

3rd August 2022

## Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 74

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## Cape Chatter

### *Wandering Wombats ...*

On sunny, winter days, it is not uncommon for the *Common (aka Bare-nosed) Wombat* to get out and have a feed and catch some rays during daylight hours. But more often than not, *Wombats* out and about in daylight are unwell and may have a condition called mange. Being predominantly nocturnal, it is not easy to get good photographs of these iconic Australian creatures, but when unwell and sluggish, it allows us to get closer and photo-document the extent of the disease to assess treatment options. The photos also highlight the variation in facial features and fur colouring. We all probably think that *Wombats* have dark fur, but as you can see in these photos, the fur colouring can vary quite a bit.



**Clockwise from above left:** The more usual dark coloured fur of the *Common Wombat*, dubbed 'Dave'; the unusual pale brown fur of 'Blondie'; and the lovely silvery tones of 'MAG'. All these *wombats* reside in the vicinity of **The Cape** and sadly all have mange. Fortunately, they have all been treated under the auspices of volunteer organisation *Mange Management* and hopefully will recover. Over the past 12 months, 8 *wombats* within **The Cape** have been treated for mange.

**Did You Know?** *Wombats* deposit their scats (poo) on top of prominent objects like rocks or sticks as territorial markers. The scats are cube shaped, usually in groups of 4-8 and are shaped so they do not roll off the object (allegedly)!! The scats are also accompanied by some 'V' shapes scrapings from the hind feet of the wombat.



## *It's raining Red-browed Finch ...*

Quite prominent recently have been flocks of tiny *Red-browed Finch*, especially along the south east walking track toward 2nd Surf. There have been reports of flocks of 20-50 finch. Keep an eye out for them alternating between the ground feeding and retreating to cover in nearby scrub when disturbed. It is like a 'flying carpet' of red and olive!

There are some 20 native finch species in Australia and most reside in the northern parts of the continent. The *Red-browed* is the most common in the south east part of Australia along with the less common *Diamond* and *Beautiful Firetail*. They weigh in around 10 grams and are about half the size of the very common *House Sparrow*, which sometimes you might mistake them for in when the flock is seen in flight. They are a stunning little bird!



The other finch likely to be seen at **The Cape** during spring and summer is the introduced *European Goldfinch*, a distinctive bird with a black, white and red head. They are especially active in the open grassy spaces when the *capeweed* is in flower and in the central creek.



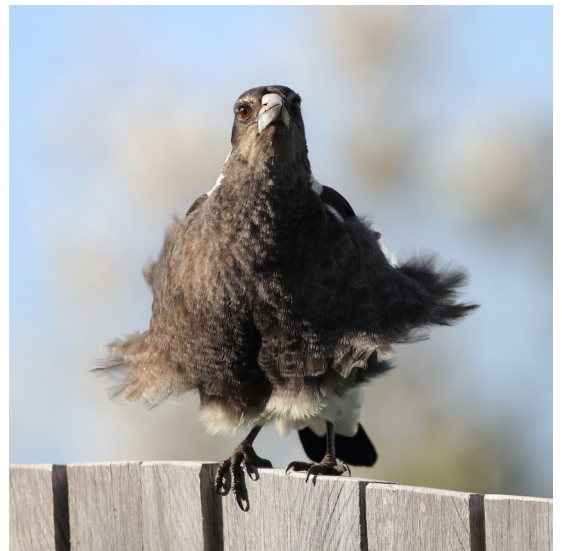


## *I just love the Magpie(s) ...*

It has been a great season for our local *Australia Magpie*. I have enjoyed watching the local family evolve into a cohesive, social unit. I sense some territorial protective behaviour is occurring at the moment as there are numerous scuffles among the various *Magpie* groups around **The Cape**. Our nearby adult pair, Mr & Mrs Darcy, have two generations from the 2020 and 2021 breeding seasons still around and I have seen Mrs Darcy starting to build a nest in a *Swamp Melaleuca* just in front of the 'Lone Pine' behind the large central wetland. Mrs Darcy will do all the nest building and then attract Mr Darcy to do the deed, at which point he becomes very territorial and protective of the nest and assists in raising any hatchlings. That's when life can become difficult for any intruders into the territory! The family are frequent visitors to our home garden, especially the young, and while still very tentative to my presence, they can be often heard singing and warbling, and seen preening themselves on the garden fence. Over the last couple of weeks, I have managed to get a few nice shots of the 2020 and 2021 offspring at close quarters, capturing their beautiful silvery plumage as they go about their daily business and develop into beautiful adult birds.



