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## Nature Observations around The Cape



## Cape Chatter

## More habitat, more trees ... and more Koala?

**The Cape** lives in a challenging coastal environment that has become heavily degraded since European settlement. Extensive rewilding of the estate's drainage lines into reconstructed wetlands, ponds and creek line and retention of important habitat buffers with the adjoining Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Reserve have helped restore some of its past glory. However, there remains a dearth of trees, especially mature trees in the area, which are so important for a wide variety of fauna and a healthy ecology. In addition to the streetscape, pocket parks and creek line tree plantings, back in 2021, a community led project began to enhance the treed environment of **The Cape**. Project KOALA came into being and with the great support of the developer and the community of residents and owners, the resultant 'mini-forest' vegetation plots have proved a great success. Now it's time to extend the Project and develop further habitat links throughout the estate. **If you are a resident or owner at The Cape and want more trees in the landscape, get on board and lend a hand in this conservation project.** See event and registration details on the next page—it is happening just after Easter!



**Above:** No-one really knows how many *Koala* are resident in the local Cape Paterson population, like this one pictured near our mini plots. What we do know is that, unlike most other cross-bred *koala* in Victoria because of relocations, Cape's *koalas* are pure 'Strzelecki' from the Gippsland region. Hence they are extremely important in protecting the future of Australia's dwindling *koala* populations. As Cape develops, there is more pressure on habitat, so this project offers further corridors of their preferred food species, *Coastal Manna*, to support them.



**Above:** We do know that there are only 8 mature *Coastal Manna Gum* in the vicinity of **The Cape**. Some trees are estimated to be around 100 years old—true survivors! In Phase 1 of the Project, we planted almost 60 of the species as part of an overall planting of 600 different plants—and at last count, most are strong and healthy. The trees to be planted in Phase 2 have been grown from the seeds of these mature trees and raised in **The Cape Community Farm**. These plants are also providing the tube stock for an initiative by Cape Paterson residents **Robert and Virginia Hayward** who are generously donating trees free to local residents to plant in their gardens to provide more *Koala* habitat. A great community effort by all involved.



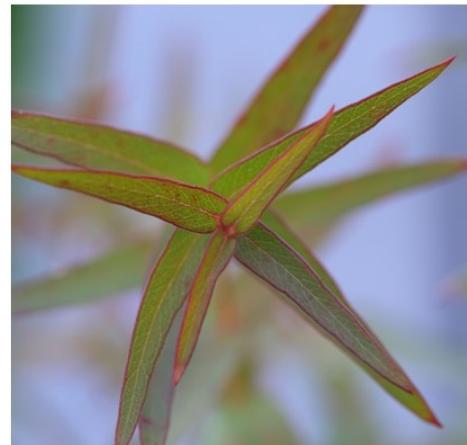
*A community led ecological restoration project to re-establish indigenous tree species to The Cape*

## Koala Project

### Phase 2

Project Koala started back in 2021 as a community led revegetation project designed to enhance the indigenous vegetation within The Cape and along the bordering Yallock-Bulluk Coastal Park. The aim is to provide additional and diverse habitat for local native animals with a focus on the local Cape Paterson Koala population. The initial focus was on the South East corner of The Cape (at the end of Sunlight Blvd). The community got together in late 2021 and planted a variety of trees, bushes and ground cover to create 'mini-forests' over 12 plots. The 12 plots include Manna Gums which provide food and shelter for our Koala population and create a Koala corridor.

Each plot was allocated a custodian (or a group) who watered the plants, weeded and generally looked after the plots for the first few years. The vegetation has grown significantly over the past 3 years and we have learnt what has worked well and we will be using these learnings to execute phase 2. It is enormous encouragement and a testament to the project when residents are seeing Koalas using these new habitats! We are very excited that the Phase 2 plots are almost prepared and we are getting ready to plant!



**Please see the below details, we would love the community to be involved in this fantastic project!**

**WHEN:** There will be two planting days; Tuesday 2nd April, 2024 at 9.30am and the second planting will be on Saturday 13th April at 11am.

**WHERE:** We will be meeting at the end of Sunlight Blvd

**WHAT TO BRING:** Dress in working/gardening clothes and enclosed footwear, bring gardening gloves, protective eyewear, a hat (or beanie!), gardening tools (but don't worry, we will have some), some water to keep you hydrated along with a sense of spirit and fun.

**AFTER:** Stay and enjoy a casual bbq. Please bring a plate to share (some sausages will be provided).



If you are keen to manage/maintain a plot or be involved in any way, could you let us know by registering your interest by email to John Godfrey at [john27rg@gmail.com](mailto:john27rg@gmail.com) by the 27th of March (for those who have already indicated your interest via Facebook, no need to do it again).

