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Thank you to all those residents and owners of **The Cape** who registered their interest to participate in the first planting day planned for early September as part of Project KOALA. We had a fantastic response and have had to cap the numbers involved due to the sensitivity of the planting zone we are to be working in. There will be further opportunities in future planting zones for those that missed out this time.



## *'Hopping' onto the trail of a 'Rail'...*

Since arriving at **The Cape** two years ago, I have always hoped there would be some rarely seen and secretive waterbirds residing in the wet, swamp paperbark areas of our retained habitat and adjoining coastal park. Well you can imagine my excitement when I thought I heard some unusual calls on one of my recent photographic strolls in the south of the estate. Knowing the camera would be of no use in this situation, I grabbed out my trusty old i-phone and managed to record the call of a *Lewin's Rail* which has been verified by fellow resident Joe Spano. What a great find, and just shows how wonderful our sensitive habitat areas are working in housing our fragile native wildlife. The *Kangaroo* mob are appearing in rising numbers and becoming increasingly active. I managed to have a nice engagement with a young male who was inside the central wetland fence and was quite unperturbed with my presence and the camera clicking before 'hopping' off slowly. And to top it all off, another highlight was a *Black-shouldered Kite* devouring a very tasty *mouse* on a stag in the creek line. More proof not to use rodenticides to control rodents!



## *The secretive and vulnerable Lewin's Rail—bird species #114*

The *Lewin's Rail* is a small wetland bird from the family *Rallidea*, which also includes *Crakes*. Most of these birds are secretive and only seen around dawn and dusk (or “crepuscular”) so they are more likely detected by their calls rather than sight which was the case with our *Lewin's*. I recorded the call and checked it against my handy field app (Morcombes's *eGuide to Australian Birds*) which includes good call/song recordings which I then sent to Joe to verify as he is pretty handy on bird calls. The *Lewin's* has three distinctive calls of which I heard two—all are thought to be territorial: a **krek-krek-krek** sound repeated about 10-20 times and a slow deep **ceerrggh-ceerrggh** call which to be honest sounds more like someone **farting**! In fact, I thought my tummy was rumbling when I first heard it!! Its third call which I did not pick up is a soft drumming noise which sounds like a galloping horse!



**Above:** The similar looking Buff-banded Rail—this is not the Lewin's Rail!

I am not hopeful of getting a photo of this bird because they are secretive, inhabit very thick wet vegetation and I would probably need to spend hours waiting for it to appear in the open—but I will keep my eyes out for it. To give you an idea of what we are talking about though, the bird left is a similar species: the *Buff-banded Rail* which I photographed on Lady Elliot Island off the south Queensland coast. The *Lewin's* doesn't have the buff chest, white throat or white facial streak above the eye and is a bit smaller, weighing in at about 75-100 grams. They breed from August to January so let's hope the calls I heard were associated with the quest for a partner. In fact, I am not unsure if there is another bird in the vicinity because the call locations were moving about a bit!

If you are interested in learning a bit more about this secretive bird, there is a lovely You Tube clip at his link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eslb8aajqyc> which has great video footage and the calls I heard and recorded.



**Above:** *Latham's Snipe* rest during the day and are well camouflaged in damp, grassy areas which provide cover, and feed in the evenings. They can be sometimes seen when flushed from cover and will generally fly off in a zig-zag pattern making a rasping alarm like *krek-krek* call. Keep an eye out for them on the southeast exit track near the natural wetland as it is a popular spot for them.

## *The amazing, migratory & vulnerable Latham's Snipe*

While on the subject of vulnerable wetland birds, the first of the season's *Latham's (or Japanese) Snipe* may have arrived at **The Cape** from northern Japan, a bit earlier than expected, for their summer stayover. There are reports of them being seen recently in Canberra, so the sighting by resident Jeannie H of two birds lifting off from **The Cape's** south east natural wetlands a few days back is a promising sign. Jeannie has been involved in all *Snipe* counts for the [\*Latham's Snipe Project\*](#) at **The Cape** so has really good knowledge of their flight pattern and call.