This is the 2020 immature bird, named Son of Darcy (SOD) enjoying the wind and sun on the back fence. At nearly two years of age, the bird retains some of the silvery plumage which suggests to me that it is in fact a female as a male should have had a dark black chest and belly by now. SOD also has a 'grey tinge' on the hind neck which is a distinguishing feature of females. So I had better rename this bird DOD! Also notice the greyish coloured beak which distinguishes its maturity compared to the younger bird below.



The *Magpie* pictured above is one of a pair from the Darcy's in the 2021 season. Feeding, preening, socialising, playing and helping support the family territory is all in a day's work for this young bird. Note the difference in beak colouring—quite darker compared to the adults. Magpie beaks are sturdy and designed for foraging, fighting, breaking open hard soil and objects. Nestling beaks are soft, so that is why the young birds are fed to the throat by their parents until the beak hardens and it can forage for itself. Also, pictured on the left, is an unusual sight not normally seen by the human eye. It is the translucent third eyelid, called the nictitating membrane, which keeps the surface of the eye clean and moist by 'blinking' many times per minute.



## *A hint of change is in the air ...*

There is a hint of seasonal change in the air despite the cold blustery conditions. The *Coastal Wattle* and native *Clematis* are beginning to flower in the remnant coastal bush. There is plenty of evidence of nest building and breeding activities among the birds with increased activity among the *Wattlebirds*, *Little Ravens*, *Masked Lapwing* and *Australian Magpie*—all tussling for territorial dominance—and there are numerous ‘ducks chasing ducks’ in flight around the estate, particularly among the *Pacific Black Ducks*! A few *Galah* have returned along with the occasional *European Skylark* doing its fascinating ‘in flight’ song! The recently reported beautiful *Buff-banded Rail* in Seaberry Crt has been seen in the nearby walking track between Seaberry and Periwinkle Crt—so keep an eye out for this secretive bird in that area.





## Kangaroo 'kapers' ...

Nice to see a large mob of around 40 *Eastern Grey Kangaroos* feeding on the luscious green grass of the mini oval yesterday morning before the blustery winds from the north west arrived at **The Cape**. These animals are pretty smart—this morning they were well and truly settled out of the wind, tucked up against the thick coastal bush on what I call '*Green Beach*' on the south western side of the central wetland. This is a favourite laying-up area for the mob where they can safely get out of the prevailing winds, catch some sun and recharge their batteries for the coming evenings activities around the estate. The eastern side of the central wetlands is a great place to observe them in this area without too much disturbance by us humans.



You would not want to mess with this big male *Kangaroo*, seen here on the right standing up on his tail. Just look at those claws, let alone the sharp ones on his feet which are used in fighting duals by kicking out against the opponent. If you are walking or cycling around the estate and see a mob casually feeding or hanging about in front of you, please go around and do not disturb them, as they will scatter and this is when we end up with injured or dead animals ... and they will attack as well if provoked!





## *The 'state of the environment' ...a disturbing read!*

A pretty dire report card recently released by the new Australian Federal Government was very sobering news on the state of Australia's natural environment. There was an excellent piece in today's Age newspaper by noted Economic Editor, Ross Gittins, which encapsulates the feelings of many that we are in a precarious time where the future of the world is at stake. Something has to change. Our economy, the way we live and consume, our reliance on unsustainable energy resources—are just some of the things having a detrimental impact on the natural environment ... and nature is hitting back at us with a fundamental shift from climate change.

