

13th June 2021

Issue No. 46



Cape Chatter

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Staying a bit closer to home ...

For obvious reasons, I have not ventured too far from the home in the past week. An unusual weather pattern for this time of the year, namely a deep low from the east-southeast, brought a couple of days of very strong winds, rain and chilly temperatures. I managed to get a few photos around the garden and its structures in between the vagaries of the weather. From the safety and warmth of my home, I often wonder how our animals cope with this weather and how they seem to be able to anticipate the change coming and bunker down accordingly. And when the bad weather clears, they are out and active again as if nothing had happened. They are so adaptable and intuitive.

Black Cockatoo alert! I think we might be fortunate in the years to come to be able to see, at close quarters, the beautiful *Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo*. A small group of three birds has been working up and down Sunlight Boulevard the past two days feeding on the young *Coastal Banksia* that have been planted as the main feature of the streetscapes of **The Cape**. They were first observed feeding here last October. As the trees develop, more birds are likely to come as it is a favoured food source!



Intricate Cobweb

Another interesting observation in the garden was this intricate cobweb that had been made in the aftermath of the strong winds. This web was woven within a square of steel mesh on a gate and was spotted in the still of the clear, dewy morning of 11th June. If you look closely or enlarge the photo you can see the tiny droplets of water hanging like threads to the web. There was no sign of the spider about. Life goes on in nature despite the weather conditions.



Above: Male Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo with the seed cone of a Coastal Banksia, about to take off near the corner of Sunlight Blvd/Moonshadow Ave on 11th June 2021. Does anyone else think like me that the yellow cheek patch resembles the flower of the Coastal Banksia?

Garden habitat is important

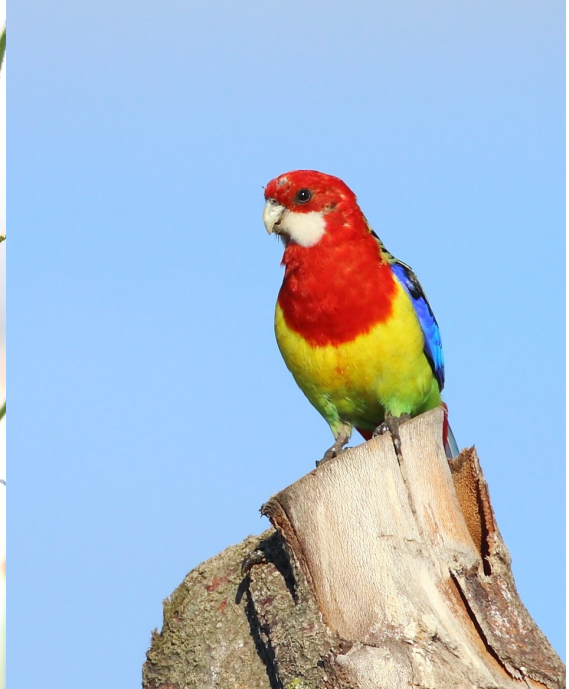
I have written before how important the streetscapes and home gardens are for providing food sources and habitat for our wildlife. Even though we are into winter and experiencing cold, windy weather, certain elements of our garden are providing protection, vantage points and food for animals. Of an evening, along with the calls of the *Whistling Tree Frog* (Verreaux's), I now can hear *Victorian Frog* and another species call I can not sort out just yet. A range of correa, wooly bush, kangaroo paw, hakea and grevillea are now in flower providing valuable nectar for the *honeyeaters* (predominantly *wattlebirds* but also *New Holland*), the usual feast of grubs is being cleaned up by *Magpies* and *Grey Butcherbird*, and the grasses are providing valuable food for *Crested Pigeon* and *Galah*. Our tree stags provide great perching points for all these birds as well as *Eastern Rosella*.



