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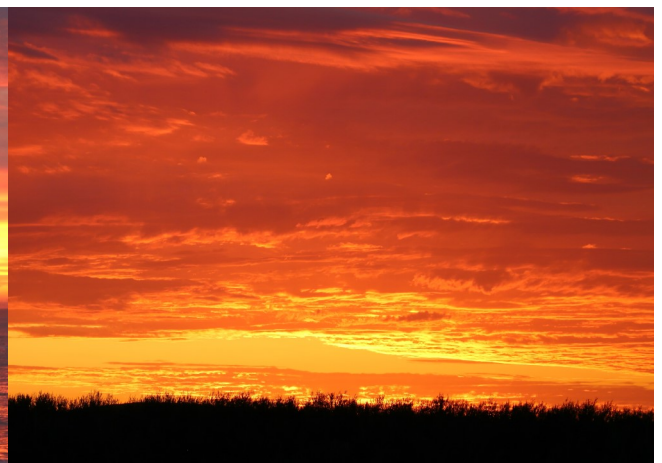
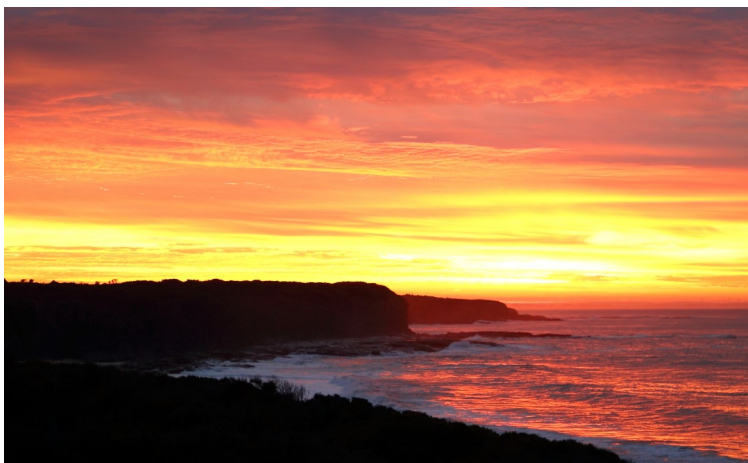
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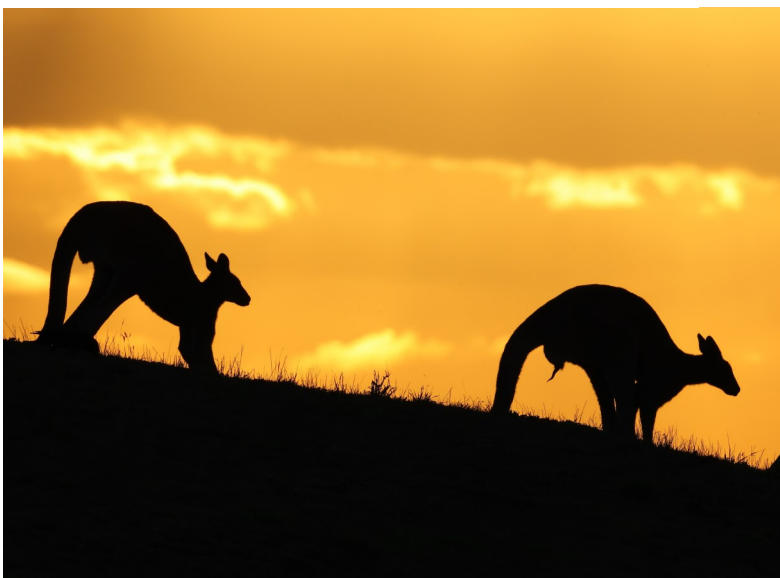
Cape Chatter

A cracking time of the year ...

