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Issue No. 60



# Cape Chatter

## *The big black ‘V’ has returned ...*

### Inside this issue:

*The little things in nature  
and native bees* 2

*Change of roster with the  
cockatoos and rosella nest  
action* 3

*Taking a walk on the  
wild side* 4

*Rodent in the coastal  
rosemary* 5

*Wetland news* 5

*Silvereyes everywhere* 6

*Winners are grinners* 7

The lovely little *Black-fronted Dotterel* has returned to **The Cape**, a bit later than usual. A pair have taken up residence in their normal spot along the central creek line—they move up and down the creek and among the waterholes but can also be seen on the grassy edges and mulched garden beds either side. These birds prefer open habitat so they can see any threats approaching, so after a chat with **The Cape** Development and Landscape team, modified plantings have occurred in the creek line to give them some more open areas rather than a wall of sedges and rushes. Many thanks to the team for modifying this part of the creek line habitat.



These Dotterels are in the same family as our beach nesting, vulnerable *Hooded Plovers*, but are generally seen around inland waters and farm dams. They are smaller than the Hoodie, weigh half their size, have the same eye and bill markings, and their identifying features are the black ‘V’ on the chest and the rich rusty band colour on their wings which deepens during the breeding season. They are well camouflaged when on the ground so keep your eye out when they are in flight where you will notice a flash of white with a high pitched ‘pit’ call. Like the Hoodie, their nest is also a simple scrape on the ground, so be careful if wandering close to the edge of the creek as there may be eggs.

## *The little things in nature that turn up colourful surprises ...*

I have had the macro lens out in the home garden recently and I continue to be amazed at the beautiful little creatures that appear from time to time. Most of these tiny insects have a key role to play in the garden either as pollinators or predators. The last few days I discovered several stunning *Long-legged Flies* in the garden cleaning up some white fly and aphids. These little beauties are great predators against mites, thrip and aphids and are a control agent for many garden pests. Their colourings are an unbelievable mix of metallic colours often missed with the naked human eye.



## *The buzz around native bees ...*

Most of us know what honeybees look like but few of us can identify native bee species. Nice article in the ABC Online about the importance of growing native plants in a bid to help native Australian bees, of which there are about 1700 species. The major factors threatening native bees are habitat loss from agriculture and urban environments, bushfires, pesticide use and climate change. Experts believe the growing of 'exotic' plant species in backyards also affects native bee food sources and places to nest, so extending your garden to include more native flora can help in some way. Limiting or eliminating pesticide use in your garden and growing more native plants and providing shelter for bees will go a long way to helping these lesser known, yet vital pollinator species, giving us a chance to see more beautiful small creatures. I am now on the lookout in our garden and hoping to make it even more native bee friendly!



## *Change of roster among our raucous cockatoos ...*

There is a noticeable changing of the guard among our local cockatoo species at the moment. The large flock of *Galah* have moved away to breed and they have been replaced by the noisy *Little Corella* who are feasting on the new grasses and capeweed (and occupying the occasional house under construction!!) And we still have a small group of three *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo* around but I would expect them to move inland soon.



