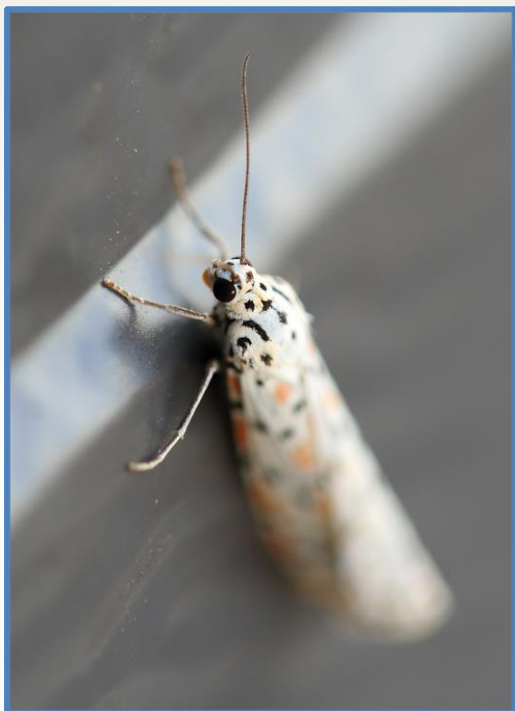


CAPE CHATTER

Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 30

16th December 2020



*A beautifully patterned moth photographed in
Sunlight Boulevard*

**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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SSS ... Snake season is here ... Sea Eagle and Stubble Quail sightings

A bit of warmth this past week was the cue for the *Lowland Copperhead* snakes to come out near the wetlands and grassy areas along with *Blotched Blue-tongue Lizard* amongst the housing precincts – all good signs that the habitat we are seeing created around **The Cape** and home landscapes is working. Also on cue was the rare sighting of an immature *White-bellied Sea Eagle* last Thursday flying over **The Cape** being pursued by a following of *Little Ravens*.

This is only the second time I have seen a *White-bellied Sea Eagle* flyover **The Cape** – in November 2019 an adult bird flew over along exactly the same route!

Another good pick-up by "call" from resident Joe Spano was the sound of *Stubble Quail* calling in the grasslands on the northern side of Seaward Drive opposite **The Cape**. That is within the rules of our area of observations so that brings our bird list to **107**, with **99** indigenous and **8** introduced species. Great stuff Joe! Joe and I intend to explore the grasslands in the south west sector within **The Cape** in coming days to see if there are *Quail* any in that area as well.



Above: *Lowland Copperhead* in a habitat log near the central wetland complex

Cape Chatter is going to hibernate during the holiday season

Next Issue before Christmas I will wrap up with the highlights of the first 30 editions and resume with a new Issue in mid January 2021.

What was that cloud formation from last week?

Thanks to resident Graeme Campbell for identifying the strange cloud formation I showed last week in conjunction with a thunderstorm front. The cloud was a *cumulonimbus arcus* (rolling thunder cloud)

Eastern Rosella nesting update

Things still look like they are going to plan with ongoing sightings of the female leaving the nesting box periodically to feed. There has also been another Rosella hanging about as well, so hopefully we will see signs soon of the male and this other bird visiting the female to feed her and the hatchlings.

Last Issue, I showed photos of the female leaving the nesting box. This week the following sequence of photos shows the female returning from a feeding activity. The male accompanied the female back and waited around until she was back in the box.



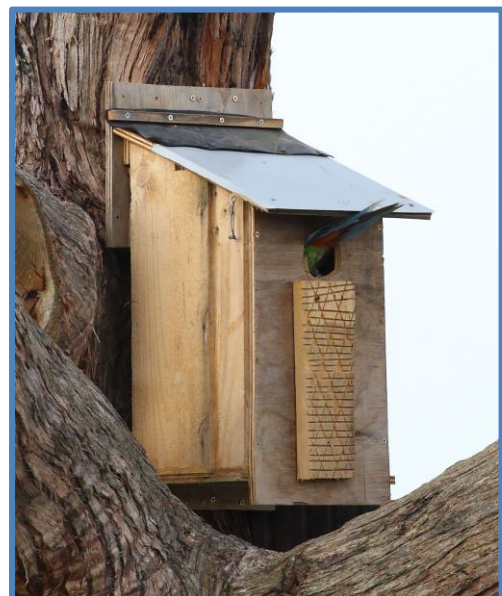
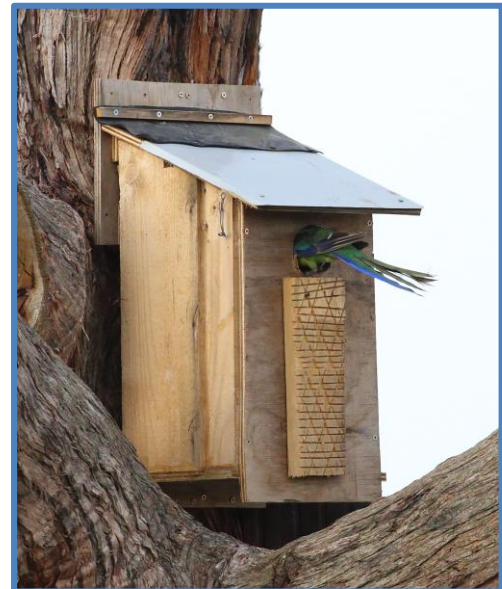
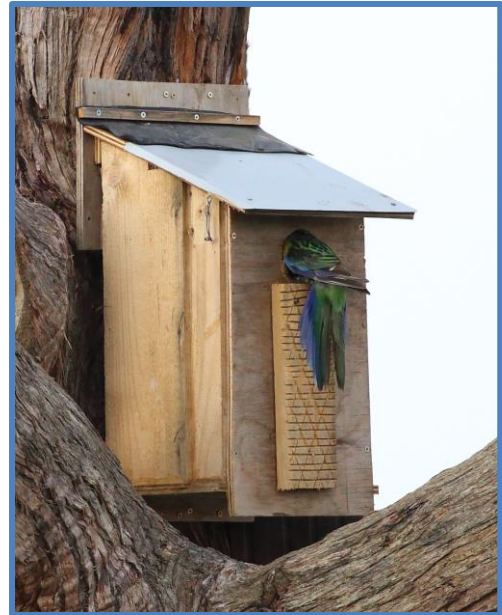
Above: The female Eastern Rosella arrives back at the nesting box after a brief feeding activity in the nearby coastal reserve.