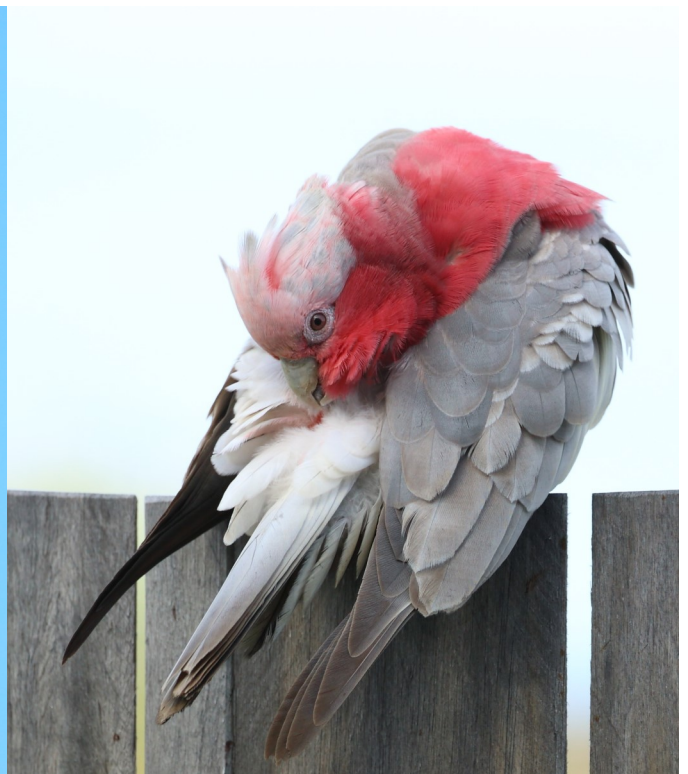
Above: Crested Pigeon, on the calm morning of 11th June, pictured on a tree stag in the home garden. These native pigeons are quite common around **The Cape** and are normally seen in twos or threes or small flocks of about a dozen birds, predominantly feeding on the ground. It makes a loud wing clapping and whistling noise when it takes off in flight and when landing, it raises its tail up and fans it out. **Below:** The Little Wattlebird (left) has a beautiful plumage with at times, quill like feathers. They are slightly smaller than the Red Wattlebird (right) which is more noticeable by the red skin flap (wattle), white patch under the eye and a yellow tinged chest and stomach. Both are very active feeding birds, territorial and aggressive in defending their territory and are common around **The Cape**.



More garden birds ...



Another of the more common *Honeyeaters* at **The Cape** is the *New Holland* (above left) feeding amongst a kangaroo paw. I am observing more instances of their quick feeding forays into our home garden as it matures and the first flowers are emerging and expect to see them become a more common sight amongst the home gardens. The tree stag in the garden is a favourite spot for *Eastern Rosella* (top right) to drop by and check the surrounding area. Of course, my favourite *Galabs* use the stags and fences of our home garden to perch, rest and preen before moving to the ground to feed in small flocks on grasses and roots of vacant lots and open spaces.



More fence and stag users around the home garden ...



The stunning, juvenile *Australian Magpie* (above left) is a daily visitor to our garden, pictured here with ruffled feathers sitting on our fence, preparing for a last meal before the big blow started to build up. The juvenile is distinguished by a black bill and speckled grey–black plumage on the chest. This young bird is one of four offspring from the infamous Mr and Mrs ‘Darcy’ family. For those new to *Chatter*, ‘Darcy’ is an aggressive, territorial magpie who terrorised me last breeding season because I just happen to live in the middle of his territory. You will hear more about him in coming months I am sure. The family is still together and ‘Darcy’ has already alarmed me with two ‘warning’ swoops watched on by the family! I think I am in for a torrid time again!!

The *Grey Butcherbird* (above right) is a frequent visitor to the stag and fences where it often sits and sings its beautiful songs before diving to the ground to capture food with its powerful bill. *Magpies* and *Butcherbirds* are in the same species family of passerine along with *Currawong* (yet to be seen at The Cape) and have beautiful song calls. The butcherbird is smaller—but notice the hooked bill which is used to dismember prey (hence its name)—while the Magpie has a straight bill.

Is this ambergris??

Thanks to resident Nathalie Charles for sending through these pictures of what she thinks may be ‘ambergris’ (or whale vomit) found on a nearby beach recently.

