



Inside this issue:

*And yet another surprise garden visitor ...*

*Echidna—some interesting facts* 2

*Invertebrates with the macro lens* 3

*An important part of the* 4

*GST plus 10%* 5

*The growing Magpie family* 6

*Learning about our local beach nesting birds* 7

Well, well ... hello there! I know I keep banging on about how important our home gardens are as wildlife habitats, but I must admit I was very surprised when fellow residents and horticulturalists/artists Fran and Paul K sent me a message saying “*there is a funny looking ducky/raily thing in our front garden!*” Low and behold, a *Buff-banded Rail* had settled into their thickly vegetated and layered native garden of 4-5 years and was making daily appearances around late afternoon and early morning ... occasionally wandering past their lounge room before darting back into thick cover. It remained a garden resident for about a week and Fran managed a few quick pictures taken through the lounge room window (see below).

*Rails* are small wetland birds but do venture into other habitats. They are secretive, elusive, cryptic birds, often heard but not seen. My references tell me though, that the *Buff-banded Rail* may become habituated and quite tame at ornamental lakes and is the more frequently encountered rail in SE Australia, although it is an uncommon species. I shot an enquiry off to a very good birding mate of mine (thanks Geoff) who was not surprised, unlike me, that it was seen in a home garden ... maybe there are more around than we know.



**Above:** Fran’s pictures of the *Buff-banded Rail* wandering past the lounge room window.

This is the second *Rail* recorded at **The Cape**, the other being the *Levin’s Rail*, a more secretive bird than the *Buff-banded* and which is listed as a species **vulnerable** to extinction. We are yet to see the *Levin’s* but we have recorded evidence of their distinctive calls in the south east of **The Cape** and in the small wetland near the well-fenced off-lead dog park. The *Levin’s* is a slightly smaller bird and does not have the ginger breastband markings or the white markings above and below the eye.

What a wonderful sighting and many thanks to Fran & Paul for the observation. More reason to keep dogs on lead, report cat and fox sightings, and drive slowly around the estate, especially from dusk to dawn.



## *The Short-beaked (Common) Echidna ... interesting facts*

We are fortunate to have a number of *Short-beaked Echidna* wandering around **The Cape** and the wider area. It is not uncommon to see them in our home gardens and around the various habitats probing for food with their long beak. In *Cape Chatter* 67, I wrote about the connection our local *echidna* has with their ancestors from 130 million years ago. Yesterday, *Chatter's* research unit (Jeannie H!) participated in a half day workshop through *Wildlife Victoria* on rescuing these amazing animals and came away with some interesting facts worth sharing.



- *Echidna's* have acute smell and hearing, and their feet have special senses to detect vibrations.
- Their beak is made of bone, is connected to the skull and is used like a crow bar to probe for food. The mouth is only as wide as the tongue which can move in and out 100 times per minute!
- Although common around Australia, their numbers are dwindling and they are becoming a vulnerable species.
- Threats include loss of habitat for young, lack of shelter from heat, vehicle casualties and the usual predators like fox, dogs, and cats.

**Source:** Dr. Peggy Rismiller. Biologist, wildlife researcher and *echidna* expert

- The echidna is a solitary creature and can live in the wild for up to 50 years.
- It is an egg-laying mammal (monotreme), one of only two in the world, the other being the *platypus*.
- The female reproduces from 5-10 years of age and produces one young (a *puggle*) every 3-5 years.
- After 22 days from being laid, the egg is placed in a pseudo pouch of muscular folds and hatches 10 days later.
- The *puggle* drinks milk from patches (not teats) in the pseudo pouch and remains there for 50 days.
- After 50 days, the young echidna is placed in a nursery burrow and fed every 5 days for about 2 hours.
- After 7 months in the burrow, the young is led out of the burrow, fed for the last time and left to look after itself.
- The young will remain in the 'home range' for a further year and then establish its own territory.



If you see an *echidna*, please do not attempt to pick it up and let it go about its business. They will dig in if you attempt to lift them and their underbelly is soft and vulnerable. If you come across an injured *echidna* or think it is danger, please restrain any pets if nearby, maintain minimal noise and movement, and ring **Wildlife Victoria** on **03 84007300** for assistance and rescue - *echidna* rescue is tricky and complex and should be done by a trained rescuer.



## *Invertebrate action with the macro lens ...*

After some stunning autumn weather, a very cold air mass has just hit here at **The Cape**—the familiar cold winds from the depths of the Southern Ocean are back and we finally have some welcome rain. I am guessing invertebrate numbers will dwindle now, so in anticipation, I had the macro out again looking for some of our very small creatures in the garden. Here is a sample.

**Right:** This little fella has the unfortunate name of the *Hairy Maggot Fly*! What a terrible name for such beauty. Metallic colours and stunning eyes with iridescent wings—just check before you bring out the fly swat! It has many economic, medical and forensic benefits.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrysomya\\_rufifacies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrysomya_rufifacies)



**Left:** The *Lesser Meadow Katydid* is a type of bush cricket that blends perfectly into its preferred habitat of reeds and grasses such as *Lomandra* and *Dianella*—there is plenty of that around **The Cape**—from which it feeds on flowers and seeds. This specimen was resting on a section of shade cloth allowing a good look at its features—a green body with black-brown stripe down its body, bulging pale brown eyes and long brown antennae.



