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## Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 77

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## Cape Chatter

### *Spring has sprung ... and nature is unfolding from it's winter slumber*

Nature has flicked the switch and the seasons have changed. We are seeing the natural world come to life from it's sleepy winter period with some punch in the sun, plenty of blossom in the bush, the sounds of singing migratory birds arriving for the warmer months, and the nesting and breeding season of birds in full swing. It is a great time to enjoy nature at it's best. A quick wander through the home garden with the macro lens has revealed some stunning flowers unfolding—they are things of beauty with amazing structure and form, let alone the dazzling colours... and all types of animals are going to enjoy being amongst them. Here are a few examples!





## *A quiet sit and a little stroll ... some lovely small bird action*

I am avoiding the large central wetlands area due to a swooping *Magpie* (see separate article on page 5) so I have been venturing mainly into the south east sector of **The Cape**. The walking track to 2nd Surf exit is a great spot to slowly stroll, stop and sit, and take in the sounds and sights of birds along with a detour around the dog park garden and small wetland nearby. I spent a couple of hours there recently and the bird roll call was great: *Superb Fairy-wren*, *Silvereye*, *Eastern Yellow Robin*, *Eastern Spinebill*, *New Holland Honeyeater*, *Grey Fantail*, *Brown Thornbill*, *White-browed Scrubwren*. In the distance in the remnant bush, the trill call of the *Fan-tailed Cuckoo* could be heard and the stunning song of the *Olive Whistler* (and thanks to resident Joe Spano for his observations as well).



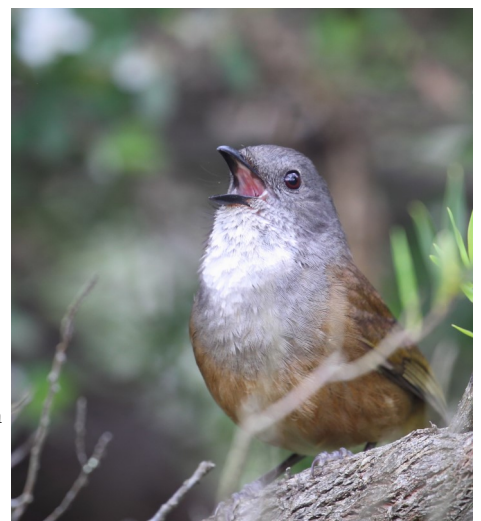
**Clockwise from top left:** *Superb Fairy-wren* (male) in full breeding plumage, *Superb Fairy-wren* (female), *Eastern Yellow Robin*, *Silvereye* (*ssp lateralis*).

The *Silvereye* is a very small and quick bird and is usually seen in active flocks as they work over the foliage for insects. They are very chatty among the flock as they dart amongst the vegetation and were really enjoying the flowering *Coastal Wattle* which is everywhere at the moment.

This particular sub species (*lateralis*) pictured here with the rich brown flanks, is in fact a Tasmanian bird that migrates to mainland Australia up to as far as south east Queensland during the colder winter months. This particular flock I saw are therefore more than likely on their way home across Bass Strait—can you imagine how such a tiny little bird can make such a trip!!



These photos left and right are from my archives here at **The Cape** (2020). Both birds are difficult to see and photograph and their presence is more often noticed by their beautiful calls. They are the sounds of early spring at **The Cape**, as these birds are migrant visitors. On the left is the *Fan-tailed Cuckoo* which has a distinctive loud trill call and on the right, the *Olive Whistler*—it has a repertoire of beautiful songs which are up there with the best of them—an experience shared with fellow resident Joe Spano.





## Bird breeding and nesting activity ...

There is plenty of action about at the moment so here is a snippet of the highlights.



*Grey Shrike Thrush.* The lovely little female GST that has been busy around the local gardens has a beau in tow. We have now had several recent visits by the pair and they have performed what appears to be courting behaviour—both birds singing beautifully with “repeated series of loud, mellow whistles of great purity” - a joy to behold! The song has been accompanied by much chasing activity and various postures such as neck extensions, head dropping, bowing and tail raising.



*Eastern Rosella.* A pair of Eastern Rosella have been preparing one of the nesting boxes in the southern most stag in the central creek line. They have been visiting daily over the past week chasing other small birds away and peeling bark from the stag and placing it in the box. There are other nesting boxes in stags up the creek so keep an eye out for any other nesting activity. I am observing this nest box by binoculars to ensure I do not get into Darcy's territory too much but will try and sneak a few long range photos as the nest progresses ... hopefully!



*Little Wattlebird.* Who needs an alarm clock with these fellas around! The streets are full of these honeyeaters at the moment and we have a group which are giving it a real go with several mating incidents occurring among the *Coastal Banksia* and on top of our garden tree stags. This bird pictured left is particularly vocal and I assume it is a female as you can just see a degree of feather loss on the back of it's head from mating encounters. Yet to see any nests but given the activity, I am sure there will be lots of new *Little Wattlebirds* appearing soon ... more noise and territorial disputes!



