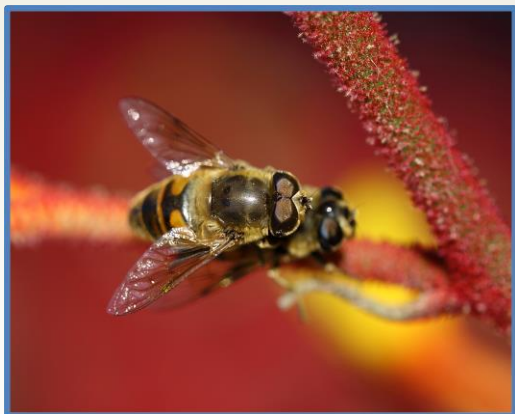


CAPE CHATTER

Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 26

8th November 2020



Drone Fly pair, The Cape, 8 Nov 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*

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Welcome to freedom ...

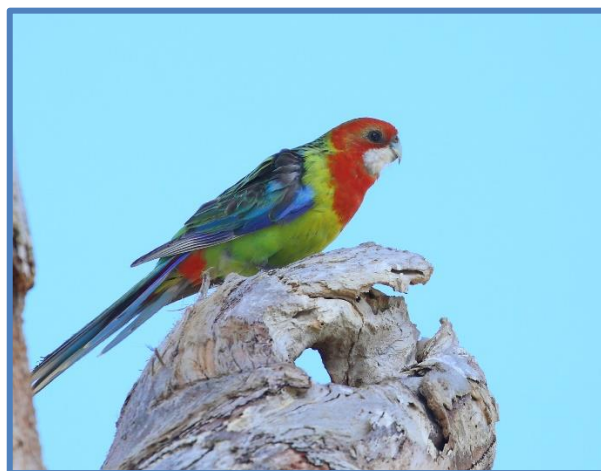
This time of year is a period of *emergence* when the slower, cooler months give way to the vibrancy and frenetic activity of warmer weather and the animals and plants "*spring*" into action. With the imminent lifting of the "ring of steel", it will not only be the people of metro Melbourne seeking freedom, but nature is bursting as the next generations emerge into our natural world.

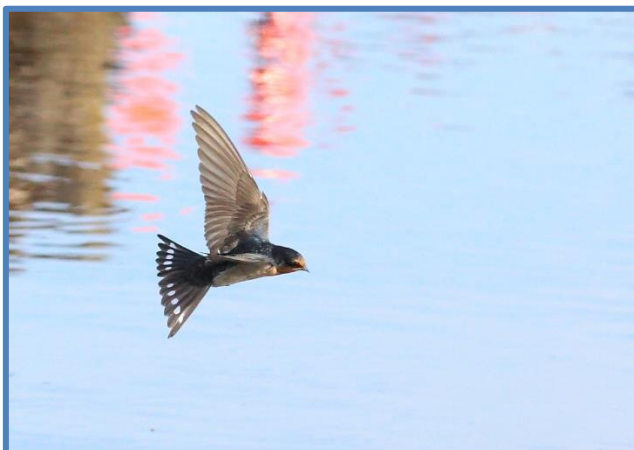
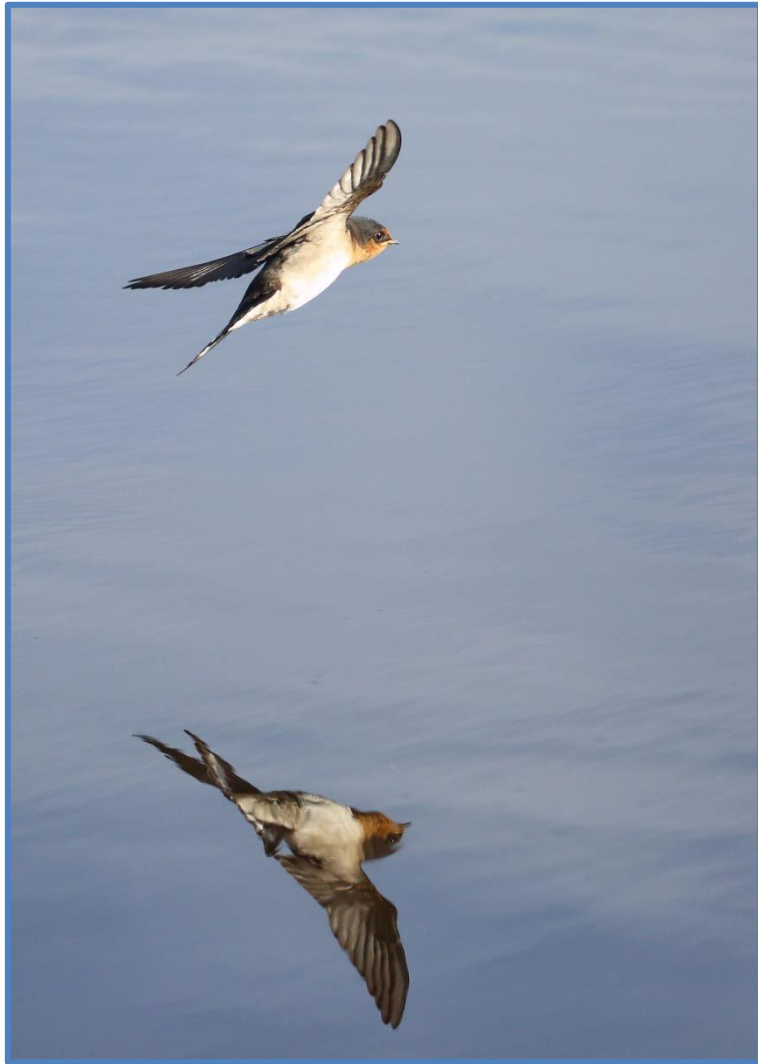
Welcome Swallows have been conspicuous breeders these past couple of months around **The Cape** and the juveniles are now everywhere, especially in the new central creek line where they are swooping over the ponds and roosting on the habitat logs. I spent a few minutes early morning on "Cup Day" watching their antics and swift movements over the water, and I can tell you, it is a challenging photographic experience!!