Please indicate:

- If you would like to be responsible for looking after a 'mini-forest plot' as a custodian.
- You would like to join in the Project on the day and are happy to help others in establishing a plot.

Please indicate which planting day you will be available.

We look forward to working with you on this cause in creating and giving back to the nature and wildlife around The Cape.

Any questions, please do not hesitate in contacting John Godfrey or David Hartney.

## Koala Project Phase 1— 30 months on ...

It has been amazing watching the progress of the first 12 mini-forest plots and seeing what has worked and what hasn't. Here is a progression of photos from the initial planting day from a selected plot, Plot 9, which was planted out and looked after by residents Jane and Martin Cox. Compact, layered plantings, and some maintenance in the first couple of years ... and it's working.



**Above:** Jane and Martin hard at it planting out their mini-forest plot on 11 Sep 21 and right, on 13 Sep 21, all finished.



**Above:** Plot 9 on 16 July 2022, barely a year old.

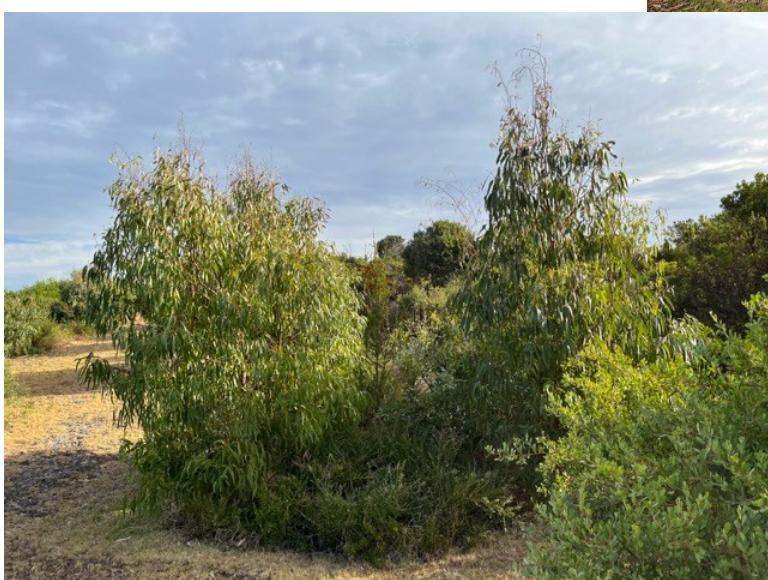
**Right:** Really looking good at the 2 year mark, photo taken on 13 Sep 23, with the Manna's and shrubs combining nicely and supporting each other.

**Left:** The plot at the 30 month mark. All the plants are well established and both the *Manna* and *Sweet Bursaria* have produced flowers.

### Did You Know??

Eight different, indigenous plants species were locally sourced and combined in the mini-forest plots: trees—*Coastal Manna Gum* and *Coastal Banksia*; shrubs—*Sweet Bursaria* and *Leucopogon*; small shrubs and grasses: *Lo-mandra*, *Rhagodia* and *Knobby Club Rush*; and ground covers *Tetragonia* and *Dichondra*.

All these plant species were used extensively by the traditional custodians of this land, the Bunurong people.



## Our rich waterway habitats ...

With no rain for many weeks now, the land is drying out and the ground cover is burning off, but the wonderful wetlands, ponds and creek line are providing important food and water for many animal species. Structures such as the tree stags, habitat logs and rocks are also vital components to this system. Recently, resident Anna noticed a *Eastern Snake-necked Turtle* near the east-west ponds to add to the growing list of invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles and mammals using these systems, along with many birds.

**Right:** *Eastern Snake-necked Turtle*, pictured by Anna, who carefully placed it back off the road and nearer the water. There have been several sightings of this species around the wet areas so please be mindful of their presence.



**Above:** The tiny *Brown Thornbill* are extremely busy foraging among the sedges and rushes of the wetlands.

**Right:** A male *Superb Fairy-wren* was using the creek line for a wash and preen while hiding among the thick vegetation from the bigger predators that are about.