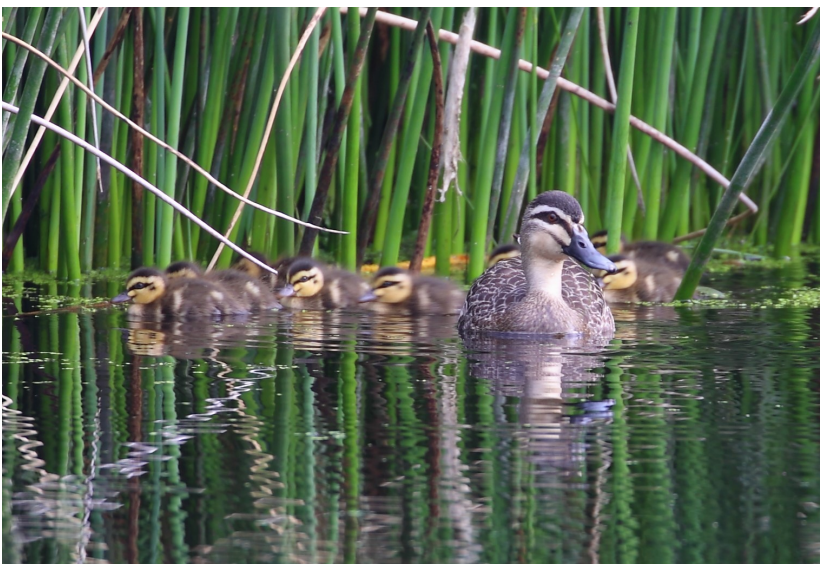
## Bird breeding and nesting activity ... Part 2



*Welcome Swallow.* A very unusual event was noticed by resident Ian Temple recently when a large flock of about 35-40 *Welcome Swallow* were circling over his house for a few hours. Maybe it was some insect activity in the area or possibly some form of courting behaviour? We don't know! Around the same time, there was a lot of swallow nesting activity, with multiple birds, normally as pairs, gathering mud after some rain, and flying backwards and forwards to nesting spots to build a nest. Most of the nests appeared to be built under balconies and eaves of houses. These birds are notoriously fast and erratic in flight and rarely land, so getting photos of these guys is a challenge! Check out the middle photo—one of the *Swallows* has dropped a “pearl” in flight!



*Hooded Plover.* Hooded Plovers are flocking along the coast in preparation for ‘pairing-up’ and there are signs of pairs already forming—Hoodie ‘RY’, one of the pair that had two hatched chicks last year in the 2nd Surf dune blowout has been hanging around with another Hoodie on the beach in front of the blowout. If happy, they will start developing some nest scrapes and if all goes well, will lay up to three eggs in a nest above the high tide line. Here is hoping for some breeding success this year!



*Freshwater Birds.* Keep your eyes peeled around the many wetlands as there are sure to be hatchlings about soon. We have *Australasian Swamphen*, *Dusky Moorhen*, *Pacific Black Duck*, *Chestnut* and *Grey Teal* all about making lots of noise and chasing each other in flight and on land.

The *Buff-banded Rail* pair near the Sunlight/Moonshadow intersection were seen together last Wednesday evening. They have been seen mating, so it is possible there is a nest somewhere nearby in thick vegetation or they could have retreated to the wetlands. Keep your eyes out for the chicks which are all black, fluffy and have a black bill. They will be very small but active as they leave the nest within a day of hatching.



## *Darcy ... an Australian Magpie doing his thing!*

As predicted, 'one of our local *Magpie's* Darcy' has ramped up intensity in defending his nest and chicks. Over the weekend, he has become particularly alert and is swooping a wide range of targets within his territory (people and other birds). His offspring from the past two seasons have been moved on and it is just him and Mrs Darcy. Yesterday, through binoculars, I observed the pair at the nest near the 'Lone Pine' behind the central wetlands. The female appeared to be feeding a nestling. This might account for Darcy's increased intensity over the weekend. For public safety and the bird's protection, a portable advisory sign has been placed on a nearby walking path letting people know of Darcy's swooping.



Some recent advice from *Birdlife Australia* is worth noting. Not all *Magpies* attack (just 1 in 10) and it is just the males—they are only trying to defend their nesting territory and chicks from perceived threats.

