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## Cape Chatter

*Slithering into 2024 ...*

Welcome back to *Cape Chatter* for 2024. I hope everyone in Australia had a pleasant festive season break and followers in the northern hemisphere aren't freezing too much! The weather here in Cape has been a little different—we are yet to get any significant heat, it's been a tad humid along with some nice rain-fall to keep the environment fresh.

I have been spending a lot of my time on the beach monitoring my favourite local bird—the vulnerable *Hooded Plover*. More on how that's going next edition. Away from the coast, I haven't been looking too much beyond my local habitat area—the home garden—with the occasional visit to the nearby wetlands, creeks and ponds ... snake country! So here's what's happening.



The most common species of snake here is the *Lowland Copperhead*, 3 of 4 pictured here in varying degrees of beauty over recent days, in one of their favourite areas, Snake Gully, near the central wetland complex (aka Five\* snake habitat!). The milky complexion of this young snake (bottom left) I understand to be the snake preparing to shed its skin (moult) which snakes do as they grow and also as a way to rid themselves of parasites. The eyes are also not as clear as the beauties above. Fortunately, *Lowland Copperheads* are not aggressive snakes—they are shy by nature and will generally slither away. They will bite if aggressively disturbed and are venomous.

Thanks to residents Jacqui, TOC and Mary-Ann for alerting me to their presence.



## *Echidna's on the move ...*



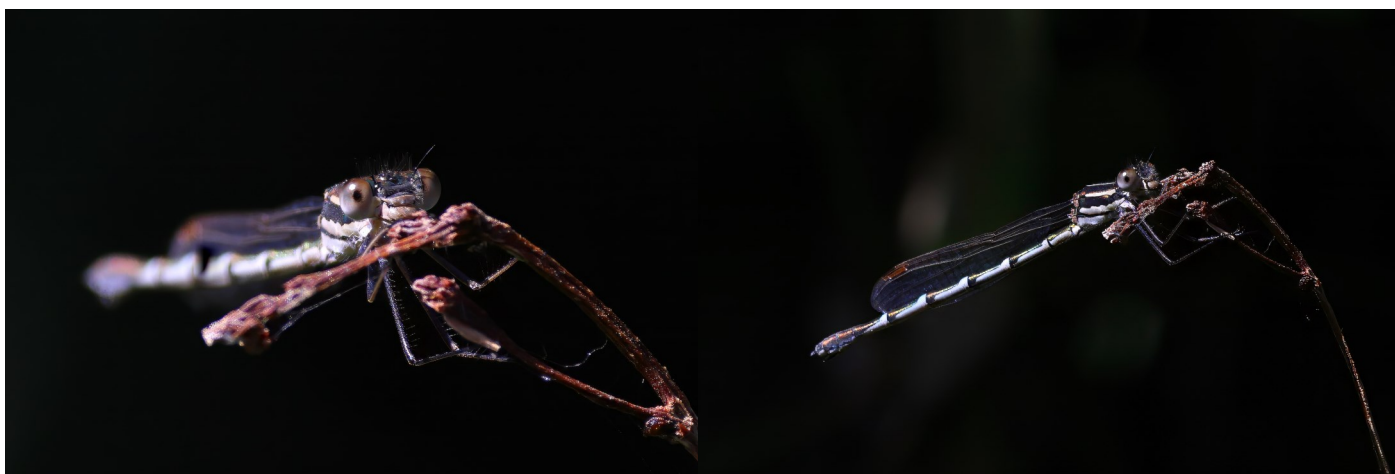
This *Echidna* was photographed yesterday near homes close to the mini-oval—thanks to resident Sheila for alerting me to its presence.

**Please drive and cycle slowly on the roads and be alert for wildlife—*Echidna's* aren't really fast and tend to lack any degree of road sense as we know it!**

Great to see several *Short-beaked Echidna's* roaming and waddling around the built-up area, with sightings among the housing zone and nearby open habitat. They are lovely creatures to watch go about their business, always on the lookout (well, actually sensing electrical signals) for ants, termites, worms and grubs with their pointy snouts, then licking up their prey with a long sticky tongue. If disturbed, they will dig themselves into the ground to protect themselves. If on a hard surface, they will curl up into a ball. If you see them like this, try and give them some space, so they can get back to the joy of foraging.



## *Here's looking at you kid ...*



Given the weather conditions, sightings of *Damselflies* (above) and *Dragonflies* (right) have been limited, but I am sure we will see increasing numbers as the weather warms up over February. The nearby wetlands are absolutely fantastic breeding grounds for freshwater nymphs which emerge into these stunning creatures. I am fascinated by their structural form, colours and their bulbous eyes. These photos were taken in the home garden habitat.

