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Crikey ... it's a Crake!

The constructed central wetlands are developing nicely and after four years of growth provide wonderful habitat for a range of invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds. Just think, four years ago this area was nothing more than degraded pasture land! It is becoming increasingly difficult to see what is going on within these wetlands given the thickness of the vegetation, so if you are interested in knowing what is happening, you need to tune into listening and be a patient observer. In the last few days, by carefully wandering along the track on the side of the wetlands, pausing, listening and identifying movement among the vegetation, I have seen or heard a range of elusive and secretive wetland birds including the vulnerable *Lewin's Rail*, *Buff-banded Rail*, *Spotless Crake* and the stunning little *Australian Spotted Crake*. All fantastic species right at our doorstep for us to appreciate!



The *Australian Spotted Crake* (above) was photographed near the observation point at the south of the creek line, but I have also heard them calling within the wetlands and alongside the 'bog'. This crake is a small bird, weighing around 60-70g, and is much smaller than our other resident waterbirds such *Dusky Moorhen* (around 700g) and *Purple Swamphen* (about a kilo). Another wetland species, and one you are more likely to see in the open, is the *Buff-banded Rail* (around 200g) (right). Several have taken up residence within the creek line and wetland complex and are being seen regularly. The *Lewin's Rail* and *Spotless Crake* are very secretive and are posing more of a challenge to witness, but it is lovely to hear their calls and knowing they are about!

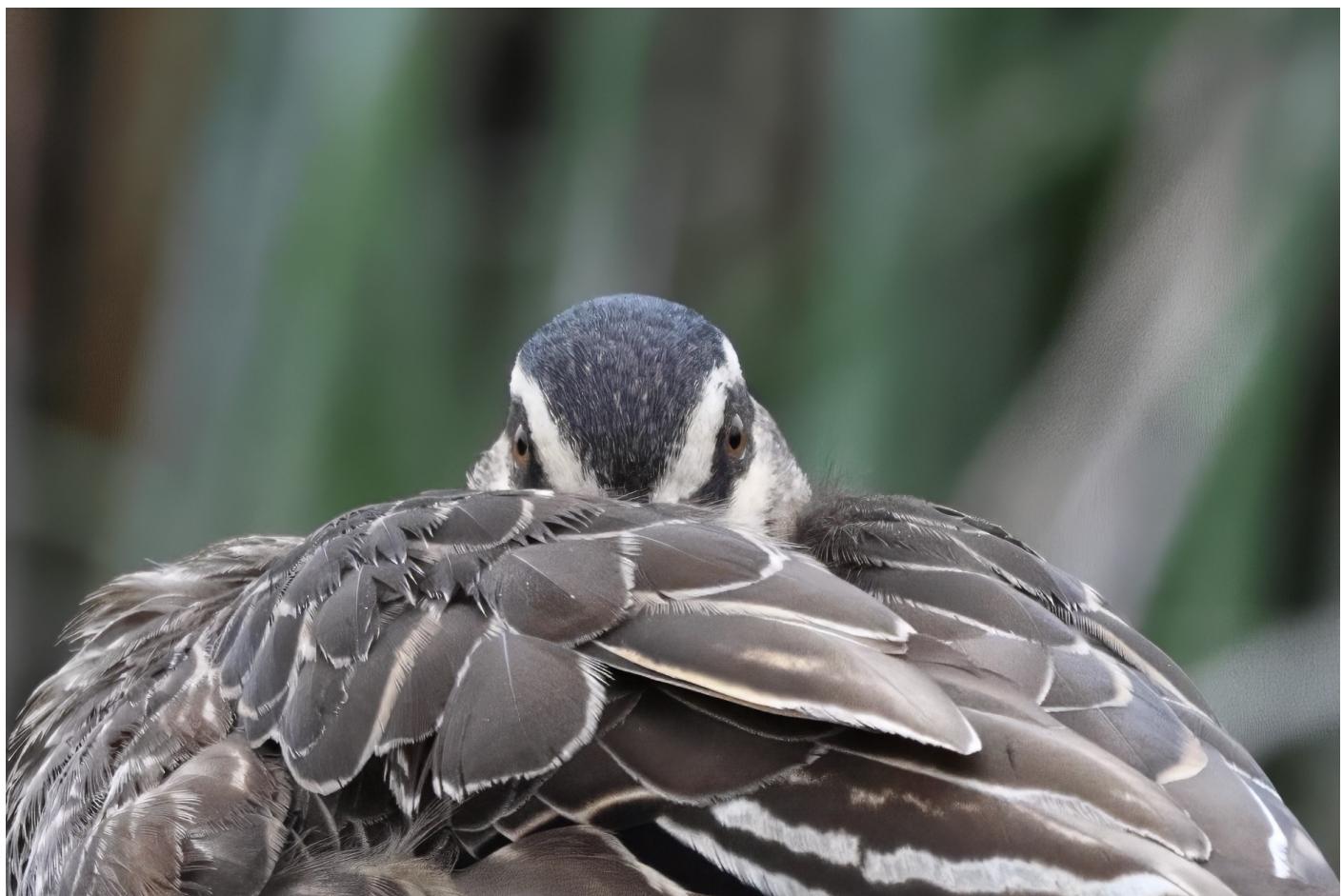
More wetland action ...