Above: Juvenile *Welcome Swallow* in flight over the Top Dam

My time by the Top Dam was rewarded by some other lovely bird sightings which I will feature on the next pages, and although the dam is being disturbed by Stage 4 construction works at the moment, my observations indicate this area is going to be wonderful habitat in future years. In fact the whole creek line is turning out to be a fauna hotspot which will only improve as the vegetation takes hold and grows. We have also observed *Eastern Rosella* (pictured below) showing interest in a tree hollow in one of the stags near the Top Dam prompting the installation of two purpose built nesting boxes in the creekline by Graeme McAlpine.





Welcome Swallows ...

There are eight Swallow species in Australia, the *Welcome Swallow* being the most common along with *Fairy Martin* and *Tree Martin*.

Welcome Swallows rarely stay still but as these photos show they are pretty birds with glossy blue-black upper parts and rufous chin and throat. Our sub-species is *neoxena*. They weigh in at about 15 g and are about 15 cm long.



Welcome Swallows can be observed all year round at **The Cape**, but they are a partially migrant species as well, meaning many, but not all, migrate to northern Australia in the non-breeding season (January-July). That is why we see them in bigger numbers from about August, building cup-shaped mud nests, especially on to built structures like under house eaves and balconies. They feed 'on the wing' after small flying insects from ground level to above tree canopy height. They will rest every half an hour or so on fences and logs – so they are constantly on the move.



Eastern Rosella nesting box

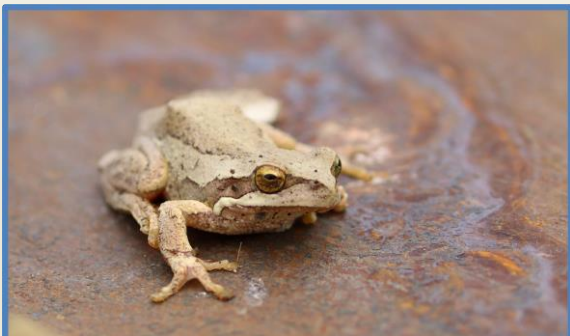
Thanks to Gabi and Jo Rayner for their *Eastern Rosella* observations. Graeme McAlpine responded to the call very quickly when we noticed them showing interest in the stags. One box has been built and located in a stag just south of the Top Pond and another in the most southern stag in the creek line. So, keep your eyes out and if you see any nesting activity let us know.



Above: Graeme fixing an *Eastern Rosella* nesting box in the bottom stag in the creek line.

Time to count frogs ...

Time for all interested “froggers” to get out and start identifying your local frogs. Thanks to future resident Robyn Shallard for letting us know about Frog ID Week from 6-15 Nov 2020. Follow the link at <https://portal.frogid.net.au/frog-id-week?fbclid=IwAR3Ev2sapVxLSLda26u9W2FWMLokf8vNkpWONhPp15fxOcQjRCsl8MYiDY> or you can download the app for Android or Apple devices. Our frogs have been a bit quiet lately but there is plenty of wonderful habitat here to sit quietly and “frog-out”!



Another honeyeater checking out the streetscape ...

