



Cape Chatter

Inside this issue:

Welcome Back ...

Snakes close up 2

Food chain action in the home garden 3

More activity in the home garden 4

Bee attractions 4

Hoodies at 2nd Surf 5

Kangaroos on the oval 6

Other bird news—Snipe are about and 2020 Action Plan for Oz Birds 7

Right: An imposing male *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* poses for me from inside the central wetland enclosure (**note:** I have a telephoto lens!). Quite a few of this mob are becoming well habituated with the daily life of **The Cape**, but we need to remain cautious of them as they can be dangerous if provoked. Please be aware of the dangers and make yourself familiar with the signage placed around the area. Entering restricted habitat areas to get a closer look and having unsupervised kids chasing them on bikes is not wise and may lead to some distressing situations for both the kangaroos and provocateurs.

It has been an interesting summer period so far. While much of the Australian nation has been receiving good amounts of rainfall, our stretch of coastal hinterland has been lacking in precipitation and was starting to “brown-off” until some good rainfall last week. I do not think I have seen **The Cape** so dry in my two and half years here and it was evident by the lack of *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* activity around the estate and the dearth of green grass over the last several weeks. Maybe the rise in casual visitors walking and riding and construction activity in the final housing stage had something to do with it as well! So it was most pleasing to see a large number of these beauties feeding and lounging around on the new green grass of the oval and at “Green Beach” - their favourite rest-up area—last evening. There were at least 40 kangaroos on the oval (enough for two footy teams) and another 20 or so further away grazing. A wonderful spectacle!



Snakes close-up ...

Snake season is well and truly with us with multiple sightings around **The Cape** in several locations—especially around the wetlands, the Project KOALA habitat area, near the dog park, and untouched habitat areas. The predominant species is the venomous *Lowland Copperhead*. A pair is commonly seen near the sculptured viewing seat and habitat log at the central wetland complex (just near the snake sign!!) and are now regulars having been seen consistently in the same location over the past two years. *Copperheads* are generally shy snakes and will retreat when they detect movement near their location. A reminder these are protected animals and should not be harmed in any way, so be aware and look out for their presence in that area and let them get on with their lives.



I took these photos a couple of days back while having a look for birds in the wetlands. These are the two *Copperheads* near the snake sign basking in the warmth. They were separate at the time but were seen together a few minutes later. The snake on the left is darker in colour and if you look closely at the eye, it appears milky or grey-blue in colour (quite scary really!). Snakes do have an ocular scale/spectacle that protects the eye from dust and dirt. However, snakes can also get a milky eye appearance when they are shedding their scaled skin, so this could be what is happening here. The snake pictured right has a lighter skin colour, clear eyes and the coppery tones are apparent—looks beautiful!



Both these snakes look extremely healthy and are quite at home in this habitat area. It is most likely they will breed this season and can produce a reasonable size 'batch' of live young which are ready and raring to go once hatched, as we discovered in our back yard last year (see below).



Food chain action' in the home garden ... nature at work

Fascinating to watch some “food chain action” at close quarters in the home garden a few days back! I have become quite fond of observing small *Grass Skinks* (*below left*) showing themselves fleetingly around the habitat rocks catching some warmth. We also have an immature *Grey Butcherbird* (*below right*) which I see regularly, feeding skilfully in the garden, over the past year or so. Unfortunately, their paths crossed recently and a skink is no longer with us! **Beware of gory photos!**



These *skinks* are very wary of me and the camera, so I was amazed when this *Butcherbird* appeared and sized up the meal opportunity so quickly—first of all by catching it in the undergrowth, dismembering the tail and consuming it, and finally flying off with the remainder of the reptile to complete the meal. Precision butchering and all over in a fraction of time. It really is survival of the fittest out there in our garden jungle! Follow the sequence of events (clockwise from left) in the picture below.



I guess you can see why these birds are known as ‘*butcherbirds*’! The precision like dismembering of the tail from the body and the use of the hooked end of the bill to further stun the prey by banging it on a hard surface is a sight to behold. See the photo above right for a good illustration of the hooked tip - very nasty. *Kingfishers*, including the *Laughing Kookaburra*, also catch and kill their prey in a similar fashion but lack the hooked bill tip. I felt pretty sad for the skink—sitting there awaiting its fate and the stunned look in the eyes as it is about to be finally consumed. By the same token, I am amazed at the hunting skills of this predatory bird—its ability to seek out and capture a well camouflaged and mostly alert prey—a bird that has the most melodic and beautiful call when in voice! Nature at work.

More action in the home garden ... 'stepping stones' are working?

