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Nature Observations around The Cape

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Cape Chatter

Local Koala is pure as ...

A small colony of *koala* reside around the Cape Paterson area, occasionally wandering into the environs of **The Cape**. Recent DNA testing of scats (poo) has revealed the small population is of the uncommon *Strzelecki Koala*, a genetically healthy sub-species of the genome, in which the gene pool remains intact. The *Strzelecki Koala* is the only remnant population of *koala* in Victoria and South Australia—it is estimated there are around 1500 of the subspecies in total in Victoria. All other populations of *koala* throughout Victoria and South Australia are the result of translocations, including the koala on nearby French and Phillip Islands. They are a mixed genetic bag and are suffering from a ‘genetic bottleneck’. As a direct descendent from the original Victorian *koala* gene pool the ‘Strzelecki’ may hold the key for the survival of the species in Australia, as koala populations in Queensland and New South Wales continue to succumb to a variety of environmental problems and face extinction.

The lack of genetic diversity in koala populations can make them more vulnerable to diseases caused by inbreeding and less resilient to diseases overall. Translocated populations of koala have not fared well, often facing boom and bust times requiring further translocation and even culling! Healthy genetically diverse koala appear to be coping better with changing environments, albeit at a slower rate, and while not threatened, like many Australian mammals, need our help to survive.



These photos are two of the local *Koala* pictured within **The Cape** back in 2021. The one on the left ventured into the main thoroughfare, Sunlight Blvd, and spent the day in a *Coastal Banksia*. The one on the right, was nestled in one of the few *Coastal Manna Gums* remaining within **The Cape**. Both pictures were taken around September/October period. Recognising the impact further development of the area could have on the local koala, **The Cape** community instigated Project KOALA in 2021 to further enhance native vegetation habitat and revegetated treed habitat with endemic plant species, and the plots are coming along nicely!

The plots thicken ... Project KOALA

In September 2021, some 600 indigenous tree, shrub and ground species were planted in 12 mini-forest plots using a concept designed by Japanese ecologist Miyawaki. The aim was to enhance the (decimated) treed habitat of **The Cape** to provide further wildlife corridors and bio-links with an emphasis on koala, but also native invertebrate, other mammal and bird species. At the time of planting, only 8 mature *Coastal Manna Gums*, the preferred food source for local *koala*, had been identified within the estate. Today, we have about fifty small *Manna Gum* thriving in the plots, some over 2 metres high and some already displaying their first flower buds. *Koala* have been seen and heard in this vicinity, so it is hoped over time, this new contribution will provide further vital habitat.



Other initiatives for Koala at The Cape

There is more work to be done and plans to extend Project KOALA into other areas of the estate to build on this first phase are in hand. Seed has been collected from one of the few mature, healthy *Coastal Manna Gum* for propagation in the Community Farm and grant applications have been submitted for funding to support the project moving forward. Meanwhile, **The Cape's** policy of 'dogs on leash at all times' is a policy designed to protect the animals as dog attack is one of the many threats facing koala in Australia. The use of portable signs if koala emerge into built-up areas (like the Sunlight Blvd occurrence) also help to manage a safer environ by keeping interested onlookers at a safe distance and slowing down vehicle traffic (vehicle strike another major threat facing *koala*).



The not so 'cute and cuddly' ... we need to help them as well!

The future of another of our local iconic Australian mammals is beginning to cause concern ... the *Bare-nosed (Common) Wombat*. The number killed on the roads by vehicles is alarming, but more concerning is the degree of the deadly disease **mange** in our local population. Is this another species on the road to vulnerability? As a rough guestimate, some 75% of all wombats seen in and near **The Cape** have some degree of mange (see photos below). Most recently, two adults and a joey were seen emerging from the bush late afternoon near 'Green Beach', the kangaroo lay-up area south west of the central wetland complex. All had mange, so it hits regardless of age! One adult was able to be treated, one bolted back into the bush despite very patient attempts to apply medication. The joey was rescued and moved to a wombat nursery for treatment and release back into the wild.



But there is hope ...

Mange is a treatable condition. Local volunteers are able to apply liquid treatments to the back of the animal, particularly when they are more docile and feeling the affects of the disease. This is especially important if they are seen out in the open and they are easy to get to before running back into the thick coastal vegetation.

If you see a wombat out in the open feeding, particularly during daylight, there is a reasonable chance it has mange, noticeable by the scarring and fur loss along it's sides and legs.

Please call **Mange Management Inc**, a voluntary organisation specialising in the treatment of mange on **0431 600 125** and they will contact a local volunteer to assess the wombat and apply treatment if appropriate. That's **0431 600 125**.



While on the subject of threatened species ...