### *Try these tips—they may work!*

- If you can, avoid the area while the bird is actively swooping.
- Wear sunglasses and a hat. This will protect your eyes.
- Avoid running and screaming away with your arms flailing about wildly as it simply reinforces to the bird that you are something to fear.
- Stay calm if you do get swooped. Move quickly out of the area but resist the urge to wave your arms or attempt to hurt the bird. If you have an umbrella or stick, keep it up but don't wave it around.
- Cyclists are particularly disliked by magpies. The best thing to do is to get off and walk rather than to keep riding through—which also means you are less distracted and moving slower and safer.
- Talk nicely to the *magpies* you come across! There is no evidence that this works though some swear by it. It is known that magpies recognise faces though - up to about 100 of them, so be friendly to those you see and hopefully come spring they will be friendly to you too!!



All these *Magpie* pictures are of the main man 'Darcy' - he is a beautiful, stunning bird with heaps of character—he is just a bit grumbly for a little time each year!



## *Delicate time for the Kangaroo mob!*

With the opening of the Stage 5 walking paths and parks, it is a delicate time for our wildlife as they adjust to increased human activity. The *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* mob are slowly habituating to human presence, but as more of their 'natural' grazing habitat dwindles, they will rely more on the retained habitat areas for safety and rest and the parks and open spaces for feeding.

We can all do our part by taking care on the roads, not getting too close to them and not disturbing them such that they scatter which is when they are likely to injure themselves. There is plenty of educational signage around the estate on how best to behave with these animals and hopefully we will have them around for a long time into the future.

I am very grateful for new resident of **The Cape** and keen photographer **John Godfrey**, for this lovely picture of a kangaroo and joey taken over the weekend and I love John's ethical comments that came with the shot—"*Taken with a long lens ... I was close enough to watch, not close enough to disturb*".

Please respect our wildlife and appreciate how lucky we are to observe it at reasonably close quarters in their natural environment.



## *Cheeky and bold ... the Red Fox*

There are still plenty of Red Fox sightings about the estate and this young one was pictured this morning at 6.30 AM on resident **Joe Spano's** decking. These animals are becoming quite bold and I wonder what damage it did overnight. I understand a fox eradication program is being planned along the coast and within **The Cape** estate this November, so hopefully their numbers will be reduced somewhat to give our native wildlife a chance. Thanks Joe for the photo.

## *'MAG'—the little wombat cult figure*

The little *wombat* christened 'MAG' is looking pretty rough around the edges from the effects of the terrible mite borne disease, mange. He is still appearing in daylight hours feeding near the 2nd Surf car park. Since first sighted on 31st July, as you can see, MAG's hair loss has been rapid and he is still itching scabs which sometimes leads to red raw flesh and bleeding. The good news is he is still very active and his 'attitude' hasn't diminished. He has had all the mange treatment he can be given safely at this stage and his wounds are being treated with antiseptic when it is possible to get near him and they are healing well. *Mange Management* and *Wildlife Victoria* are monitoring his recovery.



A portable wildlife sign advising of his plight is in place, advising that authorities are aware of his situation and he is being treated.

Please keep your dogs on leash in this area as they could chase and injure him more.

There is hope he will eventually recover fully ... let's hope so.

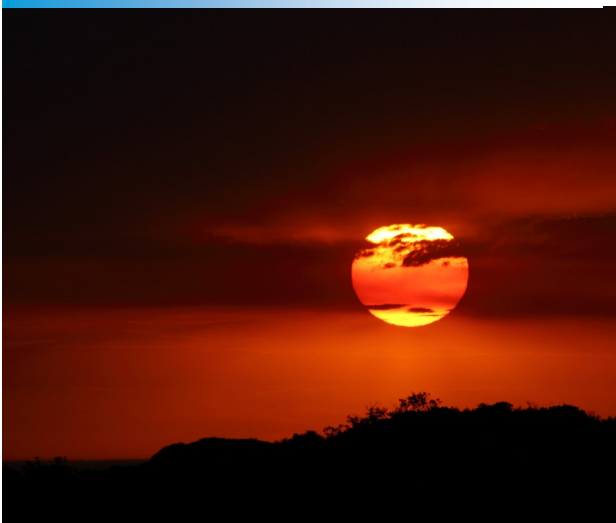


## *The last word on spring arriving ...*

The recent rains brought a cacophony of frog calls from the wetlands ... mainly *Eastern Banjo (Pobblebonks)* but other species like *Marsh Frogs* and *Eastern Froglets* were also prominent. Really healthy ecosystems are developing around **The Cape** in the wetlands and home gardens. The first *skink* to appear in the home garden since winter finished has been basking on the warmer, sunny days recharging it's battery. The *Southern Grass Skink* (about 12 cm long) is a cold tolerant species—it has a beautiful, metallic brown colouring with a black dorsal stripe that runs down its side. And finally, the cheeky *Little Corella* flock is starting to build in numbers and make a racket morning and night—their presence will intensify over the next month and then watch out for fun and games!



### 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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