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Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 72

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Cape Chatter

The great northern migration ...

Chatter is back after a short northern migration to the Queensland border during June. It happened to coincide with *Humpback Whales* also migrating north from Antarctica to the warm tropical waters of northern Queensland. Great spots to see them were off Jarvis Bay in southern NSW and at Ballina in northern NSW, near where they “turn the corner” at Australia’s most easterly point, Cape Byron. There have been a lot of sightings off our local Bunurong Coast and they are still coming through. This is a great time to watch out for and marvel at these magnificent creatures, because on their southern return in October to the icy waters of Antarctica, they tend to veer off at Wilson’s Prom and head south in the Australian Eastern Current, so there is less opportunity to spot them.



Chatter has been fortunate enough to observe *Humpback's* at close quarters on both the Australian western and eastern coast migrations and in Antarctica. They are life-long memories. The three photos above were taken off Wilson’s Prom and the one right from the Antarctic, where the amazing journey begins.

For those interested, there is a great story on the ABC about whale migrations and what you can do as a citizen scientist in reporting whale sightings to help better understand and protect these wonderful creatures.

Go to—<https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2022-06-20/winter-whale-watching-citizen-science-australia/101128580>



Up close and personal with a local “cult” figure ...

This beautiful bird is a *Grey Shrike-Thrush* and it is becoming quite a cult figure around **The Cape**. Since reporting its goings-on in recent *Chatter's*, it—I cannot determine its sex yet from the plumage—has really made itself at home by visiting many of the resident's gardens and enjoying a range of tasty morsels. The bird seems to have developed quite a regular feeding pattern and is a daily visitor to our garden. *Grey Shrike-Thrush* can be quite confiding. This morning, while sitting down having a quiet coffee in the front garden, I had a most remarkable experience—the bird actually flew onto my foot and then up onto my knee before returning to the garden to resume the hunt for invertebrates. It was a lovely and unexpected moment.



Mammal meanderings ...

A quiet walk in the remnant coastal bush within **The Cape** last week to retrieve a sensor camera revealed a *Bare-nosed (Common) Wombat* and *Short-beaked Echidna* going about their business. Both are unique, iconic Australian mammals and I feel really privileged seeing them in their natural environment.



This *Common Wombat* has been christened "Dave". Sadly, "Dave" has mange, which is caused by an infestation of a parasitic mite. If not treated, "Dave" will die from a slow and agonizing death. You can see the effects in his eyes and pinkish skin on the inside of his front legs. His side is also scarred from mange and it was itching its body regularly. It is not known exactly where mange comes from. It may have been introduced by early settlers as scabies or during settlement with the introduction of foxes and domestic dogs. What we do know is, it has spread throughout our wombat population, and is quite prevalent within the area of **The Cape**. Seeing wombats feeding in daylight during winter is not uncommon, but it is more likely the wombat has mange. If you happen to see a wombat out in the open during the day, see if you can spot any bare skin patches. If so, please report it to the volunteer organisation *Mange Management*. There are local volunteers who can start a treatment program if it is possible and hopefully the wombat will survive. "Dave's" plight was reported to *Mange Management* but a treatment has yet to be applied despite continued visits to the area to find him. It is a tricky job finding them and their burrows in the thick, coastal bush.

Mange Management

Phone: 0431600125

Website:

<https://mangemanagement.org.au/>

The local “mob” ...

The remnant coastal bush within **The Cape** and the adjoining Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park provide an extremely important safe haven and daytime resting retreat for all of our native mammals, especially the *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* mob. The mob are slowly habituating to the development and the people, and these areas are vital as their grazing territory shrinks. They still emerge into the estate of an evening to graze, and return to the bush during the day. They can also be seen regularly in another safe haven “Green Beach”, the open area behind the main central wetland complex. A mob of about 60 was seen yesterday morning around the wetland complex, and when disturbed, they retreated to their bush safe haven along established “kangaroo pathways”.