The easiest way to distinguish a *Damselfly* from a *Dragonfly*? *Damselflies* usually have their wings settled parallel to their body when landed and are more dainty/smaller; *Dragonflies* have their wings spread at right angles to the body when landed and tend to settle less.





## *Getting a buzz in the garden ...*

While there are plenty of introduced bees hanging about our gardens, it is rare to see native bees doing the important job of pollinating. So, it was with much excitement that native *Blue-banded Bees* were making regular visits to our garden recently. They were certainly contributing to the growth of our tomato plants and we are now enjoying the fruits of their labour! Borage was also popular.





## Wetland wanderings ...

Here is a snippet of what has been happening with birds around the various wetlands ....

### *Latham's Snipe ...*

The third and final survey of *Latham's Snipe* at **The Cape** was conducted on 13th January. We managed to see **17** Snipe, bringing the survey total for the season to **56** (compared to **43** last season), and the best result since we started. The January count was a bit lower than expected and went against the trend of being the best time for *Snipe* numbers. Recent rains and some nearby disturbances to habitat areas may have contributed to the result. Overall, the 'bog' remains the most prominent habitat for the *Snipe* followed by the south east natural wetlands. It is pleasing to see the central creek line and east-west ponds numbers on the rise as well.



Many thanks for residents Jeannie, Kerry, Joe, Ray, Gabi, Helen and Robyn for participating in the surveys and doing the hard yards by trudging through the mud and slush as well as avoiding the snakes. It is a bit of fun, but also important citizen science work to help preserve this threatened migratory wader from northern Japan.

## *A Nankeen Night Heron ... Bird # 134*



**Above:** Adult Nankeen Night Heron

During the *Snipe* survey, a largish, unusual bird was disturbed and took off from behind the bog in lumbering flight, did a circuit and landed in the nearby coastal reserve. This was the second time I had seen this bird in that week. Fortunately, Ray Farr had his camera and was able to get an identifying photo to confirm a new species for our list—No. **134**—a juvenile *Nankeen Night Heron*.

The juvenile bird has markedly different plumage to the adult (pictured left for reference—and a picture I did not take at **The Cape**) and has more streaked brown and white plumage. I am guessing this individual was just wandering through and checking things ... but a good sign they are checking this habitat out.

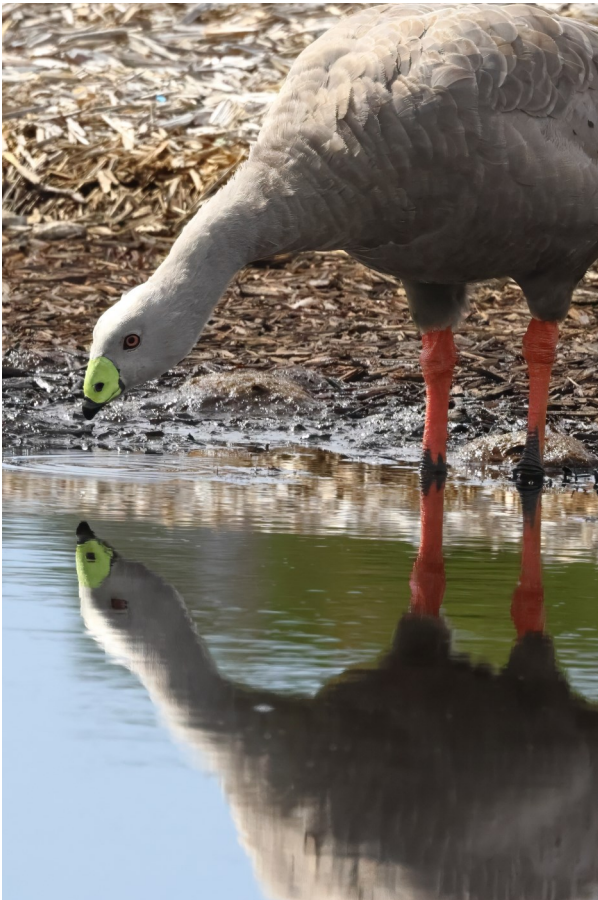


**Above Right:** The most common heron of **The Cape** is the *White-faced Heron*, seen here having a good old scratch atop a stag in the central creek line. These birds are at home around **The Cape** and along the rocky platforms of the beaches—best of both worlds!



## You Goose ...

Of course ... I didn't have the camera nearby, but it was an amazing scene to see a skein of **18 Cape Barren Geese** fly over **The Cape** recently. They were so low you could hear the gentle swish of the air moving over their powerful, slow flapping wings with the occasional *honk* call from a couple of the birds. A few days before, I also saw a gaggle of **8 Cape Barren Geese** land near the new south-west wetland and one particular bird settled for a few hours, so I managed to get a couple of shots after some *Hoodie* monitoring.