Right: She wastes no time in re-entering the box as the male keeps a watch of the surrounding area before flying off.

I have found morning from around 7.30 AM and evenings about 6.00 PM as the best times to observe this activity, but you need to be patient.

Hopefully, some hatching activity will occur from this week.

The female re-enters quickly ...



Waddling in the Wetlands

Waterbird activity in the wetlands has been down this year compared to last. I am putting this down to a very good rainfall year – there is still a lot of water laying around the surrounding district. As this dries up, hopefully the birds will return.

A small flock of around 8-10 *Pacific Black Duck* have been floating around the central wetlands recently. *Little Pied Cormorant* are daily visitors along with *Australian White Ibis* and *White-faced Heron*. Smaller birds such as *Welcome Swallow* are everywhere, the *Little Grassbird* is happy amongst the reeds and *Willie Wagtail* are still dancing about.



Above: Part of the *Pacific Black Duck* flock.



Above: *Pacific Black Duck* are extremely wary and tend to take to flight when disturbed.

The wetlands are heaving with insect life and frog sounds, so there is plenty of food around for the predatory food chain. Last week, I heard some noisy commotion from the local *Masked Lapwing* pair and quite a few *Welcome Swallows*, and saw a large raptor (I think it might have been a *Whistling Kite*) lifting off from the wetlands with a catch in its talons.

The wetlands also provide great habitat for *Lowland Copperhead* snakes, and that is why we should be cautious walking on the tracks around the wetlands and creek line.

Lowland Copperheads ...

Lowland Copperhead is the predominant snake we have at **The Cape**. They are highly venomous, but of the many poisonous snakes, these guys are considered secretive and less likely to strike, preferring to avoid human encounters. 'If cornered a copperhead will hiss loudly, flatten its body and thrash or flick about, but usually without biting. Further provocation will cause the snake to lash out and bite. The venom is powerful, and a bite from an adult may be potentially fatal without medical assistance'. (Source: Australian Museum).



Above: *Lowland Copperhead* in the hollow tree log

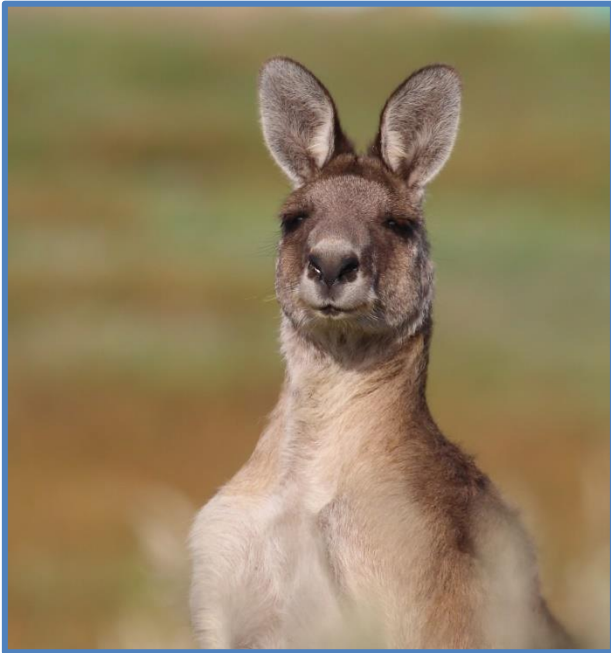
At the central wetland complex near the sculptured wooden bench seat with a "SNAKE BEWARE" sign directly in front, there is a burnt-out habitat log with a hollow running through it. One *Copperhead* is using this to hide and sun itself (the eastern end in the morning and the western end in the afternoon). Another snake has been seen at the same time in the white PVC drain about 10 m further east running under the walking track into the wetland.