*"... what applies inside the economy applies equally outside it. Everything inside what we call the economy is connected to everything outside it. What is outside it? The rest of the world – the natural world. The 'economy' sits inside what we call 'the environment'. Without the environment, there wouldn't be an economy. Humans wouldn't be here, and we wouldn't need one." (Gittins)*

*"... the report reminds us that contact with (healthy) nature is associated with mental health benefits, promotes physical activity and contributes to overall wellbeing. Biodiversity and green and blue spaces in cities are linked to stress reduction and mood improvement, increased respiratory health, and lower rates of depression and blood pressure. Enjoy 'em while they last." (Gittins)*

### *What's happening at The Cape?*

In addition to developing a sustainable housing, food producing community on previously degraded pasture land, **The Cape** is placing a huge emphasis on conservation and habitat biodiversity. It has retained important remnant coastal habitat for endangered species and is building new indigenous habitat and wetlands to provide safe havens for birds and other animals... hopefully that will live in harmony with a community aware of what is around in the environment and being better connected to nature.



Every one can do something about this at the grass roots—not just relying on government actions. I believe we have a moral obligation as individuals to act ... and there are benefits to doing so by better understanding and connecting with nature.

You can read Ross Gittins article here:

<https://www.theage.com.au/business/the-economy/a-wounded-environment-leads-to-an-unlivable-economy-20220802-p5b6jn.html?btis>



### *The Cape's report card ...*

We now have three years worth of native bird observations since they were started in August 2019. Here is a summary as of 1 August 2022:

Total bird species: 119 (14% are under threat of extinction)

Freshwater birds: 22 species (23% under threat)

Coastal & Marine: 23 species (30% under threat)

Land: 66 species (3% under threat)

Introduced: 8 species

We are also maintaining a list of land and sea mammals, reptiles, amphibians and feral animals observations.

Species details can be found at <https://capechatter.com/>

Numerous development led and community led citizen science projects have been undertaken such as the Koala Project, community planting days, Hooded Plover monitoring, Latham's Snipe surveys, Blue-winged Parrot surveys, systems and trained volunteers in place to manage injured animals and mange in wombats, and the monitoring and reporting of feral animal sightings so eradication programs can be put in place.

## *Some thanks from Cape Chatter followers!*

*Cape Chatter* aims to connect residents, visitors and interested individuals to the natural world of **The Cape** and its immediate surrounds through observations and photographs—hopefully making people more aware of the conservation efforts by the community to make this special place a better one for all. The blog is not only for residents of **The Cape**—it is freely available to anyone, so feel free to share this resource by getting your families and friends to subscribe to the newsletter through the website. See the details below. Subscribers come from all over the place including the surrounding Cape Paterson & Bunurong Coast region, all over Australia and many people from overseas.

The website is also packed with all sorts of background and useful information and a lot of this is based on nature observations by residents from their home garden habitats and as they wander around the various habitats on the walking/cycling paths and along the stunning Bunurong Coast nearby. You can contact me through the details below with observations.

I really appreciate observations and feedback ... so keep them coming!

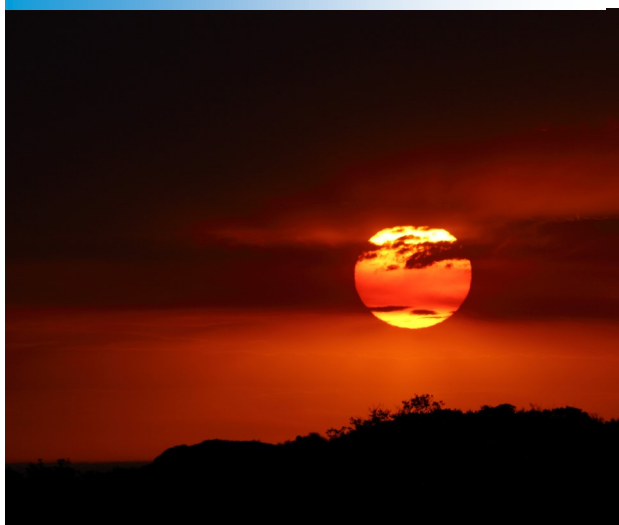
A big thanks to the recent support from followers Rod and Rebecca!

*“Hi Dave. As with Rebecca, I love your newsletters too; and as you know I live 2000km away! I too feel a connection to the Cape and I haven’t set foot there for decades. Great contribution to your community and also to preservation of landscape and species. We need so much more of this in Oz. Well done, as usual!” Rod*

*“Thank you David! I read every one of these newsletters and love being connected to what is happening at the Cape. Very exciting news about the whales, the koalas, the parrots and the new ponds!” Rebecca*



### 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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