Although prevalent on the islands of Bass Strait and nearby Phillip Island, there occurrence on the mainland is rare, so I do not think we need to worry they will colonise locally .... otherwise we may be in trouble!!



## Garbage birds ...

The much maligned 'garbage bird', the *Australian White Ibis*, are currently hanging out foraging in good numbers on the open grassy spaces of **The Cape**—there must be some delicious grubs in the ground. The scourge of rubbish tips and public attractions, it is nice to see them feeding in their natural habitat and being wary of humans and other disturbances.

**Left:** Two adults and a juvenile in the middle, distinguished by its feathered head and neck—the adult has a bald head.



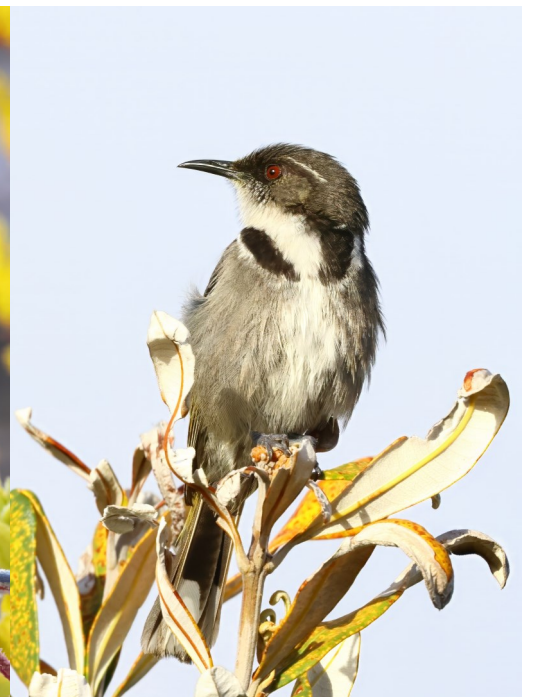


## *Birds in the home garden ...*



**Above:** *New Holland Honeyeaters* are still very active among the *Woolly Bush*, *Coastal Banksia* and *Kangaroo Paw*.

**Below:** The small but loud *Crescent Honeyeater* remain daily visitors feeding in the same plants.



The female *Crescent Honeyeater* (**left**) is less boldly marked than the male (**right**) which is distinguished by the bold black crescent markings on the sides of the neck/upper breast.

**The Cape** Bird Species List has been updated with the addition of bird number **134**, the *Nankeen Night Heron*. You can download it here:

<https://capechatter.com/the-cape-bird-species-list-and-brochure/>

## Brutal Silvereys ...

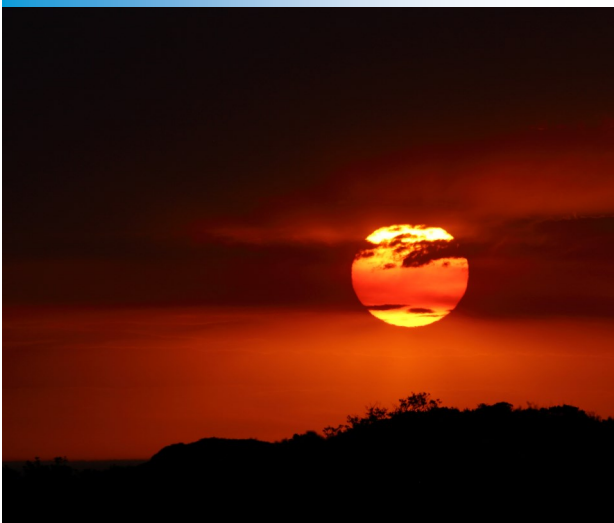
The tiny and very energetic *Silvereys* are extremely busy in the garden and natural habitats at the moment. They never seem to stop. If you see a small flock of noisy, fast moving birds—more than likely it is *Silvereys*. I was fascinated watching this one foraging in a native *Kennedia* creeper, finding a caterpillar and then proceeding to bash the living daylights out of it to soften it up before digesting it!



Nest issue of *Cape Chatter*, I will provide an update with photos on how the local *Hooded Plover* breeding season is tracking. The beaches will start to quieten down after this weekend, and we will be able to begin to gauge the extent of the breeding success for this season.

In the meantime, you can follow the progress of the local *Hooded Plover* breeding season by going to the *Cape Chatter* website: <https://capechatter.com/the-hooded-plovers-of-cape-paterson-2/> or if you are local, by scanning the QR on the Hoodie advisory signs at beach access points and on approaches to enclosures when erected.

### 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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