After two years of growth in our home garden, we are starting to reap the rewards with the appearance of more small birds in the past few weeks. Obviously these tiny birds are starting to feel more secure among the growth in native plants away from the predatory birds such as the *Grey Butcherbird*! The latest batch of visitors to inspect the garden are the tiny *Silvereye* (*Zosterops lateralis*). A small flock of five birds has repeatedly visited the garden, hiding among some *boobialla* and *tea-tree* plants while foraging into the vegetable beds to clean up grubs! Why am I so excited? Because, it shows that our home gardens if planted with a diversity of layered, closely planted native species, provides vital habitat with security, feed and some water which the birds will seek out—a type of 'stepping stone' of habitat to connect with the natural retained areas, constructed habitat, and adjoining coastal reserve. Watching these *Silvereyes* come and go, I believe they are nesting and residing in a stretch of *melaleuca* habitat retained on the edge of the oval, some 100 metres away from our garden. So keep those home gardens coming along and you will be providing a whole lot of habitat for a range of native fauna—creating your own little ecosystem and having birds close-by to enjoy.

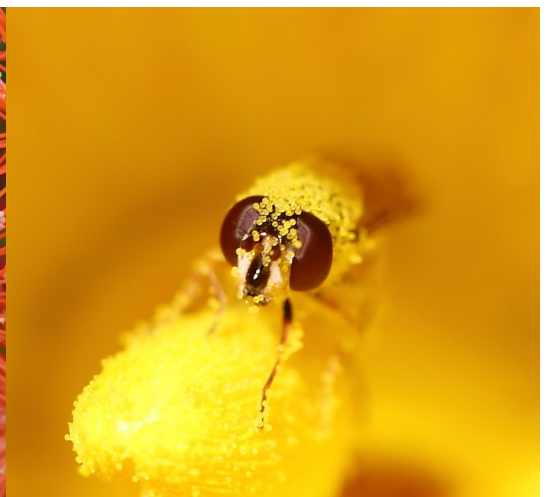


Above: A tiny *Silvereye* sitting on a steel mesh fence and another among some *borage* flowers—a plant very popular with the bees! The nominated species of *Silvereye* (*lateralis*) is distinguished by the brown flanks (sort of goes nice with the rusty fence!) and these lovely little birds are summer migrants from Tasmania. How does a tiny little bird weighing in at 10 grams make such a trip across the treacherous waters of Bass Strait?

Bee attractions in the home garden

Great observation work by resident Robyn Shallard who managed to see an elusive native *Blue-banded Bee* in her garden (pollinating a tomato flower). Just shows how quick fauna will show interest in emerging ecosystems.

Following on from last issue of *Chatter*, I am still on the lookout for more native bee species—just need the winds to ease off to get a few photos with the macro lens. Our *ficofolia* (*Wild Sunset*) - pictured below centre—has flowered for the first time and I cannot wait to see what native bees and other pollinators come in to investigate this beauty! The yellow of sunflowers and pumpkins seem popular with many nectar feeding pollinators, like this *hoverfly* below right.



Hoodie action at 2nd Surf ...and some useful hints below

The challenge of nesting and breeding by our vulnerable *Hooded Plovers* continues along the Cape Paterson coast. A pair at Pea Creek/Undertow Bay are on their fifth nesting attempt - that's a lot of hard work laying and incubating up to 15 eggs over a few months with little return so far! Closer to home at **The Cape**, a pair have successfully started their first attempt with a two egg nest in the sand dune blowout on 2nd Surf Beach. From observations by volunteer monitors, it is anticipated there may be hatchlings late next week if the nest does not fail for some reason beforehand. The pair (RY and partner) have been coming and going for some time in this area which is roped off and signed. It is a very busy part of the surf beach, so they continue to face many challenges. Please do not enter or get too close to the enclosure for a sticky beak and stay at the waters edge if walking along the beach, preferably not at high tide. Dogs are not supposed to be on this beach from 0900-1800 daily until April, and when allowed should be on a leash.



Above: 'RY' (left orange) is one of the pair nesting in the blowout. This photo was taken on 2 Oct 2021 along 2nd Surf when 'RY' was with a flock of six other Hoodies leading into the nesting season.

Above: 'RY' pictured back in Nov 2019 at F Break near Wilson's Rd at the western end of 2nd Surf Beach.

the
Cape

THE HOODED PLOVER





The Cape Paterson area and the beach adjoining The Cape is home to a small, threatened shorebird, the Hooded Plover. It is estimated that only 600 birds remain in Victoria. You will normally see these birds feeding and resting along the beach and on the rocks. They can be observed between Second Surf and Wilsons Road near The Cape. They are listed as a vulnerable species and their breeding is enormously impacted by human behaviour. Unleashed dogs are one of the major threats to their survival.

Their nesting/breeding period is from mid spring to early autumn which coincides with the busiest holiday and recreation period along our coast. They nest on the upper beach just above the high tide mark and in the dunes. It is normally a simple depression in the sand. If disturbed,

the likelihood of successful hatchlings is extremely low - adult birds will abandon the nest, exposing eggs and young birds to predators and the elements.