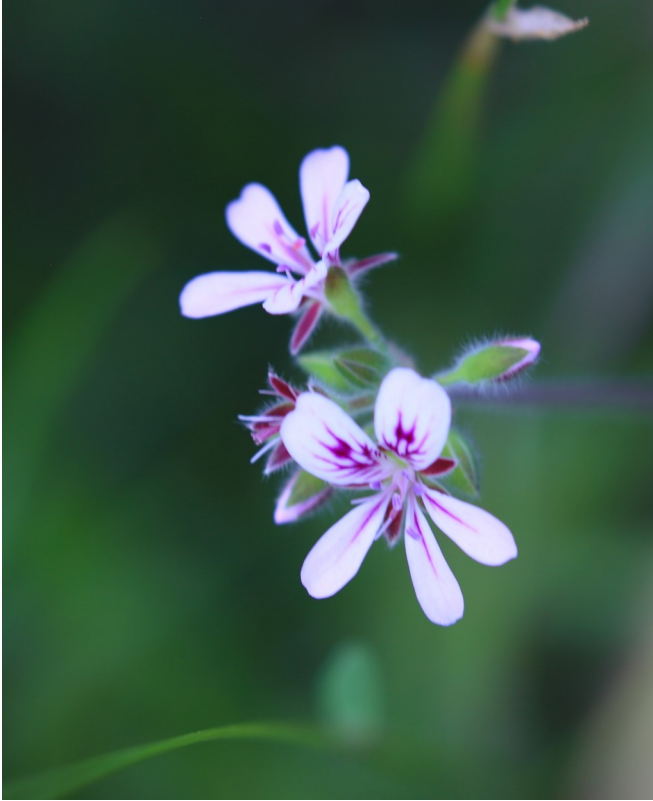
## *Rosella nesting action ???*



There has recently been action at one of the three *Eastern Rosella* nesting boxes in the creek line. Robyn S reported a flock of 12 birds squawking and fighting near the Top Dam and smaller groups of five have been squabbling in the area. All about territory and nesting spots I guess! Over the last week, a pair (pictured left) have been coming and going at the entrance to the box, in what I am assume is feeding activity for a female on a nest in the box. The bird on top of the box is an immature bird by the looks (most likely from last year) and the bird at the hole looks like a male. Both birds approached the hole and went half way in, in an activity that took several minutes. This behaviour accords with breeding behaviour I have read about. Unfortunately, I have not been able to ascertain if and when any egg laying started so I do not have a predicted date for hatching and then fledging, but I will keep my eye on activity there. The nesting box is the most northern in the creek line just below the Top Dam, so if you are walking by and see any activity, please let me know. I would love to have a camera put in the box to record what is going on—does anyone have any ideas or suggestions on how this could be done or funded??

## *Taking a walk on the wild side ...*

I managed a bit of a walk into some of the wilder parts of **The Cape** recently in conjunction with some work around feral animal monitoring between the estate and the adjoining coastal reserve, along with preparation for our next *Latham Snipe* survey and some mange management of a young wombat. In between a few fauna photos, I managed to see several tiny indigenous flowers popping up among the tall grasses.



**Above:** I am pretty sure this is some type of native geranium, a delicate little flower and plant that is sitting just beside a major Kangaroo thoroughfare, but has managed to survive and show its beauty. The leaves are shaped like geranium leaves.



**Above:** I have no idea what this flower and plant is, but it looks very much like some sort of orchid. If it is, it is the first I have seen within the estate. It was growing next to a swamp area overgrown with melaleuca, in long grass, with a couple of flower heads noticeable along a green stalk with small leaves. Does anyone have an idea of what it may be?

## *Kangaroo Fruit ... indigenous medicine*

There are several small patches of *Kangaroo Fruit* (aka *Kangaroo Apple*) in this wilder habitat. Pictured right is the flower of this species. These plants are growing about a metre high. It derives its name from the shape of the plant's leaf, which is similar to the paw of a kangaroo. The flower forms a fruit which was used by the indigenous Bunurong people as a natural anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant. The young fruit is poisonous.





## Rodent in the Rosemary ...

There is a nice *Coastal Rosemary* (*Westringia*) bush outside my study window beyond the flowering *Kangaroo Paws* (which have provided some wonderful close-up opportunities to watch the *Wattlebirds* feeding on nectar). On a rare still day recently, I noticed some movement in the *westringia* and thought it might have been a small bird feeding on insects. Low and behold, on closer inspection it was a small rodent feeding on vegetative matter in broad daylight. I am unsure if it is a native mouse, as I did not get a chance to get a good look at it so it looks more like a *House Mouse* (*mus musculus*) to me (but it would nice to be wrong and it may be a *New Holland Mouse*!).



This is a timely reminder to be careful when you manage rodents pests around your house. Apart from possibly being a native species, rodents are an important food source for many bird species such as raptors and other predatory birds (photos below). If you are using rodenticides from the hardware store or a supermarket, there is good chance it would have a detrimental affect on birds if they ingest a poisoned rodent they have caught. It would be best to catch the rodent in a pressure-triggered cage trap so you can identify the species and take the necessary action to despatch it if it is an introduced pest like the *Black Rat* or *House Mouse*, thereby saving any native species.



## Wetland news ...

Thanks to Gabi T for advising we look like we are now down to **two** *Pacific Black Ducklings* (or hybrids—see below) from the eight that hatched a few weeks back. The weather has not been kind to them and there could be a few predators about as well. Joe Spano reported an *Australian Swamphen* (pictured right) in the central wetland which has been making quite a racket calling out and it has also been observed in the snipe bog and nearby swamp among the melaleuca paperbark.

When is a *Pacific Black Duck* (PBD) not a Black Duck? You learn something everyday in this birding caper! An Instagram follower of mine advised me that what I thought was a photo of a PBD is in fact a hybrid duck crossed with a *Northern Mallard* (an introduced feral bird) that aggressively breeds with the indigenous PBD, reducing the genetic integrity of that species. Not good! *Mallards* love feeding on food scraps and mostly live in Australia in semi-domestic situations. So, please do not feed the ducks within **The Cape** (or anywhere), as you are potentially contributing to the loss of a species! Better still, do not feed any bird unnaturally—it is not good for them!

Can you spot the difference?

