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## Nature Observations around The Cape



# Cape Chatter

## *Just like clockwork??*

I now have three year's worth of detailed observations and supporting photographs recorded of **The Cape's** wildlife and natural world along with an ever increasing library of issues of the *Cape Chatter* newsletter. Each time I sit down to prepare a new newsletter, I am now able to compare what is happening around the same time of each year. Hopefully we will be able to see some trends around the impact the development is having on the natural world as more homes are built along with greater human activity in addition to climate change. But I am also keen to record the impact the significant investment in ecological restoration, habitat retention, wildlife protection measures, and commitment to citizen science projects will have moving forward. Let's hope it is all positive!

## *'Tuning-in' to observations*

Speaking of clockwork! One of Australia's most iconic birds, the *Laughing Kookaburra*, is an uncommon sight at **The Cape**. This is probably due to unfavourable habitat, particularly the lack of mature tree hollows for nesting and their preference for open forest/woodlands. So I am puzzled why we have now had three observations in three years in mid-August of this bird when we rarely see it at other times of the year. The latest observation involved a territorial dispute with a *Magpie Lark* on a TV antenna in Sunlight Blvd. I wonder if it is transiting to the coastal bush in search of a rare nesting hollow or whether it is on the hunt for bird nestling prey early in the bird breeding season?





## Cockatoo changes ...

One thing I have noticed this season is the change in cockatoo activity. Normally, we have had really good numbers of *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo* and *Galah* feeding around **The Cape**. Our other prominent species, the *Little Corella*, will hopefully arrive soon to feed on lush grasses and weeds. In fact, I finally saw and heard a small flock of *Little Corella* flyover yesterday so hopefully they will occupy the open spaces of **The Cape** soon. As for the *Yellow-tailed* and small *Galah* numbers, I am unsure what is happening!



**Above and Below:** I am looking forward to good numbers of *Little Corella* returning soon as the grasses and weeds grow in the open spaces. They are particularly fun to watch as they get up to their antics—playing, feeding, preening and just having fun messing about!



**Above:** This stunning female *Galah* (note the pinkish-red iris—the male has a dark brown iris) is one of just four birds in a small group around at the moment, when normally there are many more birds present. Maybe they are the vanguard? This fella was helping prune my *boobialla* shrub when I caught it out!!

**Below:** In 2019-2021 we had really good numbers of the beautiful *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo* within the estate, with a particular interest in the seed of *Coastal Banksia* in the streetscapes, and an attraction to pine cone in the remnant bush. Let's hope we get to see some of them return in the back-end of winter and during the coming spring, as they have been conspicuous by their absence.





## Love is in the air ...

Spring time is peak bird breeding time and the action of partnering, nest building and egg laying has begun. The most notable entry into the breeding stakes at this stage is my local *Australian Magpie*, the much written about 'Mr Darcy'. This is the third year in a row that *Darcy* has displayed territorial protection rights and as I forewarned a couple of *Chatter*'s back, *Darcy* is at it again—and has begun swooping me! I was a bit bemused by a recent social media post from *Birdlife Australia* advising people the swooping season has begun.



**Above:** The beautiful and intelligent *Darcy* in more peaceful times of the non-breeding season. *Darcy* has never actually struck or made contact with me yet, but I do suffer from “swoop shock”!

- “*Magpies swoop to protect their family, especially the chicks, from perceived nearby threats*”. It is not only humans, I observe *Darcy* chasing away many other bird threats!
- “*Less than 10% of male magpies swoop people*”. Given only one in four magpies actually breed, and one in ten males swoop—we have one very rare and hyped-up bird here!
- “*They are intelligent and can recognise faces*”. I have tried all sorts of hats and clothing changes, tried cycling as well—none of it has worked for me yet!!
- “*Magpies swoop at targets within 50-100m of the nest*”. *Darcy* has swooped me from well over 350m flying low to the ground like a guided missile!

Go figure!!

## ‘Canoodling’ fairy-wrens ...

Not sure what is happening here, but I managed to witness a lovely sight of two *Superb Fairy-wrens* (male right and female left) huddled up together in a small eucalypt in the off-leash dog park garden (by the way—a nice spot to observe some of our lovely smaller birds!). It was cold and wet, so maybe they were offering each other some warmth and comfort! There are a few brighter breeding males about at the moment in their striking blue and black livery!