Grassy areas adjacent to the coastal bush are important lay-up areas where the mob can rest and not be disturbed. They also use the area behind the creek line and central wetland complex as safe havens and you can get some good observations from the walking track and viewing points.

A number of interpretive signs on how to behave with the mob are placed around **The Cape**, so take a moment to read them so we can co-exist. If you see a mob ahead of you on your walk or ride, please make an effort to go around them to prevent them scattering and running into barriers, where they will get injured.

Please also respect the “*Native Habitat Restoration*” signage where displayed and refrain from entering these areas as they are also important safe spots for our native animals.



Faces of the mob ...

While they may all look the same from a distance, each *Kangaroo* has a distinct feature and personality, and I love getting close-up photographs of these wonderful animals. Please note—I use a long tele-photo lens to get these shots. I am very cautious not to get too close as these animals can be dangerous. Respect them and let them go about their business undisturbed—and you will be rewarded with some wonderful experiences.



Behind the scenes ...

Thanks to Parks Victoria, we still have remote sensor cameras capturing wildlife images in the remnant coastal bush of **The Cape** and the latest months worth of images (around 5000 photos) were downloaded and processed last week. Still no sign of native rodents/small marsupials.

It was lovely to see some good activity from a number of *Swamp Wallaby*. These animals are not commonly seen around **The Cape** during the day, but they are certainly active at night so a real treat when adults, juveniles and a joey were spotted by the cameras.



Above: This young *Wallaby* was quite taken by the camera and triggered about 400 photos of itself!

Top Right: Adult with joey.

Right: An adult male by the looks of the upper body/shoulder size.

The cameras continue to capture significant *Red Fox* activity and in the last month we have proof of *Feline* activity both at night and day. We also have an example of a cat with captured prey (bottom right). These feral animals are causing untold damage on our native wildlife across Australia. Great to see our local council move to ban cats from being uncontained at any time from next year.

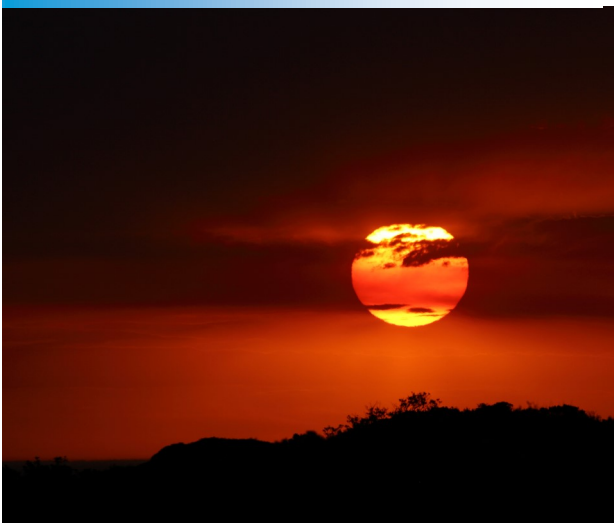


Bird activity ... a little quiet

Bird activity is subdued at the moment as you would expect for this time of year. The *Wattlebirds* (*Red and Little*) are really busy and noisy. Other recent notables were a rare sighting of an immature *White-bellied Sea Eagle* flying in a westerly direction over the Coastal Park; an observation of what was believed to be a secretive *Levin's Rail* in the remnant south east bush (their calls have been recorded but we still have no photographic proof); *Crescent Honeyeater*, *Eastern Spinebill* (around the dog park), *Eastern Rosella* checking out the nesting boxes in the creek line stags; *Red-browed Finch* and *White-browed Scrubwren*. The wetlands are quiet, but *Dusky Moorhen*, *Australasian Swamphen*, *Grey Teal* and *Pacific Black Duck* are about in small numbers. Oh ... and I had a *Magpie* (Darcy) swoop me for the first time this season—my time is going to be hell for a few months! Here is a snippet of the action!



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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