**The Cape** contributes to the conservation of *Latham's Snipe* by providing additional, and retaining existing habitat around the estate's wetlands and by participating in three counts as part of the annual survey of *Snipe* numbers in Australia through the ***Latham's Snipe Project***. For more information, see the project website at: [\*Latham's Snipe Project\*](#)

There is also an interpretive sign at “the bog” on **Mary's Circuit** alongside the central wetland complex which gives some details of the bird.

The first *Snipe* count for this season is to be held on Saturday 18th September with another in November and the last in January. I will call out for helpers shortly for the first count.



## *The Kite, the mouse ... and the Galah!!*

There have been a few sightings recently of *Black-shouldered Kite* over **The Cape**. Being in a handy location to watch the comings and goings on the creek line tree stags, I noticed one of these *Kites* sitting in top of the most southern stag a few days back. Out came the camera and off I ventured over to grab some piccies. As I got closer, I could see the bird was standing proudly on a small rodent. Now here was a photo opportunity! Sneaking closer, I managed a few distant shots as it started to dismember its catch. The action heated up when a pair of *Galabs* attempted to move the *Kite* on but it wouldn't budge. It proceeded to devour its prey, culminating in a final gulp, head first and tail last!! An amazing sequence of events until it finally flew off—a little heavier but happier.



**Clockwise from Top Left:** The *Black-shouldered Kite* starting to dismember the mouse; next a *Galah* flies in to move the *Kite* on but it didn't budge; the *Kite* ponders whether it can get the whole mouse into its mouth ... no problems! And, finally, well fed and holding its ground, it digests its meal before flying off in search on another prey. Please do not use RODENTICIDE!

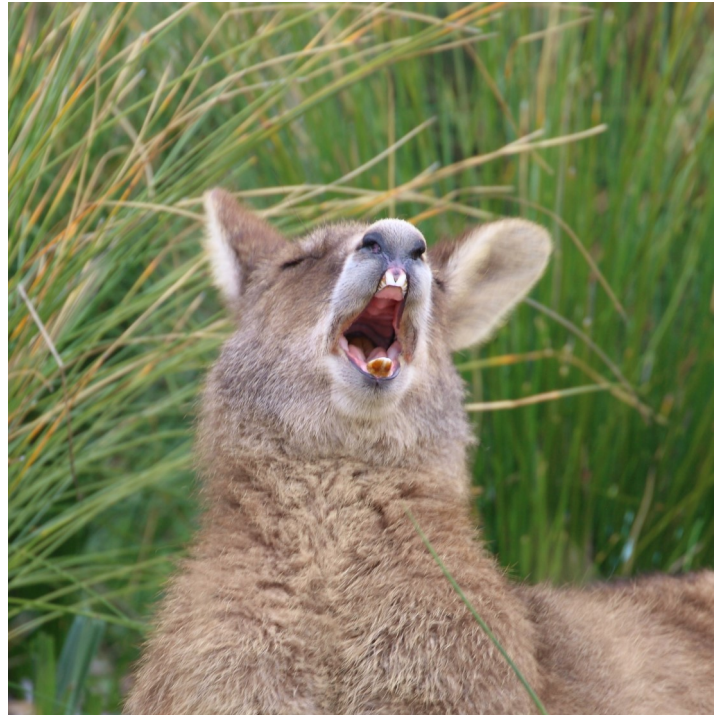


## *A special time with an Eastern Grey ...*

I have written a few times how privileged we are to have a reasonable size mob of *Eastern Grey Kangaroos* which call **The Cape** home. In particular, the mob which hang around the central wetland complex are becoming quite habituated and feeling comfortable within the area of the wetlands, the creek line and 'Green Beach' rest area. Two days ago a nice looking male was resting during the day right next to *Mary's Circuit Track* amongst the sedges and rushes, soaking up the sun in the calm weather—he was so relaxed (see picture below left) and it was great to watch him and be able to spend time observing this marvellous animal ... at a safe distance of course. So ...