## *A snippet of other bird action ...*



After the *Little* and *Red Wattle-birds*, the *New Holland Honeyeater* is our most common honeyeater around **The Cape**. Their numbers are starting to increase with spring on the doorstep and will peak in October when the melaleuca flowers. This little bird was in the remnant bush preening when I managed these couple of shots—I love the photo on the right as the bird has a “matador” look about it with its distinctive white eyes peering over its ruffled back. A few *Yellow-faced Honeyeater* are about as well.

The *Australasian Swampphen* (aka *Purple Swampphen*) are venturing further afield. This pair were photographed in the little south east wetland last week near the dog park away from their usual haunt in the larger central wetland and creek line. They were having a great time chewing on the rushes and sedges on the edge of the water and you can see the debris under neath them. They sever the plant stem with their huge bill and grasp it in their feet to chew. Interestingly, they were also preening each other, something I have not seen before and a behaviour more often seen in cockatoos and parrots. I will keep an eye out to see whether there is any nesting activity associated with this pair ... and that will keep me away from Darcy's territory!!



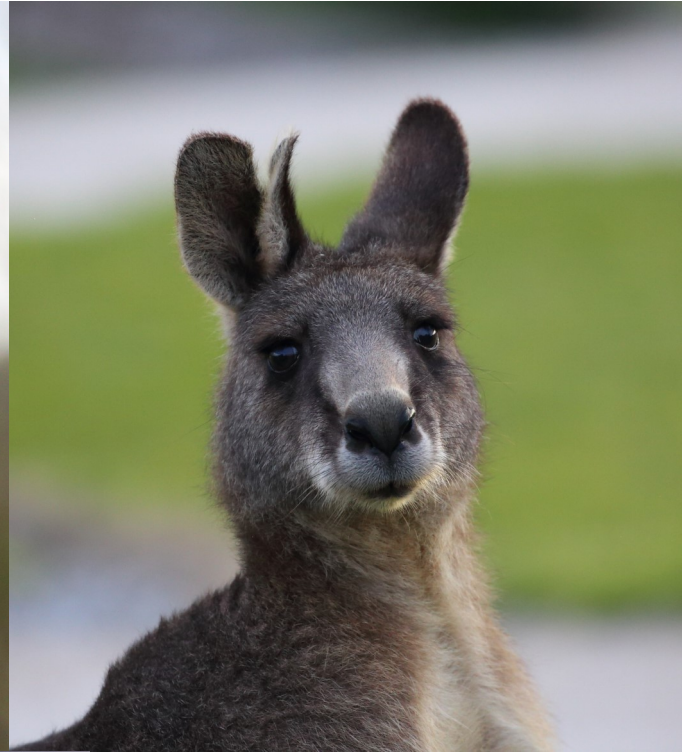
*Australasian Swampphen* breed from July to December and lay 3-5 eggs in a bowl shaped nest built on a shallow platform of reeds and sedges which have been trampled down just above the water. Possibly what may be occurring here—a nest in the making??

Keep your eyes out if you are walking by the little wetland and pop your head in to the reeds to see if they are about!



## *Faces of the mob ... and even more kangaroo advice!!*

I have managed a few more nice photos of our local mob in the past week, mostly from the safety of my home garden as they venture out in the early evening onto the mini-oval which is lush with grass and food at the moment.



**PLEASE KEEP A REASONABLE DISTANCE FROM THE ROOS AND LET THEM BE IN PEACE!!**

I have the utmost respect for these amazing native animals. I only take photos from an appropriate place and safe distance with a good camera and very long tele-lens. These shots are then 'cropped' to get the close-up intimate detail of the face, especially the eyes—I try and capture the soul of animals in their eyes so people can see their beauty and character.

On a 'local' social media platform recently, someone posted some photos of our local mob taken on some form of camera at a distance that, to me, appeared "unsafe". The resultant photo quality of the shot was probably not worth the effort and could have led to a dangerous situation if the kangaroos became unsettled, aggressive or scattered in fright.

