

14th October 2022

Nature Observations around The Cape

Issue No. 80

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Cape Chatter

Putting a little dampener on nature ...

The *Bunurong Coast* seems to have escaped the heavy flooding rains experienced in other parts of Victoria and south east Australia, but for the natural world, life goes on. As communities face the challenges of rising floodwaters and flash flooding, our wildlife have to quickly adapt to the changing environmental conditions. We are in peak breeding season for many species, and some of our very young and immature critters will face a tough time coming out the other side. So if you are out and about around **The Cape** estate or walking along the nearby *Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park*, please keep an eye out for any distressed animals that may require help, and in the first instance, please ring **Wildlife Victoria** for assistance and they will organise a trained wildlife rescuer to attend to the situation. Please save the number below in your mobile phone.



This immature *Little Wattlebird* has worked out that unnatural structures like houses can provide shelter from the rain. This young bird, probably not very long out of the nest, has already developed the 'nous' to perch on a garden seat under our back yard pergola away from the drenching rain! It spent most of a wet yesterday in this spot!



Kangaroos adapt to poor weather, particularly the strong winds at **The Cape** by seeking shelter out of the prevailing winds. Wet weather doesn't stop them grazing and their furry skins are better than any 'oil skin' coat! This soaking old fella, nicknamed '*Chopper*', was feeding in our front garden last evening.

Please save this phone number in your phone and help to save our native animals

Wildlife Victoria (03) 8400 7200

Hooded Plovers ... local Cape news

As part of **The Cape's** generous *Hooded Plover* donation and initiatives, you can now keep up to date with news of these vulnerable beach nesting birds along the Cape Paterson coast. *Cape Chatter* now has a dedicated 'Hoodie' project page which will be updated regularly on seasonal breeding and nesting news based on volunteer monitoring reports. You can go direct to this page using the following link: <https://capechatter.com/the-hooded-plovers-of-cape-paterson-2/>. Eventually, new interpretive signage will be installed at several beach access points in Cape Paterson with a QR code which will also direct you straight to the project page for the latest information.

In the meantime, what has been happening and what are the challenges confronting the Hoodies???

After a failed two egg nest at the eastern end of *Undertow Bay*, the breeding pair have moved back to a precarious spot at the *Pea Creek estuary* and have laid three eggs in a nest on the sand spit just above the high tide line. The nest was discovered by a very observant and caring member of the public. The area is now enclosed by a rope enclosure with signage.

Along *2nd Surf Beach*, another popular nesting site, the regular pair have been developing some nesting scrapes in the *dune blow-out*. Despite some promising signs, no nest has been discovered at this stage. This area in the dune faces it's challenges, with recent incidents of motorcyclists and people tobogganing down the dune into the known nesting area along with a moderate level of off leash dog prints.

Further west of *Wilson Rd/F Break*, regular sightings of three birds and several nest scrapes have been identified.. No nest/eggs have been observed, but there are examples of off leash dogs running through scrapes.



Above: Hoodies will develop several nest scrapes before choosing one that is selected to lay the eggs in. The scrape is a simple small depression in the sand and adorned with some timber/shells/seaweed etc around the outside. Another indicator is numerous Hoodie prints coming and going from the scrape. The scrapes are normally established above the high tide line on the beach, in foredunes and higher up in dunes. This is why beach goers and dog walkers are encouraged to walk along the waters edge, and dogs kept on lead as per local regulations. You can see above where an off leash dog has run through a potential nest.



Above: Meet a newcomer to the Cape area. This is a sub adult Hoodie (Left Yellow 96) who has joined up with two adults in the area west of Wilson Rd access and was photographed last week. This bird hatched on 2 January 2022 at Smith's Beach on Phillip Island, quite some distance from here. It was one of three successful fledglings in the clutch. Just proves that Hoodies do get around and try and establish themselves in a territory that suits them ... even if it is well away from where they were raised.

I love 'Raven' about birds ...

There is plenty happening in the bird world around the *Cape Chatter* observation area. Here is a snapshot of recent bird activity...

Right: The *Little Raven* is our more common *Raven* species at **The Cape**. They adapt extremely well to human presence and are one of the bird kingdoms most intelligent species and capable of complex problem solving. Watch their behaviour around building sites investigating the rubbish skips! They are a natural predator to the *Hooded Plovers* on the beach. Occasionally, the larger *Australian Raven* is seen around **The Cape**.



Left: The tiny *Silvereyes* are a summer treat in our bush and they are loving gleaning insects among the flowering *Swamp Melaleuca* at the moment. This photo taken a couple of days ago is I believe the sub-species *westernensis*. We also see the nominated species, *lateralis*, here at **The Cape**—they are a Tasmanian bird identified by dark brown flanks who migrate across the Bass Strait. *Silvereyes* are seen in small very active flocks going in all directions, with a high pitched trilling song and contact calls!!

The *Superb Fairy-wren*, *Brown Thornbill* and *White-browed Scrubwren* are also very active among the flowering *Melaleuca* and *Coastal Wattle* at the moment.



