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## Nature Observations around The Cape



# Cape Chatter

### *The 'movement' of water ... and quiet contemplation*

A key landscape design of **The Cape** is the way water is managed throughout the estate, by using and retaining water as high up in the system as possible, managing the flow, and using natural filtration before entering the ocean via the Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park. Along the water's journey, various structures and flora habitats have been created: swales and streetscapes, constructed creeks, ponds, and wetlands providing wonderlands of natural habitat for a range of animal species. These water features are really pumping at the moment from the rain and there is a cacophony of frog calls to go with all the other wildlife sounds inhabiting these wonderful ecosystems. I continue to be amazed how much the wetlands are developing and coming to life with everything from small birds, waterfowl, ducks, frogs, reptiles, mammals, turtles and invertebrates. These habitat areas of **The Cape** are real treasures. So if you feel like some quiet contemplation while connecting with nature, it is right at your doorstep. You might be surprised what you see, how good you will feel and even have the odd chuckle!



*Superb Fairy-wrens* love the wetlands and have moved into the reeds in good numbers. Last week I spent some time watching a flock forage very quickly among the ephemeral plants and bathe at the waters edge. There was also time for play— and this female and male pair (above) were doing some interesting acrobatic manoeuvres. Look closely, and the female is hanging onto the back of the male while it in turn is hanging on for dear life from the stem of a sedge. 10/10—with a high degree of difficulty and time for a laugh!



## *Holding your ground ... and the rules of the road on water*

Inland Australia has been awash with rain and floods and many freshwater bird species have taken off to these natural wetland ecosystems to breed, meaning numbers have been lower around **The Cape**. They will return as things start to dry up. We have small numbers of freshwater birds around, and there is some 'turf warfare' and interesting interactions going on, particularly among *Australasian Grebe*, *Chestnut Teal* and the *Pacific Black Duck*. *Dusky Moorhen* and *Australian Swamphe*n are among the thick vegetation among the wetlands, there have been quick glimpses of *Buff-banded Rail* in the central creek line (thanks Lorraine) and some home gardens, and I am still hearing the calls of the *Spotless Crake*.



The small *Australasian Grebe* is a bird with attitude and very territorial during the breeding season. I once saw one attack and kill several ducklings that intruded into its territory. It is not breeding time at the moment, but is certainly letting the *Chestnut Teal* and *Pacific Black Duck* know it is around and running interception if they venture too close to where it is foraging. While the *Teal* and *Ducks* seem happy to share space, there was some commotion between two pair of *Chestnut Teal* when they were in close proximity on the same pond—protecting territory or some form of courting behaviour.

**Clockwise from top left:** *Pacific Black Duck* pair and *Chestnut Teal* pair happily sharing a habitat log; an *Australasian Grebe* cutting off a male *Chestnut Teal*; *Pacific Black Duck* claiming ownership of 'duck island'; the *Grebe* heading off a *Black Duck*; and the altercation between a female and male *Chestnut Teal* when the two pairs were very close to each other!



## *Wetland happenings ...*



**Above:** *Dusky Moorhen*, reflecting on life in the northern most pond of the central creek line.



**Above:** *Australasian Swamphen*, foraging in the thick ephemeral growth of the central wetlands.



**Above:** The *Buff-banded Rail*, is the less secretive of the small waterfowl that inhabit our thick wetland vegetation (and suitable home garden habitats). It will usually be seen emerging from thick vegetation into the open to forage, especially at dawn and dusk, but also during the day when it is overcast or raining. When disturbed, they usually dart back into cover. Their diet consists of plant matter, invertebrates and small vertebrates. Similar species around **The Cape** that have been heard calling but not seen include the *Levin's Rail* (listed as vulnerable), *Spotless Crake* and *Australian Spotted Crake*.



## 'Knee deep' in frog calls at the moment ...

The wetlands and ponds are a haven for frogs—it is great to hear the noisy calling at the moment. My trusty (and it's free) **FrogID** app says there are potentially 12 species of frogs likely to be in **The Cape** area. To date, we have 8 identified species reported by both call and photographic evidence. Currently, the really active callers making all the racket are predominantly the *Common Eastern Froglet*, *Brown Tree Frog* and the *Whistling Tree Frog*.



**Left:** This is the *Brown Tree Frog*, (*Litoria ewingii*) pictured in my garden last week. It is an active caller throughout the year but particularly from June to December. It is a medium sized frog up to 4.5 cm in length. Distinctive features are the gold iris and horizontal pupil and the black/brown stripe from the snout to past the arm. It's call is the distinctive 'cree cree cree' repeated 5-15 times, heard most of the year, especially when it has been raining.

**Right:** The *Common Eastern Froglet* is an active caller most of the year other than the warmer months of summer. It is a small frog about 3 cm in length. More often seen than heard, it's call is a series of 3-5 pulsed calls, in a cricket like chirp of 'crick, crick, crick'.



## New south west wetland filling up



The last of the constructed wetlands at **The Cape** is really looking good. The system has been designed around habitat for the endangered *Australasian Bittern*, a bird rarely seen, but are known to be in the nearby Wonthaggi Desalination plant wetland. The island in the middle of the pond is now covered in shallow water after recent rains. The top picture at left was taken last week and below in April. Planting of the habitat is expected to begin in Spring with the island containing *Phragmites australis* (*Common Reed*) which *Bittern* like, surrounded by an ephemeral zone, along with shallow and deep marsh plantings. Further away from the water, there are low garden zones with plants to attract the vulnerable *Blue-winged Parrot* and several treed habitats containing *Coastal Manna*, endemic *Snow Gum* and *Drooping She-oak*.