A beautiful juvenile male *Crescent Honeyeater* is the latest small honeyeater to explore the Coastal Banksia which is the predominant tree planted in our streetscapes. What a stunning little bird and great to see it venturing away from the coastal bush habitat.



Snakes are on the move ...

A word of caution that venomous snakes, especially *Lowland Copperheads*, are on the move at the moment so please be watchful when walking **The Cape** tracks, and particularly those close to the wetlands and edges of the coastal bush. A big one was spotted yesterday near the Dog Park. Please let them go about their business – they will move away if not harassed.

Other bird activity in the creek line

My walk down the creek line on “Cup Day” revealed some lovely bird activity. The water level is down in the Top Dam and there is much machinery noise on most days, but it has not stopped the birds using this habitat – at least while the machinery is not operating!

In addition to the lovely *Welcome Swallows*, as I approached the Top Dam, a *White-faced Heron* was sitting on a habitat log, three *Black-fronted Dotterels* were running along the water’s edge, a pair of *White-fronted Chats* were about, the *Eurasian Skylarks* were singing and hovering overhead, several *Australian Pipits* were scurrying about, a small flock of *Little Corellas* watched at me inquisitively, and over my shoulder, a pair of *Eastern Rosellas* were checking out a hollow in a stag.



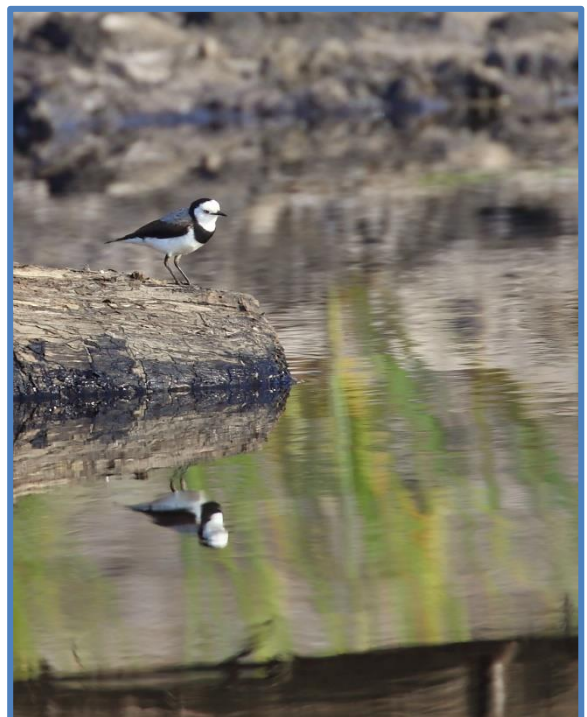
Above: *White-faced Heron* on Top Dam



Above: *Australian Pipit*. **Below:** *Little Corella*



Below: *White-fronted Chat* (male) on Top Dam



A 'regal' Spoonbill ...

As I continued my way down the creek, several *European Goldfinch* were feeding in the grasses and flying into the ponds for a drink, and four *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos* flew over towards the coastal reserve. I was extremely excited when I got to the "Snipe Bog" in the south near the central wetland to see a very regal *Royal Spoonbill* in breeding plumage feeding alongside an *Australian White Ibis*.



Above: *Royal Spoonbill* in breeding plumage

Royal Spoonbill are distinguished by snowy white plumage and a textured, long, black, spoon-shaped bill which is used to feed by sweeping sideways through shallow water to detect prey. They are listed as a **vulnerable** species in Victoria. Breeding plumage includes a dense mane of long white plumes from the head crown, a yellow oval patch over each eye and red-purple patch on the forehead.

What flower was that???

Many thanks to Wendy Watkins and Brendan Condon for identifying the lovely little flower I included in last weeks **Chatter**, which was spotted in the walking path swale near the Dog Park ... yes near where the big *Copperhead* snake was seen!



I was fascinated to learn that the flower is a "species of *Utricularia*, or common name *Fairies Aprons*, a carnivorous plant believe it or not. It is a *Bladderwort* that gets its food from the environment through both photosynthesis and eating animal protein with bladders that are triggered by small water bugs which suck the bugs into the bladder where they are digested". Maybe we should name that swale 'The Amazon'!!

Looking at nature a little closer

I have just acquired a new lens, called a macro lens, to get photographs in a very upclose and personal way. So, do not be surprised to see some things not seen clearly by the human eye in coming issues as I learn how to use it and get some unusual shots of tiny fauna and lovely flora.



Above: A *Damselfly* resting on the flower of a Kangaroo Paw. *Damselflies* generally differ from *Dragonflies* in that, when resting, their wings are parallel to and above their bodies.