Above: Beautiful coloured scales on the snake

Faces of the mob ...

The local *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* mob are certainly making the most of **The Cape**. The new mini oval is a popular spot for them. I have noticed an increase in joey numbers recently and if you sit quietly on one of the lovely gabion seats that have been erected, you can have a lot of enjoyment watching them go about growing up. Again ... please be mindful of them and do not approach joeys quickly or get between a mum and her joey ... and also give them right of way on the walking/cycling tracks.



Above: Big strong male *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* photographed near the 'bog' adjacent to the central wetland complex.



Above: Joey feeding on the main oval no more than 30 m from our lot on Moonshadow Avenue – very inquisitive ... and cute.



Above: This joey just emerged from the pouch and was closely guarded by mum



Above: "I just love you mum!" and **Below:** "Kiss good night mum!"



Bird activity in The Cape

I have not managed to get into the scrub too much lately. I am cautious of the snakes and I always put on my gumboots when venturing into the long grassy areas and damp heathlands and take a snake bandage with me. However, I can still hear lots of noise and see plenty of activity.

In the open grasslands and along the edge of the Coastal Reserve, it is still full of birds flying back and forward with tucker for their hatchlings. Flocks of *Common Starling* are evident most of the day as are the *Little Ravens*. The **Darcy** family of *Australian Magpie* can be seen regularly around the housing precinct and open spaces – the juveniles are still following mum and dad around.



Above: Young *Common Starling* flock in flight

All the usual local small birds are active – *Silvereye*, *Superb Fairy-wren*, *Grey Fantail*, *Brown Thornbill*, *White-browed Scrubwren*. *Rainbow Lorikeet* have been flying overhead and the *Galahs* are back – they are so much fun to watch! Still a few *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo* stragglers about as well!

A pair of *Willie Wagtail* are seen most times I visit the creek line and central wetlands – they love dancing about like *Grey Fantail*.



Above: *Willie Wagtail* perched for a brief moment on a fence post – they are a challenge to photograph as they move so quickly.

Pie and chips – not so good tucker!

Ravens and *Magpies* are smart birds. I have written previously about these birds scavenging food scraps from around the building sites. *Ravens* in particular have gathered all sorts of bread and pizza items which are then dunked in our bird bath to soften up for digestion. The other day, a *Magpie* had a serve of “small chips” which it gathered individually to feed itself and one of its offspring. It is best to discourage this behaviour – especially for the bird and to prevent aggressive behaviour developing.



Above: *Mrs Darcy* collecting leftover lunch chips which she proceeded to feed one of her offspring

The *Grey Butcherbird* are about, with one performing a beautiful song this morning on a stag in our house garden.



Above: *Grey Butcherbird* in song – they have the most beautiful and pleasing calls – disappointing about their feeding habits!

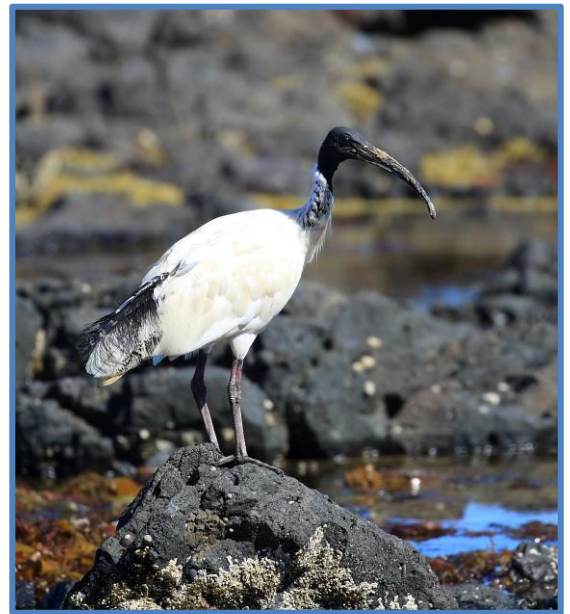
Straw-necked and Australian White Ibis

These two birds are reasonably common around **The Cape** most of the year. Most days, you can see them flying over in a “V” formation and they regularly feed in small groups around the marshy areas near the wetlands. Quite often, they can be seen feeding together and you may also notice them in mixed flight flocks. These few photos will hopefully help you notice the difference between these two similar freshwater birds.



Above: *Straw-necked Ibis* – dark underwing in flight and iridescent body feathers

Below: *Australian White Ibis* – white underwing with black wing tips in flight



Above: *Australian White Ibis* – predominantly white body feathers

Summer skies ... evening life

There have been more lovely sunset skies in the past week. The picture below was taken on the 13th December looking west over the coastal reserve from Moonshadow Avenue.



And below ... life goes on as one of the *Eastern Rosella* family leaves the stag where the nesting box is located.



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