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Cape Chatter

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Territorial defence and aggressive feeding at play ...

Over the past couple of weeks, I have done some wanderings down to the dunes overlooking 2nd Surf Beach to see if the leading *Humpback Whales* have begun checking out the inshore waters of Cape Paterson on their migration north. Nothing yet, but they shouldn't be far away—last year we saw our first 'breach' around the 24th May.

On the way to the lookout, I was fascinated by the territorial and feeding activities of our local *honeyeaters*, especially amongst the nectar rich *Coastal Banksia* (*Banksia integrifolia*) beside the sandy track leading into the coastal dunes. There was so much activity going on, particularly between the *Red* and *Little Wattlebirds* and the *New Holland Honeyeaters*, with birds chasing each other in all directions in an attempt to protect their feeding territory. There was also a couple of *Rainbow Lorikeet* feeding quietly without any frenetic activity (strange ... yes I know!).

Nectar is one of the most available food resources to birds in Australia and the Australian continent has more nectar available than any other continent. That makes it a worthwhile food and the behaviours and calls witnessed on the track demonstrated our native birds at work in a natural environment that has evolved over many, many thousands (in fact millions) of years.



Red Wattlebird (above) in full voice. They are extremely raucous birds sitting high in trees and calling, before setting off to chase another territorial intruder away! Meanwhile, the Rainbow Lorikeet (below) quietly fed on the nectar of the banksia... but they are also very territorial and noisy!



Honeyeaters and nectar



Rainbow Lorikeet (above) and New Holland Honeyeater (below) feeding on the nectar of a Coastal Banksia



Little Wattlebird in quick flight between the Coastal Banksias (above) and feeding on nectar (below)



Australia's honeyeaters are very important pollinators of our native plant species such as banksias and grevilleas. When it comes to melaleuca and eucalyptus—which are the only bird pollinated trees in the world to form forests—wattlebirds and lorikeets are important pollinators of their flowers.

But why all the noise and activity defending territory? Tim Low in *Where Song Began* puts it like this: “Nectar birds are loud because their food repays defence. A fruit, seed or insect is gone after it is eaten, but flowers supply nectar hour after hour, day after day. More than other foods, flowers reward aggression”.

Mammal moments ...



On one of my walks down to the 2nd Surf lookout I noticed this lovely *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* (left) munching on some fresh grass in the partially dry natural wetland to the west of the walking track. She was very wet from the heavy dew which had formed from a clear, cool night. This is another good area to see some of our local mob at a reasonable distance.

I also managed to see a few rats emerging from the bush into the grassy edges of the track one afternoon. I am not 100% sure, but I think they are *Bush Rats* (*Rattus fuscipes*) given the size and colouring and its movement.



Above: Bush Rat emerging from the bush

Managing rodents

There are a few rodents around in the home gardens at the moment and it is difficult to distinguish between native and introduced rodents. We have observations of antechinus, bandicoot, possum and native rats and mice around Cape Paterson. So what is the best method of managing and catching pest rodents in the garden without affecting our native rodent populations?

If at all possible, try not to use **rodenticides** as these poisons can find their way into other animals that may consume sick or dead rodents, especially birds of prey and corvids. Surprisingly, the RSPCA suggests using traps that execute a quick, spring-loaded strangulation of the rodent, but this approach does not allow differentiation between a native and introduced species (you only know after the event!) and do not always do the job correctly.

Last week I had a 'rat' consuming my newly planted broad bean seeds (originally I thought it was birds) but diggings under the compost

bin suggested a *Black Rat* (*Rattus rattus*). I borrowed a trap from resident Graeme McAlpine and managed to catch the culprit after a couple of evenings later using broad beans as bait.

I was still unsure as to the exact species of rat because of its size and colouring, so decided to take it well away from my house and released it in the central wetland complex (some 250m away) to let nature look after its future. It jumped away rather than scurrying, which also confused me as to its identity. So far, there are no signs of its return and the broad beans are happily popping up in the garden!



Lonely ‘Larry’ the Galah

Over the last two years a lone *Galah* has been observed within **The Cape** feeding on seeds and roots in the open grassy areas. This is surprising behaviour as *Galahs* are group animals that bond as pairs, work in family groups and form social flocks. ‘Larry’ looks healthy and can fly, and is quite approachable. So I wonder what has brought about his life as a ‘sole operator’. Has he been ostracised? Is he a released captive bird? Did he have a life partner who has died? If only ‘Larry’ could tell!