**Above:** This is a *Heliotrope Moth* resting on a *Borage* flower and on the stem of a corn plant. I am pretty sure the caterpillar is the same species as the moth. *Heliotrope's* look white in flight, but when they land to rest, their beautifully patterned red, orange and black spots appear. There has been quite a few of these in our garden recently.



## *Invertebrates ... a very important part of the food chain*

There are many thousands of invertebrate species in the animal kingdom and identifying them is quite a challenge. Some of the ones I have photographed at **The Cape** I have been unable to identify yet. But ... many are beautiful tiny creatures and they are such an important component of our natural world, acting as decomposers, pollinators and food for bigger critters higher up the food chain.





## *The GST +10 percent ... tucker time up the food chain!*

Unfortunately, but necessarily, many of these invertebrates end up as food for birds, small mammals and reptiles. Last *Cape Chatter*, I reported on another surprise sighting in the home garden of a *Grey Shrike-thrush (GST)*. Well it appears this particular bird has been doing the rounds of the estate with more sightings from residents Joe S, Alison McA and Robyn S. Joe sent me a couple of photos and it does appear to be the same bird.

Not to be undone, this young GST went above and beyond the last encounter (plus 10%) and has re-appeared several times in our home garden allowing me to get more pictures including some with tasty morsels picked up while foraging around the understory and gleaning in the shrubs. They eat a range of arthropods and small vertebrates and at times, sadly, may take nestling birds! I just love the way they cock their head to side as they process what is about to catch.

These birds can be very confiding as you can see in some of the photos and will come quite close to you if you remain still while observing them as they listen for, and focus on their prey.

This fella has not made many calls in our garden, but when the GST sings ... it comprises "*repeated series of loud, mellow whistles of great purity*".



The classic cocking of the head (centre) as it seeks out some tucker. This green invertebrate in the bill above left is possibly the *Lesser Meadow Katydid* but looks more likely to be the *Common Garden Katydid* featured in the previous page. Below left, GST has caught a hairy caterpillar from our native creeper *Dusky Coral Pea (Kennedia rubicunda)*. It looks very similar to the caterpillar on P.3, which I believe is the *Painted Apple Moth*. 'Such is life' in the natural world!



## *Mr & Mrs Darcy and the growing magpie family*

Local *Magpies*, Mr & Mrs Darcy, are looking very fit and healthy going into the coming breeding season ... and last season's new duo are developing nicely as well. I took these pictures of the adult birds this morning on the back fence and they looked primed for nesting season. I will keep an eye out for any nesting activity! The family spends a lot of time around our area and it is a treat to watch them work together as a group. The remaining immature bird from season 2020, 'Son of Darcy' (SOD), is noticeably spending more time away and alone from the group after spending a good deal of time helping in the duo's raising.



**Above:** Mr and Mrs Darcy—the female is on the left and Darcy is on the right. Alert and keeping a close eye on the young duo which were not far away. I do not normally see this pair this close together.

**Above:** Mr Darcy eyes me off after the missus flies off. Breeding season starts from June so beware of swooping magpies!



The 2021 offspring (pictured above) are also looking in tip-top shape. I just love their silvery-black plumage. Note these younger birds have not developed the red-brown eye of the adults and the bill is black compared to the whitish black-tipped bill of their parents. They spend a lot of time together. They may leave this territory if the parents are successful in this coming breeding season.



## Learning more about our beach nesting birds ...

The *Cape Chatter* 'team' are off to learn a bit more about our local beach nesting birds at a Birdlife Australia conference, but *Chatter* will be back soon after. Our local beach nesting birds include the *Hooded Plover*, *Sooty Oystercatcher* and *Red-capped Plover* (pictured below). We are keen to understand how these vulnerable birds can be helped as they are all struggling to successfully nest and breed due to the impact of various environmental and human threats. Hopefully, as part of the Bass Coast Friends of the Hooded Plover team and local Birdlife Australia volunteers, we can leverage off some success stories at the conference and improve the rate of breeding along the Cape Paterson coast in the upcoming summer breeding season.



### *The Cape Bird List*

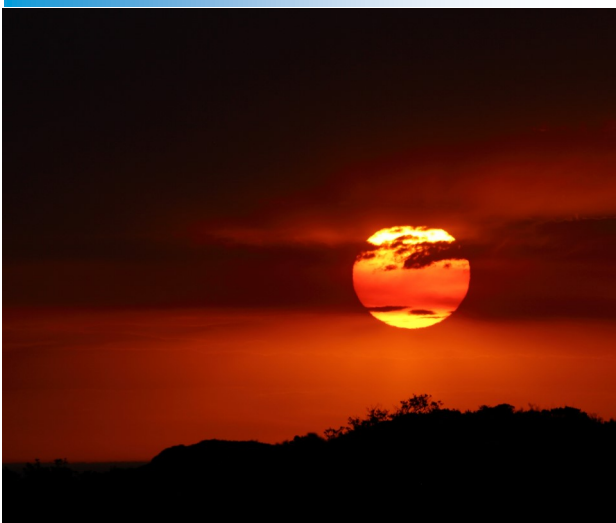
With Fran & Paul's wonderful sighting of the *Buff-banded Rail*, the bird list count at **The Cape** is now **119** species since it was started in August 2019. As the habitat's develop we can expect to see some new bird species.

You can download the PDF list from the *Cape Chatter* website at:

<https://capechatter.com/the-cape-birds/>



### 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](mailto:dwhartney@bigpond.com)

---

**capechatter.com**

---