*We shared a few jokes ...*



*We had a bit of a scratch and did a few stretching exercises together ...*



*... and finished off with a light snack!*

PLEASE REMEMBER THESE ANIMALS CAN BE DANGEROUS SO DO NOT GET CLOSE TO THEM AND OBSERVE THE EDUCATIVE SIGNAGE GUIDELINES. ALSO, I USE A VERY LONG LENS SO AM ABLE TO GET CLOSE UPS YOU CANNOT GET WITH YOUR I-PHONE!!





## *Bird observations over the last week ...*

There is definitely evidence that spring is in the air and nesting/breeding is beginning amongst the birds. You can see changes in plumage colour; birds collecting nesting material; lots of chatter and calling and general activity is on the rise. Aside from the excitement of the *Lewin's Rail* and *Latham's Snipe* a few other notables popped up. A 'rare' sighting of a *Kookaburra* (there not common in **The Cape**); a flock of *Little Corellas* flying over; still a few *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos* about (thank you Ruby for the observation), *Little Raven* numbers are on the rise; the flocks of *Red-browed Finch* are active (thanks Pat); plenty of *Pacific Black-Duck* and *Teal* activity in the air and on the water; and the territorial *New Holland Honeyeaters* and *Wattlebirds* are more active. Over the coming weeks, things will really start to heat up as some of the migratory birds return and the blossoms come out... we will not know where to look!



**Clockwise from above:** *Red Wattlebird* in full voice; these three *New Holland Honeyeaters* were very active together amongst the *Swamp Melaleuca* (look out for groups of these birds doing a "corrobboree" where they all gather and frantically chat at each other over territory); this male *Superb Fairy-wren* is nearly in full breeding plumage and on the look-out for a partner or two!; the female *Superb Fairy-wren* in full voice letting everyone know that she is about; and a beautiful *Grey Fantail*, one of my favourite birds which are skilful aerobic dancers who will come quite close to you in an inquisitive manner. All these birds, and more, will be seen in increasing numbers in the weeks ahead along the walking track in the south east sector of **The Cape**.





## *A couple of cuddly Galahs to finish off this Chatter ...*

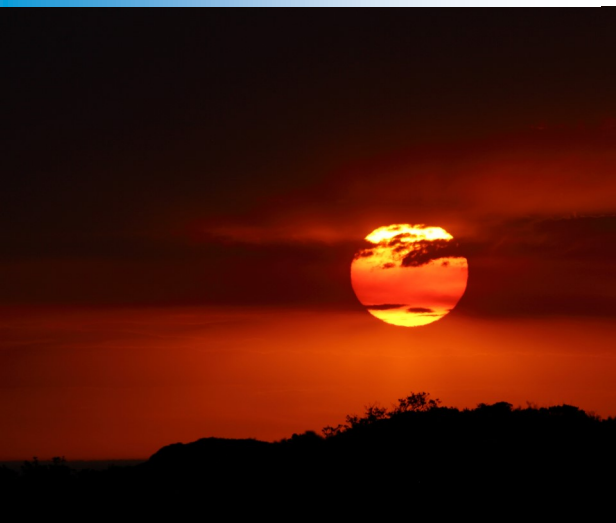
Besides hassling the *Black-shouldered Kite* and chasing off a *Nankeen Kestrel* flying over, the *Galah* flock continue to provide wonderful moments of amusement and affection as they go about their daily lives at **The Cape**. These two *Galah* in particular caught my attention as they preened each other before they had a minor tiff and one flew off in a huff!



*And a final word on the benefits of wetlands ...* researchers from Victoria's Deakin University recently conducted a study that calculated Victoria's 500,000 hectares of wetlands sequester 3 million tons of carbon. Not only are they valuable carbon storage units, they provide wonderful habitat to many species of birds and other fauna ... just like these beautiful *Pacific Black-Ducks* in **The Cape's** wetlands.



### 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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**capechatter.com**

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