‘Larry’ (above) feeding on the edge of the mini-oval by himself in the late afternoon sun and left, snuggled up in some Swamp Melaleuca out of a cold SW wind the following morning

Wandering past the wetlands

In addition to the sounds of croaking frogs and microbats sweeping over the wetlands (thanks to Brendan Condon for his video footage and observations), a recent walk past the larger Central Wetland Complex revealed a nice array of waterbirds floating about. In addition to what now appear to be resident *Dusky Moorhen* and *Australasian Swamphen*, some *Pacific Black Ducks* have been joined by a *Grey Teal* family (adult and four young) and an *Australasian Grebe* has returned.



Above: Australasian Grebe have returned. This one is in non-breeding plumage. Breeding plumage comprises rufous neck sides and a black throat.



*Above: Female Grey Teal and four young on the edge of the central wetland complex at **The Cape** - the male is just out of picture to the left.*

More of our small invertebrate world

I haven't had much chance to get the macro lens out lately with some strong winds blowing the vegetation about, but I did manage to get a couple of shots of some interesting observations during the past week.

This colourful wasp below is what I believe to be a *Cream-spotted Ichneumon* (*Echthromorpha intricatoria*). It was showing a lot of interest around our climbing *Kennedia Beckxiana* and *Rubicunda* (*Dusky Coral Pea*). And now I know why? The female wasp lays egg(s) inside caterpillars by using the ovipositor at the end of its abdomen. The larvae feeds on the caterpillar and the adult wasp eventually emerges from the caterpillar's cocoon. Not surprisingly, nearby I noticed that our *Kennedia*'s were draped in caterpillars feeding on the foliage. The female wasp does not sting and they feed on nectar. (Source: Museum Victoria)



Above: Caterpillar residing in the Kennedia and left, the very interested Cream-spotted Ichneumon

Hooded Plover nesting season update

Several residents of **The Cape** attended a debrief of the Hooded Plover nesting season in Wonthaggi yesterday. Sadly, the Bass Coast area had a poor season of only five fledglings (average is 12.4). Even worse, was the result for Cape Paterson area with no fledged birds (there was one last year). There are many reasons for this result, both natural causes and human behaviour.

For those interested residents of **The Cape** (in addition to those who attended the recent Hooded Plover Information session), you can register any voluntary assistance you can provide with Birdlife Australia by going to:

<https://beachvol.birdlife.org.au/login/index.php>

Any help would be appreciated in support of the wonderful work done by Birdlife Australia and local Bass Coast volunteers.



Then and now ... the Cape creek line is coming along ... all in 12 months



Above: The bottom pond in the creek line in Oct 2020

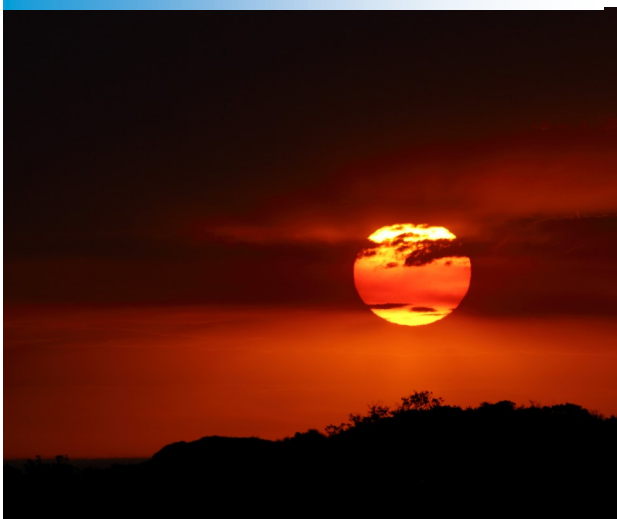


Above: The bottom pond in creek line on 5 May 2021



Above: Forming the bottom pond in the creek line on 23 April 2020

Nature Observations around The Cape



The Cape is on the traditional land of the
Bunurong people

The ***Cape Chatter*** blog is a periodic newsletter produced by resident of **The Cape**, David Hartney. You can subscribe to receive it automatically by email by visiting <https://capechatter.com> and signing up. The website also contains all sorts of nature information and pictures of the ecology, flora and fauna at **The Cape**.

All photos shown in ***Cape Chatter*** are taken by David Hartney unless otherwise credited.

Feel free to contact David by email or through the website to report any nature observations at **The Cape**.

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