There is something about this time of the year which I love ... the loud sound of the waves cracking on the nearby surf beaches at night and the stunning 'book-end' landscape colours as the sun rises and falls—vibrant colours splashing across the waters and skies. Along with some rain, a bit of green has emerged after the dry summer invigorating the vegetation, the frogs are croaking, the insects are declining in numbers and the birds are on the move. April is a time of change—but nature still delivers in all its glory!



And some of the big fellas are on the move ...



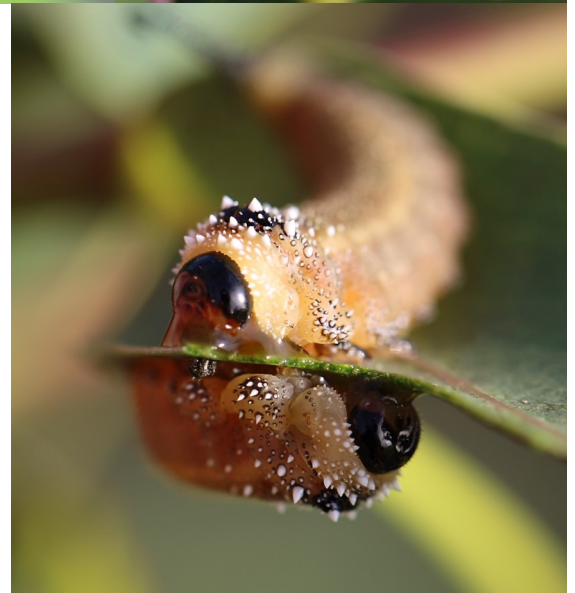
Life goes on ... Is this Australia's most stunning caterpillar?



The caterpillar of the *Emperor Gum Moth* is a truly beautiful creature. This particular specimen was one of three found munching away last week in an indigenous tree species, the Rough-barked Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis* ssp. *pryoriana*) in a home garden of **The Cape**—the trees planted for the **Koala Project**. It is about 10 cm long—big, fat and juicy!

The *Emperor Gum Moth* glues its eggs onto eucalypt leaves, which the large green caterpillars eat when they emerge. The caterpillars are covered in protective spines and build a tough cocoon in which to pupate. They may reinforce this cocoon with bark and remain inside it for one or more years depending on environmental conditions. The adults emerge in summer. The life span of adult *Emperor Gum Moths* is limited to only a couple of weeks because they are unable to feed. They must rely solely on the energy consumed as caterpillars. The moths are attracted to street lights! (**Source:** Australian Museum)

There were several other caterpillars in the same tree (pictured right) but I am unsure what they are—they could be early stage larvae of the *Emperor*!



Koala Project Update ... trees doing well

Left photo taken 8 July 2021 before planting ... same area on 13 April 2023. The *Manna Gums* are shooting up nicely!