Above Left: The *Australasian (Purple) Swamphen* is the largest of the waterfowl you will see around **The Cape**. They also flick their white tail in a similar fashion to the *Spotted Crake*.



Above Right: The *Dusky Moorhen* is more often seen swimming in the open waters of the wetlands but also hides amongst the reeds at the water's edge.



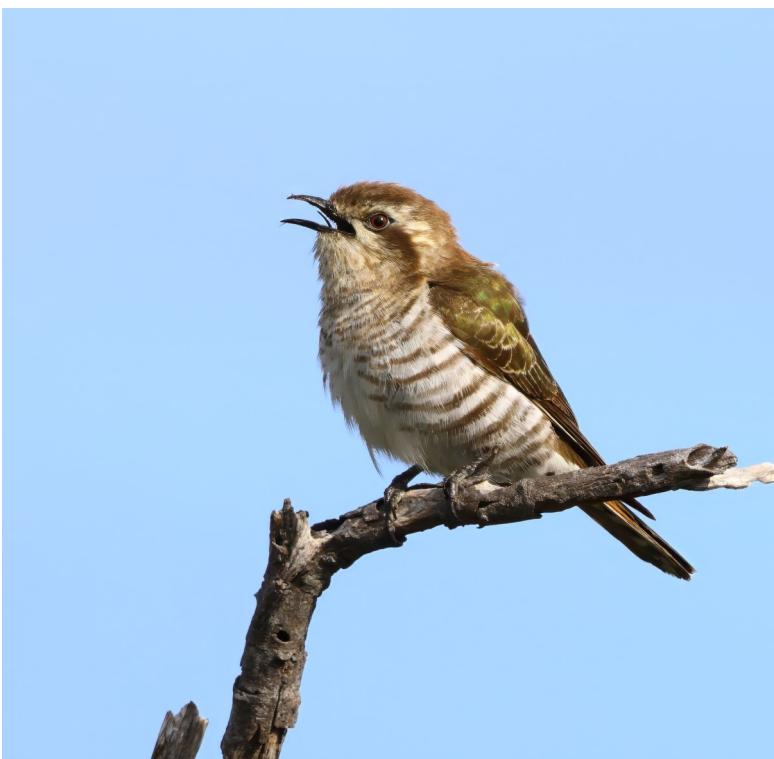
Above: The wetlands and creek line contain some wonderful habitat structure like logs and rocks for birds to roost, rest and preen. I just love the stare from this male *Pacific Black Duck* which was huddled up on a habitat log in one of the creek line ponds recently. These are fantastic safe havens for waterbirds, where they can hide from disturbances.

Bushland vocalists ...

Pause and listen, and you will hear a wonderful array of bushland vocalists singing in the coastal bush at the moment ... ranging from *Cuckoos*, *Honeyeaters* and the beautiful *Whistlers*. Here are a few highlights of recent times.