*Kangaroos* are skittish animals and will scatter at speed if disturbed unnecessarily, sometimes hitting obstacles. This morning, a big young, otherwise healthy male had to be euthanised within **The Cape** by Victoria Police. It had a terrible leg injury from an unknown cause.

There is nothing worse than seeing such beautiful creatures suffering unnecessarily, requiring the early termination of their life. So please respect them and let them go about their business. They have been here long, long before we have!!



## *I cannot get enough of this lovely songster ... Grey Shrike-thrush*

The lovely *Grey Shrike-thrush* has really made itself at home in the home gardens around **The Cape**. Many people ask me what is this little bird visiting their gardens so here are a few more photos taken in the home garden in the past few days so you can get to know the little fella a bit better. The bird is developing as an immature but I am leaning toward it being a female at this stage. It will take up to three years for it to develop into adult plumage—it is getting there! And it will have the most gorgeous song you will hear.



### *Lost pigeon???*

Anyone lost a *pigeon*? This *Rock Dove* has been hanging about the last week and it has leg bands so I am guessing it is a racing pigeon that has not found its way home. Otherwise, these birds are a feral species in Australia, and one of eight introduced bird species identified at **The Cape** to date—a number we should aim to keep down.



The *Grey Shrike Thrush* is a very inquisitive and confiding bird and may come quite close to you while you are in the garden.

While it may be tempting to feed birds like the GST and other native animals thinking you are doing a good thing, it is not doing them any favours. They can become dependent on the food, develop aggressive behaviours and unnatural food may attract other introduced species which can impact on our native species.



## *Hooded Plover breeding season starting to ramp up ...*

Over winter, the local *Hooded Plovers* have been moving along the coast to their favourite flocking sites and will often be seen in good sized flock numbers of between several to 14-20 birds. With the approach of spring, it is getting ready for breeding time and some of our local birds will begin pairing up with a partner and establish a presence in their preferred nesting site, of which we have five known sites in the *Chatter/Cape* observation area of 2nd Surf to just west of F Break. We are hoping for a better fledging success rate this year (we can only go up) with a number of local initiatives in the pipeline. More to follow on these!



Thanks to local ParksVic Ranger Matt for these observations along the coast of the Yullock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park last week.

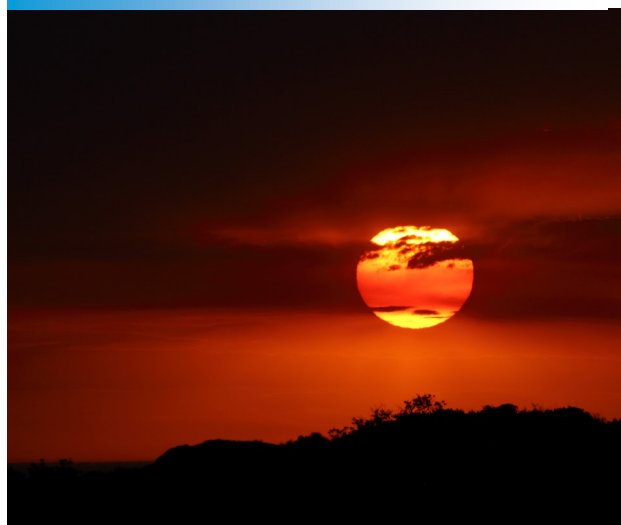
**Top Left:** Matt reported Hoodie 'YW' is back on its stomping ground of the Pea Creek nesting area. Last year, YW and partner had 16 eggs over 6 nesting attempts—none hatched!!

**Bottom Left:** Hoodie Yellow '13' was spotted by Matt at nearby landmark 'Oaks' just east of Pea Creek. This photo of '13' in 2020 was taken some distance away at 2nd Surf west beach highlighting there behaviour to move up and down the coast to preferred flocking and nesting sites.

**Top Right:** This flock of eight Hoodies congregated at 2nd Surf west, another favourite spot, in September last 2021.

*Only 700 Hooded Plovers remain in Victoria and they are listed as **vulnerable** to extinction. The Bunurong Coast is a popular spot for them.*

### 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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