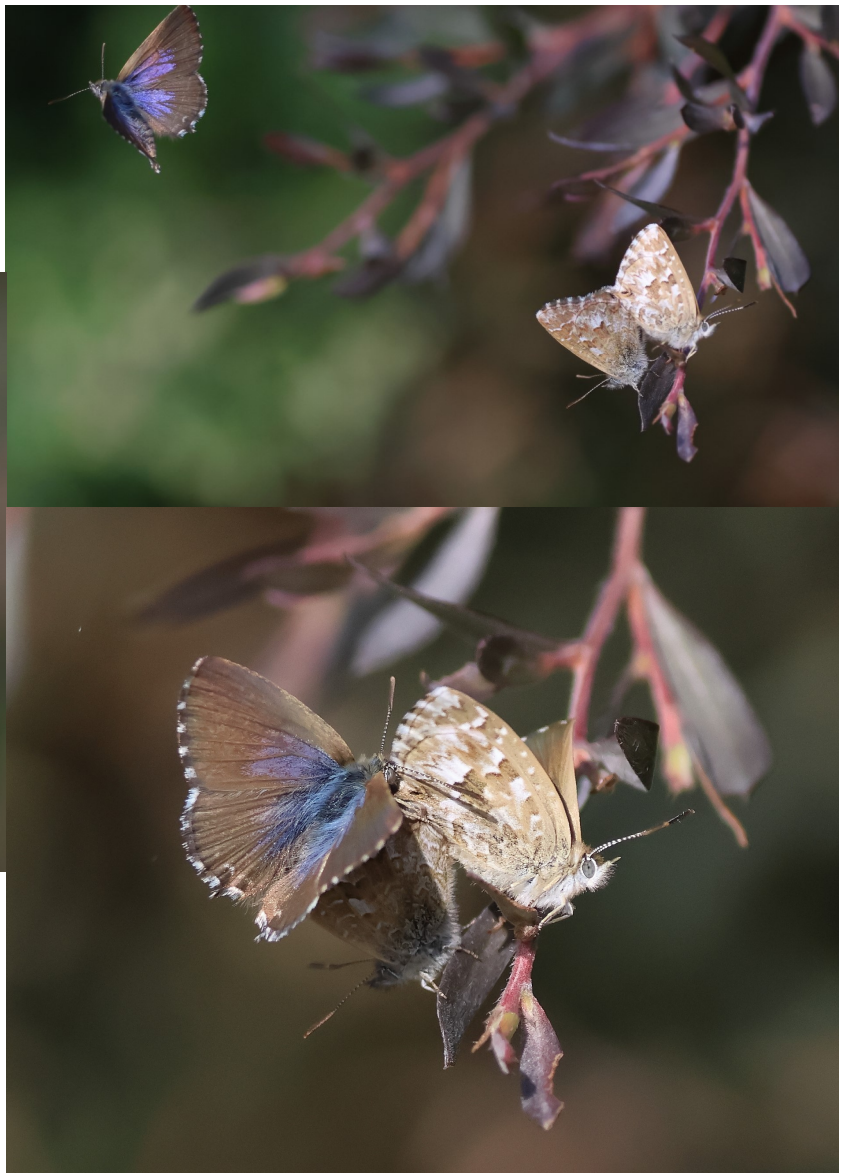
Active butterflies despite the cooler weather ...

I have been noticing a lot of these little butterflies flying about despite the drop in air temperature and reduction of invertebrate activity. The colourful *Common Grass-blue*, with a wingspan of about 3 cm, have been very active copulating among the garden vegetation over recent weeks. These butterflies fly close to the ground and land frequently to feed on flowers for nectar.



Above: A pair of *Common Grass-blues* mating on the end of a branch of *Leptospermum* (*Copper Glow Tea Tree*), which seemed to be a popular plant.

While photographing this pair, there were numerous occasions when other 'Blues' came in to either check out the action or partake! See photos right. Despite the interloper, the pair kept on the job and refused to budge! Sure to be plenty more 'blues' around next year.



A Red Robin came bobbin' along ...

Just like clockwork! Last issue I predicted we should start seeing the beautiful *Flame Robins* return to **The Cape**, and just like that, they have turned up! A flock of around 8 males and females have been foraging along the new east-west pondage complex over the last few days, alternating between the edges of the grassy lots and the vegetation either side of the ponds. For the past three years of observations, these birds have arrived around early to mid April from the 'high country' where they spend summer, moving down to our coastal lowlands for the winter months. We have two other *Robins* at **The Cape**—the *Scarlet*, also a winter migrant, and the *Eastern Yellow*, which is a permanent resident bird. All beauties! The *Flames* are the only ones you will see in small flocks.



The female *Flame Robin* perched near the pondage (above left), the male (above right and left). The female has sandy brown upperparts and a pale brown chest, while the male has the distinctive red-orange chest and underparts with a small white forehead mark.. Watch for the birds perched in little groups on fences, tree stakes and stags ... then they launch themselves to the ground to pounce on insects, their main food source.

Scarlet Robin (below left—spot the difference?) and *Eastern Yellow Robin* (below) for comparison.



