelter and water for them.

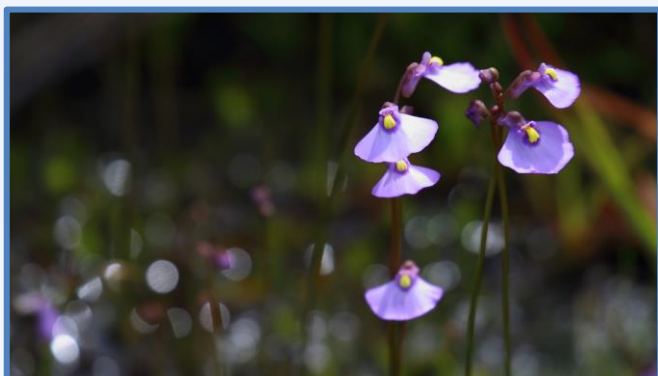
Patersonia in flower ...

There are some lovely colours of the *Patersonia* (native Iris) along Sunlight Blvd at the moment. But there is a lovely little patch in the swale along the 2nd Surf exit path as well. Many thanks to new resident Ruby who spotted a single white variant of the more common purple variety. A very good observation on her walk past there!



Anyone know what flower this is?

Graeme McAlpine has spotted this lovely flower in the same swale but is unsure what it is – does anyone have any idea? It is orchid like – single stem emerging from a very wet area!



More Little Corellas ...

I know, I know ... enough already, but you cannot miss these *Little Corellas* at the moment. They are everywhere and very raucus. Although not as humorous on the ground as the *Galah*, they still provide lots of entertainment. And does anyone know why they are 'left-footed'???



The Cape Chatter Website

A reminder that there are pictures and descriptions and where you are likely to see all the birds and animals of **The Cape** in the **Cape Chatter website**, so bookmark it as a ready reference if you want to know what you may have seen.

Also, do not forget to subscribe to the weekly blog to receive it automatically by email.