Some easy tips to help the Hooded Plovers survive and breed successfully:

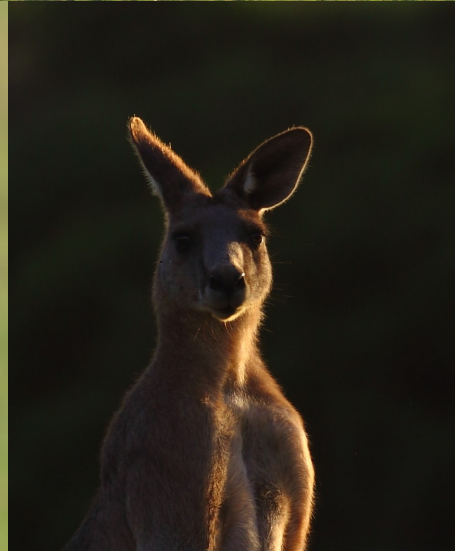
- Observe all wildlife from a safe distance and take notice of advisory signage.
- Observe signage at beach access points which are placed there during the crucial breeding period - these beaches are patrolled
- Observe roped off areas and signage where nests are likely - do not disturb the nest or the birds - **disturbed nests lead to no chicks**
- Access the beach via defined paths
- Stay out of the dunes and walk along the water's edge
- Please note that dogs are **NOT** allowed on the beach at certain periods
- During the times when dogs are allowed, keep them on a leash
- Do not leave dogs unattended while you swim or surf
- If you see the birds on the beach, walk past them about 100m before settling on the sand

For more information go to capechatter.com




More kangaroo action on the oval ...

The oval mob last evening comprised a nice mix of males, females and joeys. All looked in pretty good health and were reasonably relaxed with the human family groups walking past and taking in the scene. There was plenty of feeding, lounging and pre-mating behaviours on display.



Clockwise from top: Part of the mob of 40 or so kangaroos; a male side-lit against the fading dusk light; pre-mating behaviour (the female appeared disinterested); a male directing traffic on the oval; and a cute female keeping an eye on me!

The oval is a great place to observe various kangaroo behaviours including the odd 'biffo' session. The mob are quite happy to let you watch if you stay well away and do not approach them. Please let them go about their natural business and we should be able to enjoy their company for many years to come!

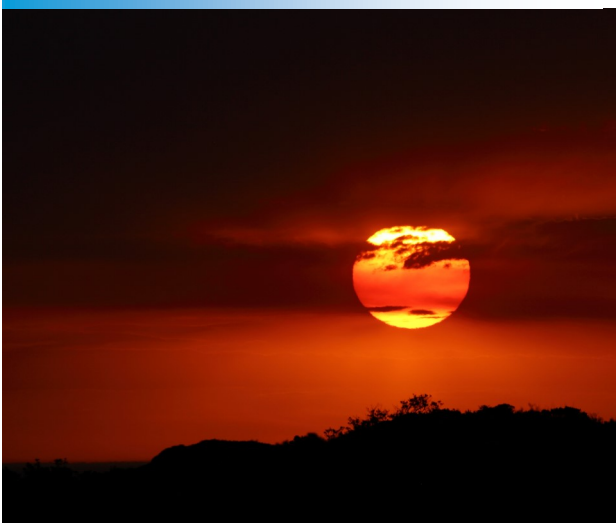
Other bird news ... *Latham's Snipe* are about

Some nice raptor activity with a pair of *Wedge-tailed Eagles* flying near the north west of **The Cape** yesterday and a young *Black-shouldered Kite* checking out the creek line and wetlands. A walk down the creek line a couple of days ago flushed out two vulnerable *Latham's Snipe* mid way down the creek and each of them flew into the "Snipe Bog" near the central wetland. Keep your eyes out for these amazing migratory birds, summer visitors all the way from northern Japan! Our final *Latham's Snipe* Survey for the season for the Australian Waders Group will be conducted this Saturday morning by several volunteer residents—hopefully it will be a good count. Further down the creek, there wasn't too much activity other than a preening *Pacific Black Duck* (Mallard hybrid), a lone *White-faced Heron* and an *Australasian Swampphen*. Returning home, I managed a nice photo of a thoughtful, juvenile *Magpie* nearby, one of Darcy's offspring from this season, who is slowly growing up!



Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020. The latest comprehensive assessment of how our Australian birds are faring has been released—there is some good news and not so good news! One in six Australian birds are now under threat and 14.4% of birds are threatened. While 23 bird species had their status down listed, 99 birds were up listed in their vulnerability. Three birds we are privileged to observe in our area currently are faring worse since the last report—the *Shy Albatross* (near threatened), the *Latham's Snipe* (vulnerable) and *Red-necked Stint* (near threatened). **Source:** *Australian Birdlife Magazine December 2021*. **The Cape**, in particular, can contribute to the future of *Latham's Snipe* through our citizen science surveys, careful habitat planning and restoration work along with responsible resident and visitor behaviour by keeping dogs on leash and behaving thoughtfully around designated habitat areas.

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**.

Email: dwhartney@bigpond.com

capechatter.com