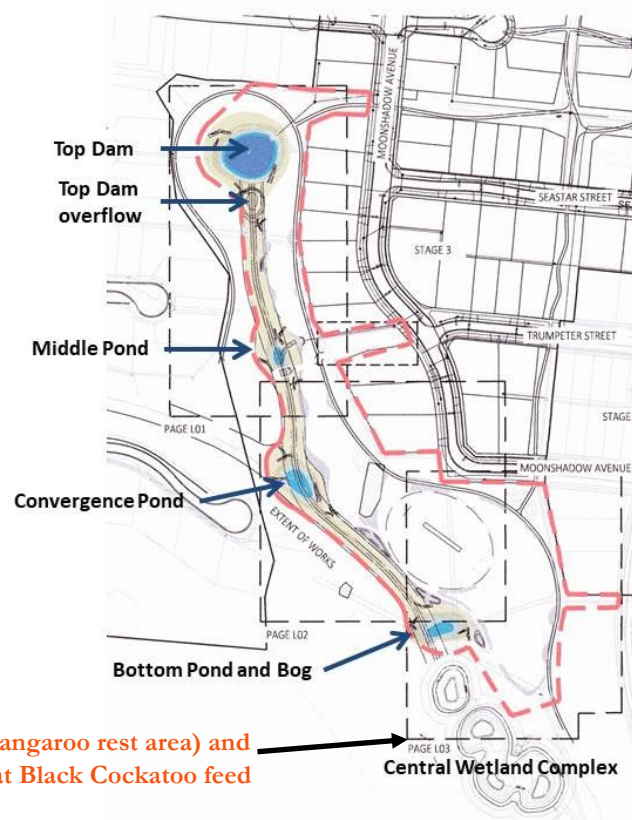
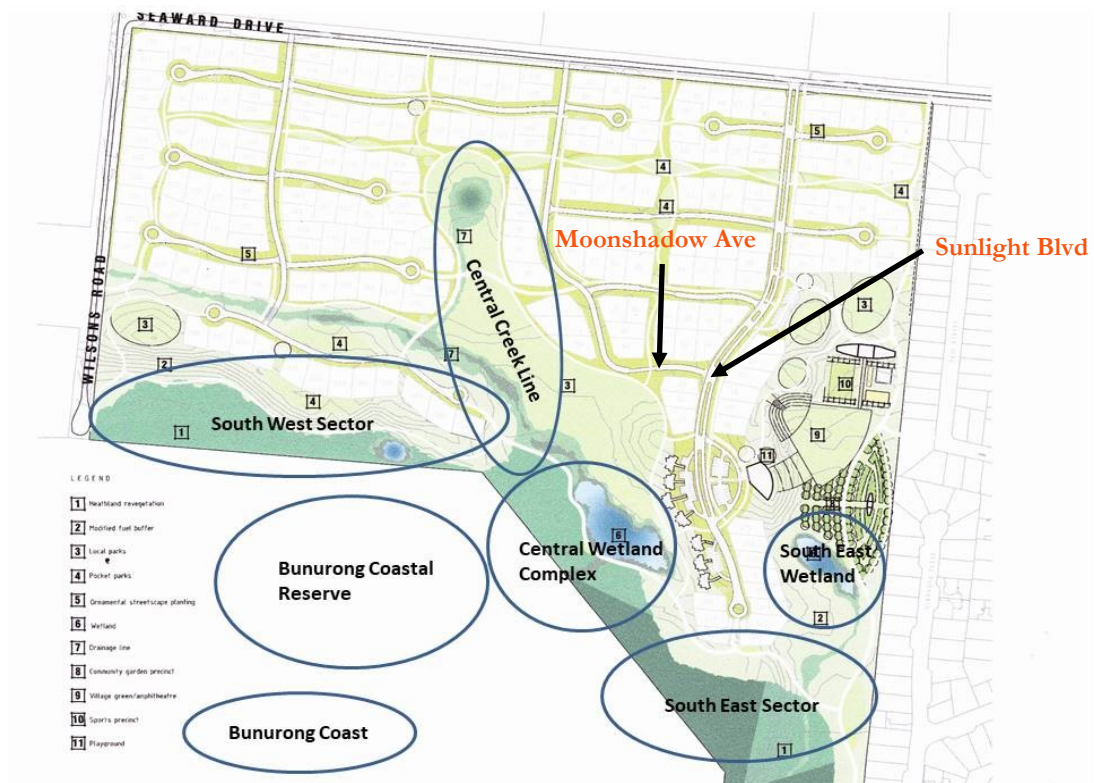
Ambergris comes from *Sperm Whales* and is released as either faecal matter or vomit. Ambergris is made up of squid beaks (squid is the main diet of sperm whales) and ambrein which allows the beaks to pass through the digestive system. It is rare, highly valuable and used in the manufacture of perfume.

Can anyone shed any light on this discovery?



The Cape landmarks used in Cape Chatter

When writing *Cape Chatter* I often refer to various landmarks within **The Cape** to describe where the actions and observations occur. For readers not familiar with these landmarks, the diagrams below highlight the areas with their descriptors. I have further broken down the '**Central Creek Line**' into the various water features as this is an important habitat restoration area *Chatter* is monitoring and photographing as it evolves. All this information is provided on the *Cape Chatter* website at <https://capechatter.com/cape-ecology/> along with photographs and landform descriptions for each area.



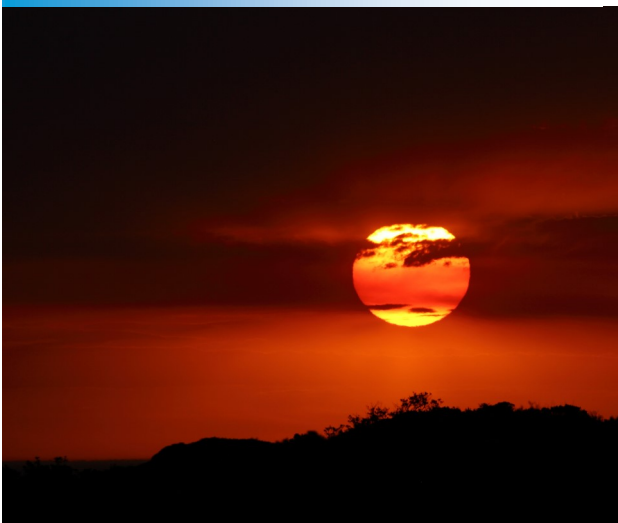
'Green Beach' (kangaroo rest area) and
'Lone Pine' (great Black Cockatoo feed
tree)

Further up the creek (line) at The Cape ... looking south from 'Middle Pond'



'Middle Pond' looking south on 5 May 2021. Bottom photo taken on 6 October 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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