An increasing number of animal species are facing threats to their survival for many reasons. Residents of, and visitors to **The Cape**, should feel a sense of privilege that they are among a developing and emerging biodiverse environment that is increasingly becoming home to a range of threatened species, some living close by within remnant and constructed habitats, and others dropping by periodically to check things out! Again, we talk often about the more prominent species under threat, but there are many others in our midst that we need to be more aware of and ensure our actions do not threaten their future. It is a fine balance between developing new built environments like **The Cape** and sensitively maintaining/building biodiversity, but the evidence and observations to date suggests it can be done successfully and things are working at **The Cape**. I was again reminded of this when I happened to see and photograph a *Great Egret*, a bird listed as vulnerable to extinction in Victoria, lift off from the constructed central wetland a couple of days ago. This is not the first observation of this species here, but the first chance to get a photograph.



Here is a current list of the threatened bird species around The Cape ...

Hooded Plover*	Vulnerable	Beach shorebird, permanent on beach/rocks
Latham's Snipe*	Vulnerable	Summer migrant from northern Japan and Siberia
Cape Barren Goose	Vulnerable	Occasional visitor
Australian Shoveler	Near-threatened	Occasional visitor—wetlands
Great Egret	Vulnerable	Occasional visitor—wetlands
Royal Spoonbill	Vulnerable	Occasional visitor—wetlands
Lewin's Rail	Vulnerable	Wetlands, constructed and remnant
White-bellied Sea Eagle	Endangered	Occasional visitor
Blue-winged Parrot*	Vulnerable	Appears around August-October
Grey Goshawk	Endangered	Occasional visitor in coastal bush

* **The Cape** and several residents are actively involved in contributing to the ongoing survival of these species with Birdlife Australia, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast, Birdlife Bass Coast and the Latham's Snipe Project.



More rodent activity ...

I managed to get a few more photos of the native *Swamp Rat* which have been very active during the day around the off-leash dog park. You can also see many of their tunnels under the dense grassy vegetation and mounds of diggings within the park garden beds. They seem very happy and at home in this location!



Swamp Rats have dark grey/brown fur, small ears and brown feet. They grow to around 15 cm in body length and their tails are shorter than the body, around 10 cm. They are shy and quick movers, with a hopping/bouncy action as well. Quite often they sit on their haunches to feed. They are herbivores, mainly eating the stems of grasses and sedges, but they will also eat insects in winter. They prefer grass, heath and sedge habitat, building tunnels (right) under thick vegetation to move, hide and feed. They are found along the coastal areas of south east Australia ... sadly their numbers are declining but are not currently listed as threatened.



Beautiful eyes ...

The eyes say it all as this male *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* contemplates what the night holds as he emerges from his daytime lay-up/rest area at **The Cape**.



Bird action around The Cape ...

A sample of what has been seen on my wanderings over the past couple of weeks ...



Last *Chatter*, I mentioned the observation of a *Brown Falcon*, and here it is, pictured left, in the south east remnant bush giving me the stare. The *Flame Robins* are dazzling, but the local resident *Eastern Yellow Robin* are also stunning, colourful birds!



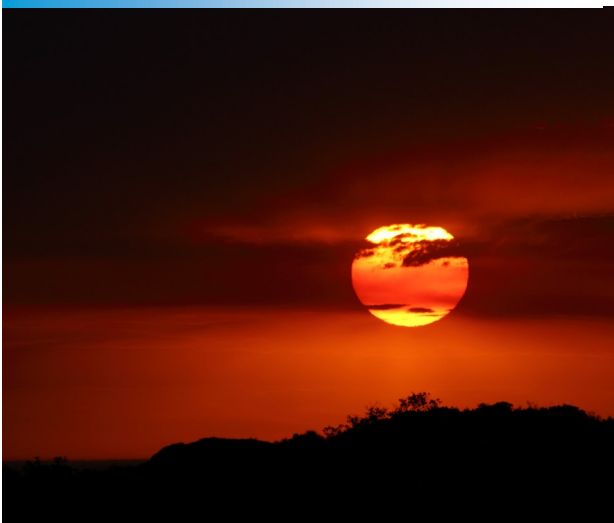
The newly constructed chain of ponds running east-west through the centre of the estate is home to several duck species, noticeably *Grey & Chestnut Teal* and *Pacific Black Duck* (one pictured here preening itself on 'duck island'). The *Australasian Grebe* (above left) have also been busy utilising the new ponds as well as the smaller pondages in the central creek line. The local *Galah* flock are also regular visitors and can be seen most afternoons on stumps and tree stags rehydrating!

Crazy, playful birds ...

It's thirsty work being a *Galah* and the ponds are a great place to visit & refresh after all sorts of shenanigans on Trev's flagpole rope!



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**.

Email: dwhartney@bigpond.com

capechatter.com