East—west ponds are coming along nicely ...

I have been making a few visits over the past few days to check out what is happening in the east-west ponds that were developed last year in the new Stage 5 area of **The Cape**. Might not look like much is happening from a distance, but there is plenty of activity on and around the water with a range of freshwater birds taking up residence along with the *Flame Robins*.



The photo left was taken on 29 Aug 2020 looking south east when the area was a grassy drainage line, with the Weathertop Crest on the immediate horizon and the 2nd Surf dune in the background. From degraded pasture to vibrant biodiverse habitat within three years—not a bad effort and one that will be a treasure for our fauna in the years to come.



Above: Then and now—the newly planted ponds looking east last year on 6 June 2022 and pictured again 17 April 2023. Photo-point located at the ‘exercise station’ on Stargazer Avenue. The water source for these ponds is partly from a natural drainage line from the west and run-off water collected from the streetscapes and swales and will vary in depth at times. These ponds feed water into the main north-south creek line which then enters the major central wetland complex where natural filtration of the water occurs. It finally enters Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park to the south before entering the waters of Bass Strait.



A Chestnut Teal (left) and Australasian Grebe (right) enjoying the deeper waters of the eastern pond over the last week.

Some structure is important for rest and safety ...

The animals at **The Cape** are wild and quite skittish when people or pets get too close to them. There is plenty of natural food for them among the habitats and they will seek out what they want over the seasons. It is important wild birds are not fed unnatural/processed foods (see reasons in my last issue of *Cape Chatter*) otherwise we will see a messy situation which is common in suburban parks! Structures like logs and stags in the habitat are important locations for birds to perch, rest, preen, observe, eat and sometimes drink.. Last week, I was reminded of this while photographing various birds using the structures to their advantage.



Galahs are ground dwelling feeders and are common in the grassy open spaces around **The Cape**. Occasionally, a drink is required along with a rest from their full-on raucous activity. Some old logs in the bottom pond are an ideal location and is a popular stop-off point for these birds later in the day!



A log protruding into the water from the edge of the pond provides an ideal rest point for this *Pacific Black Duck* to check out the area and preen itself. And do a little wing stretching! It can easily waddle off into the safety of the water if it is disturbed. The log will break down over time providing matter and nutrient for freshwater invertebrates and plants—natural food for the ducks!

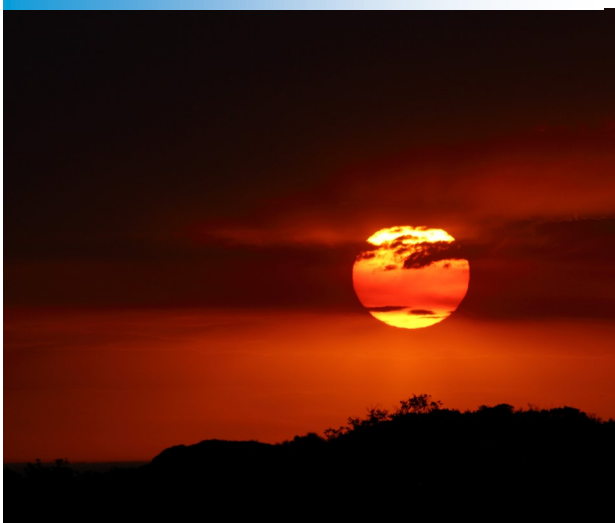
What's that moat looking thing near Wilson Rd?



Another important wetland structure is being constructed in a grassy drainage line in the south west of the estate adjacent to Yallock-Bulluk and the Wilson Rd boundary. It is a bit different to the other wetlands and has been designed by ecological experts and landscape architects with habitat for the endangered *Australasian Bittern* in mind, along with the vulnerable *Latham's Snipe*. Of course it will attract other fauna species like birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, and will be a wonderful addition to the biodiverse habitat being re-created at **The Cape**.



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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