Above: The male *Crescent Honeyeater* is the most distinctive small *Honeyeater* call at the moment. A pair are regularly flying into our garden to feed (where this photo was taken) from the coastal reserve—a really special treat. We are only getting quick glimpses before the larger *wattlebirds* chase them away.



Above: The *Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo* is still bashing out its lovely songs in the bush and the *Fan-tailed Cuckoo* is not far behind it!

Whistlers and Robins ...



Above: Unlike the migratory *Flame Robin* which spends only the cooler months here, the *Eastern Yellow Robin* is an all-year round resident. Their standout yellow breasted plumage is a delight to see in the bush and I had fun photographing this bird recently in the south east of the estate where their calls can be heard.



Above: The *Rufous Whistler* is another dominant call emanating from the coastal bush at the moment. Another migratory species, it is one of two *Whistlers* species we have observed at **The Cape**, the other being the *Olive Whistler*. Both have the most beautiful songs.

Ground foragers ...

With the grass, weeds and herbaceous plants beginning to dry out, flowering and seeding, there is plenty to feast on for the ground foraging cockatoos and parrots.



Clockwise from top: Eastern Rosellas are busy feeding on seeds. The Little Corella flock size is lower than previous years as are the numbers of Galah. Also disappointingly low, were the numbers of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo in the area and only one confirmed sighting of the vulnerable Blue-winged Parrot. Lets hope that this is just a seasonal thing!

The smaller things in life ...

With the slightly warmer weather, there is a real buzz in the air. Over recent days I have seen several native *Blue-banded Bees* busy in the garden, small *Garden Skinks* are soaking up the late afternoon sun, and *Echidnas* are on the move.



Above: The stunning *Blue-banded Bee* in the garden feeding on from left, *Westringia* (Coastal Rosemary) and the bee attracting *Borage*.



Above: *Garden Skink* in the golden hour of late afternoon.



Above: *Echidna* on the roam along the central creek line in recent days.

Down at the beach ...

Further to the recent sighting of the young *Australian Fur Seal* (below right) comes another report in the similar location near F Break, of a *Sea Lion* on the rocks, blending in very well with the environment. Thanks to resident Graeme Campbell for the photo.



Recent Latham's Snipe Survey results ...

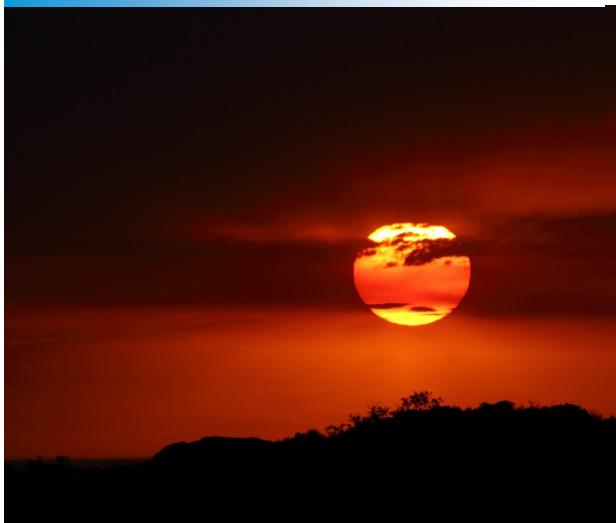
Another great result on the 11th November Snipe Survey with 32 *Latham's Snipe* observed throughout the estate, with the 'bog' near the central wetland, the creek line and new east-west ponds containing good numbers. The 'bog' had 20 snipe lift off as the counters made their way through! This spot is a great snipe spot and was thankfully retained by the Developer as crucial habitat for this threatened species. This was our best ever November result in the four years since we started (previous highest was 8). January is usually the time when we see many snipe, so this result is extremely pleasing.

Thanks to counters Jeannie, Gabi, Helen, Kerry, Joe and Ray for their wonderful work trudging through high water and thick growth of the wetlands.



Latham's Snipe breed in northern Japan during our winter and migrate to Australia for spring and summer.

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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