Great work by the landscape architects and the landscape construction team, especially Jay Van Dillen, whose handiwork with the machines has turned a boggy depression into what will become further vital habitat at **The Cape**.



## *Kangaroo action in and around the wetlands ...*

The *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* mob love the vegetation around the central wetland complex and nearby 'Green Beach' to rest and lay-up. It provides a secure area. At times they are quite close to the walking path, providing ideal opportunities for close up photography with my telephoto lens while they remain calm and secure in their protected habitat. This allows me to focus in close on their eyes and faces which I think show their beauty and character, all of them unique. On most occasions they are obliging, remaining calm, but if they appear to be a bit jittery, I refrain from disturbing them and let them go about their business.

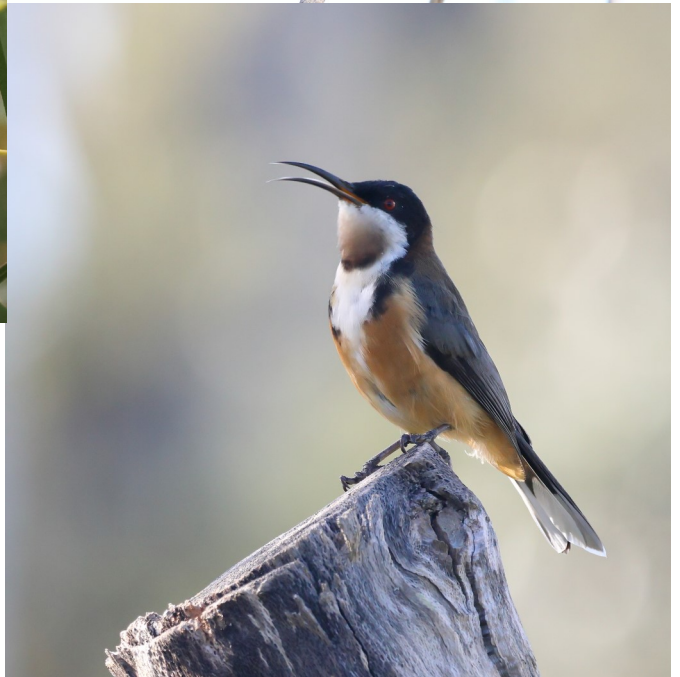


**Clockwise from Top Left:** This adult male has the distinctive feature of a split right ear. I call him 'Chopper' after a well known Australian criminal who, well, mangled his ears for some reason! *Chopper* has been a prominent member of the mob since I first noticed him back in 2019. This photo is of him emerging from the bush for the evenings activities. A joey just checking things out from the pouch in the afternoon sun. *Kangaroos* just love grass, and they are often seen continually chewing with long grassy stems hanging out of their mouth while staring at you.



## Local bird chatter ...

This time of the year is a tad quieter than the warmer months, but there is still plenty to appreciate on my walks with the camera. I am hearing the calls of the beautiful *Olive Whistler* from the coastal bush, and the honeyeaters—*White-eared*, *New Holland* and *Eastern Spinebill* are still actively calling along with the *Wattlebirds*. In the bush, *Eastern Yellow Robin* are prominent callers along with *Grey Shrike-thrush* and a flock of *European Goldfinch* have returned to the area. The local small birds such as *Superb Fairy-wren*, *Brown Thorn-bill*, *White-browed Scrubwren* and *Silveryeye* are also prominent and the *Eastern Rosella* are noisy and active in small flocks.





## Did you know—Mr & Mrs Galah ...

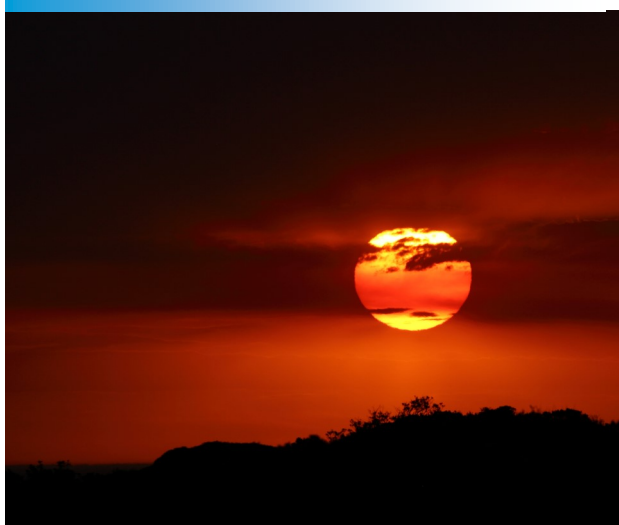
*Galahs* develop pair bonds for life and are often seen together foraging, preening each other or squabbling amongst busy, playful flocks feeding on the ground. They might all look the same but in fact there are subtle differences between the sexes. Can you tell the difference? It is all mainly in the eyes—the female (right) has a pinkish—red iris, the males (left) is dark brown.



There are three sub-species of *Galah* in Australia. Our local species, *albiceps* is best identified by the pinkish orbital skin around the eye. Two other sub-species inhabit western Australia (*roseicapilla*) and northern Australia (*kuhli*). They have different coloured orbital skins and varying crest lengths. *Galahs* bond as pairs that form into feeding flocks in common territory which is what we are seeing around **The Cape**. Pictured left and right is a juvenile with smatterings of grey plumage among the pink.



### 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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