Out in the open, grassy habitat areas, the *Crested Pigeon* (**right**) and the *Spotted Dove* (**bottom right**) have been very conspicuous feeding on the grasses and weeds. The *Crested Pigeon* is a native pigeon and is often seen in flocks of around 15 birds. They make a distinctive noisy wing beat in flight and when they land they lift their tail vertically. The *Spotted Dove* is an introduced species and is seen in smaller numbers, usually in pairs, around **The Cape**.



Left: The introduced *Eurasian Skylark* is also quite prominent in the grassy spaces, and is most noticeable by its 'in air' hovering display flight and song high above the ground.



'Raven' about birds continued ...

The large flock of *Little Corella* is still maintaining a raucous presence around **The Cape** and there have been a few pink and grey *Galah* about as well. They are both loving the capeweed and onion grass.



Meanwhile, in the wetlands and creek line ... I managed to see a *Latham's Snipe* a couple of days back emerge from the central creek line and fly off to the 'bog' near the central wetland. It is great to see this vulnerable migratory wader all the way from northern Japan at **The Cape** and in this location this time of the year. It appeared quite happy roosting about 70 m from the nearest home and close by a busy walking track.



It is great weather for ducks and waterbirds. The wetlands and creek line are pumping with water and growth, and there will be plenty of tucker in these habitats.

Above and right: Hybrid *Pacific Black Ducks* (crossed with an introduced *Northern Mallard*) are about as well as a few pure *Black Ducks*. These guys are in breeding season so keep your eyes out for ducklings around the wetlands. A pair has been hanging around in our garden the past few days—maybe looking for a nesting spot. The *Buff-banded Rail* have not been seen in the vicinity of our house for about 2 weeks—not sure if they have been seen anywhere else in the estate.

Right: A *White-necked Heron* sticks its head out among the sedges and reeds of the natural wetland in the south east of the estate a few days ago. A very graceful and methodical feeder as it moves its way through the boggy habitat pausing occasionally listening for food.



A couple of Blue-winged Parrot stragglers ...

Just when I thought it was safe to say these birds had all left and departed for Tasmania (see my theory in Chatter No. 79) ... I managed to spot a pair of stragglers on 6 October in Stage 5, some 11 days after the last sightings. I have not seen any since.



Above: *Blue-winged Parrot* pair, last seen and photographed on 6 October. Male on left and female right.



'Darcy' is the man ...

Well known local *Australian Magpie* identity 'Darcy' appears to be the proud father of two *Magpie* fledglings. I have been watching with the binoculars and the young pair seem to have left the nest and both adult parents are busy flying back and forth gathering food and flying back to feed them in the 'Green Beach' area beyond the central wetland. Unfortunately, Darcy is still swooping walkers, cyclists and other birds defending his young and territory. Hopefully it will cease soon!

I managed a few closeup photos of him near my garden after he swooped me recently—which is a daily occurrence despite me staying well away from him.



Above: Darcy pictured a week or so ago as he was nearby in my garden after swooping me.

Warm weather critters emerging

Beware—the warmer temperatures are starting to bring out the local *Lowland Copperhead* snakes. Thanks to residents Wendy and David for alerting me to one in the 'snake log' near the central wetland viewing seat. This snake has been here several seasons in a row ... right next to a smorgasbord of amphibians!!



The young, the emerging and the old fellas ...

Good to see a number of *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* joeys about in **The Cape** mob at the moment ... let's hope there are a few females among them to balance the ledger! You may see these cute little fellas running around madly by themselves in what looks like a state of panic! This is normal behaviour as they start to learn life outside the pouch. Often, mum may be seen on the other side of a barrier/fence from the energetic joey —this is also normal, so no need to worry too much as long as there is an adult or the mob are nearby. Mums will often isolate themselves for a short period to rest from pouch duties as the joey behaves like a horse racing colt learning to run!



Above: Joey in pouch just itching to get out and have some fun! An ageing male (right) photographed recently resting while the remainder of the mob were feeding nearby. Old frail kangaroos tend to distance themselves from the mob and when ready to die, will normally take themselves away to a quiet spot in the bush to finish off their last days.

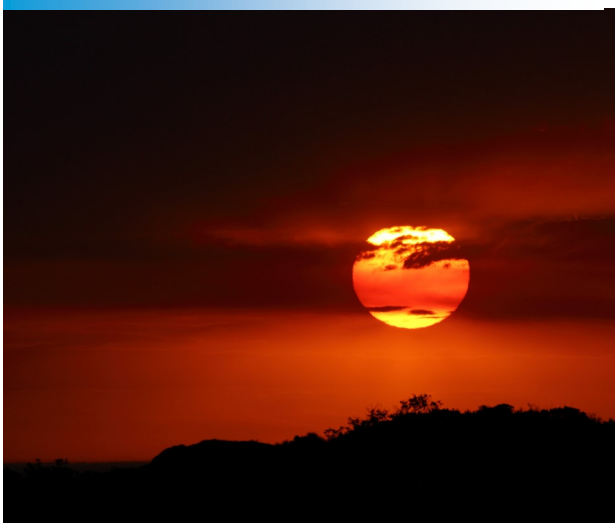
Below and Right: Emerging males practice their 'biffo' skills late yesterday near the oval in what one day may well be 'real' fighting in their quest to be the dominant male of the mob.



On a dull day ... some brightness from the garden to finish off



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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