Left is the pure breed PBD—the legs are a dirty orange with a green speculum and fine light coloured edges to brown feathers. The hybrid bird on the right has a blue speculum and the feather edges are broader. The hybrid has brighter orange legs as well. There are more hybrids around **The Cape** from my estimates, including Gabi's ducklings I think!





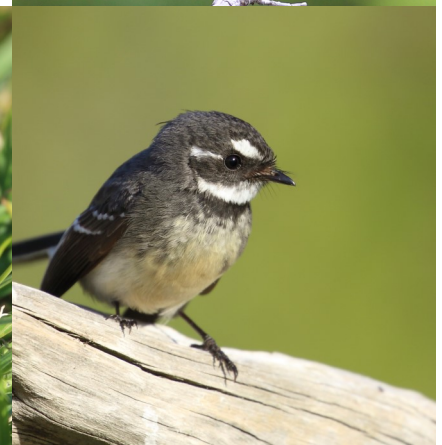
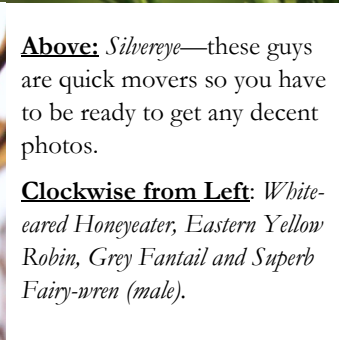
## *Silvereyes everywhere ...*

While taking my walk on the wild side, there were loads of tiny *Silvereyes* about—by far the most populous bird. These little wonders are warm-time visitors to **The Cape**. There are nine sub-species in Australia and we have two sub species that visit: *lateralis* and *westernensis*. *Lateralis* are the Tasmanian sub species that cross the Bass Strait to the mainland in spring and depart again around autumn. The *westernensis*, a south east bird, also migrates further north within the Australian mainland during the cooler months but not a lot is known about their movements. These little guys weigh in around 10-12 grams. They are generally seen in small flocks moving as groups between feeding stations, cleaning up small insects and using a brush-tipped tongue to mop up sugary liquids from flowers and fruits. Other prominent birds were the Red and Little Wattlebirds, Grey Fantail, Superb Fairy-wren, Brown Thornbill, White-browed Scrub-wren, Eastern Yellow Robin, Welcome Swallow, Grey Shrike-thrush, Yellow-faced and White-eared Honeyeater. Surprisingly, I did not see many New Holland Honeyeaters, our most common small honeyeater—not sure where they have gone! I heard the distant calls of the beautiful Spotted Pardalote but unfortunately, did not get a glimpse of it.



**Above:** *Silvereye*—these guys are quick movers so you have to be ready to get any decent photos.

**Clockwise from Left:** *White-eared Honeyeater*, *Eastern Yellow Robin*, *Grey Fantail* and *Superb Fairy-wren (male)*.





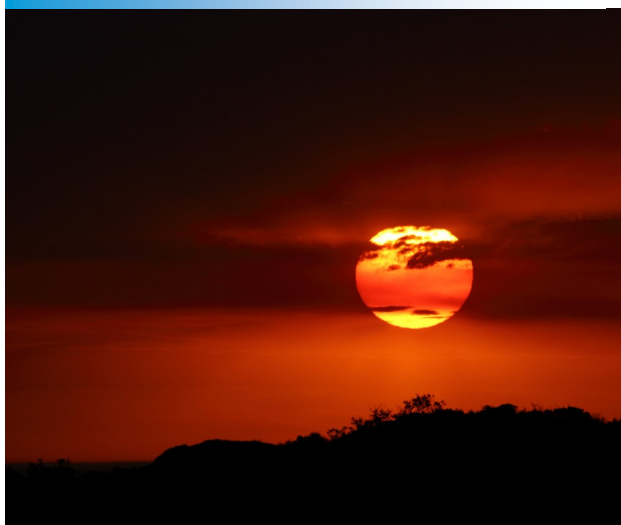
## Winners are grinners ...

Big congratulations to Joel 'Dirt' Kent and **The Cape** Landscaping Team for their contribution in being judged best sustainable landscape in the Landscaping Victoria Master Landscaper awards for **The Cape's** common/public landscape. The team are doing a great job in re-establishing habitat through hard landscaping and re-vegetation of the common areas, streetscapes, creek line and wetlands. They were also happily involved in our first community-led revegetation Project KOALA and did most of the hard yakka! The team always have a "smile on their dial" when I run into them to see what they are up to regardless of the weather conditions they face—just a great bunch of people and very proud about what they are building for our community.

I recently caught up with some of the team while they were undertaking the planting of some 30,000 plants along the pathways, wetlands and creek line, and managed to get on the other side of the camera lens for once to help them celebrate their award. That's Joel, right, with the "thumbs up"!



## 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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