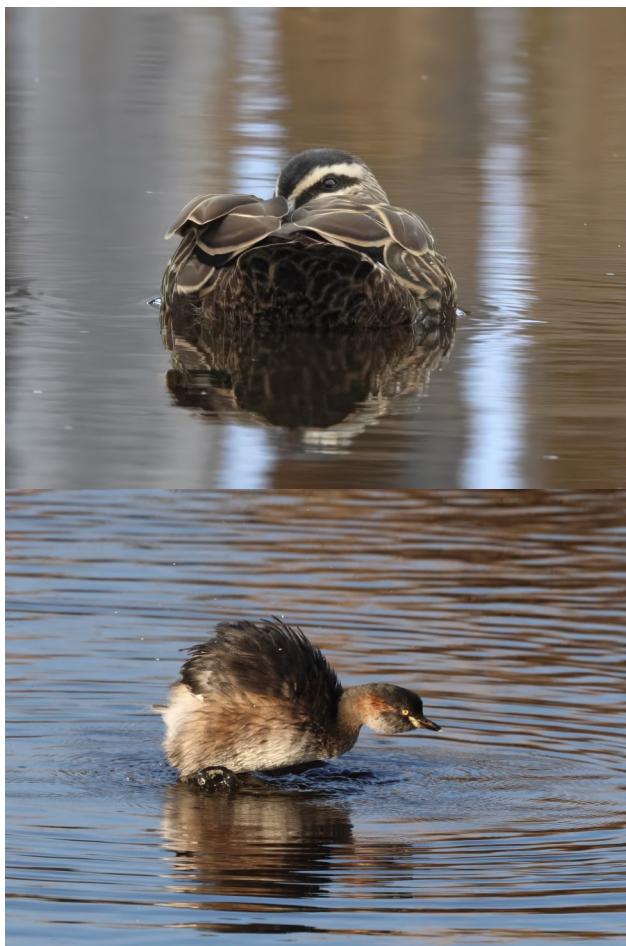


**Below:** *Black-shouldered Kite* are still around using the tree stags as perch points. The one on the left is lightening its load, which birds usually do before taking off in flight—an indicator for bird photographers!



## *Wetland bird variety ...*

While numbers are not big, there is a nice variety of waterbirds hanging out together among the water features.



*Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Australasian Grebe and Dusky Moorhen* are all sharing the plentiful water in the east-west ponds at the moment.



## Echidnas on the move ...



Plenty of *Echidna* sightings at the moment, with these unique creatures roaming the estate in search of food. They use all parts of the estate including the home garden habitats. A couple of days ago, one, which has been a regular recent visitor, wandered past the front doors. It reminded me of the time when neighbour Ian saw one walking past his front door and thought his Blundstone boots were going for a walk ... without him!! Here are a few photos of the little guy taken yesterday from the camouflage of my garden when he was wandering around the grounds of the vacant lot behind.



Another reminder to be careful driving cars, riding bikes and walking dogs, to ensure you are alert to these slow and shy creatures around the estate. Try and give them some distance if you see one on your travels. If disturbed, they will generally dig into the ground and stay still in this location until the threat disappears. Give them some space, and they will usually go on their way, slowly, and you will still get some nice opportunities to see them foraging.

## Galah numbers down??

We normally see bigger flocks of the ground feeding, playful and boisterous *Galah* at this time of the year. Maybe the dry conditions have them foraging further afield. I do miss the noisy antics of these cheeky birds as they go about their daily lot of play, bonding and quarrels!



# Move over Taylor Swift ... this is one tough bird!

A southerly change was associated with some reasonably hot weather recently and that occasionally signals the presence of a remarkable bird that spends the summer months in eastern and southern Australia. It is the *Fork-tailed Swift* (aka Pacific Swift), and I was alerted to their presence by local birder Geoff Glare. They were present over a couple of days and I managed to get a photograph of one on 11th March, the second day they were about. They are extremely difficult to photograph!

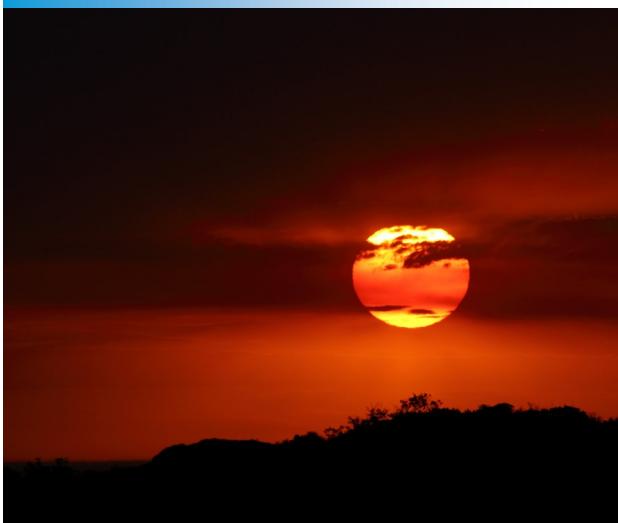


These remarkable birds migrate to Australia from NE Asia where they breed and spend October to April here. They can forage 'on the wing' in large flocks many hundreds of metres above the ground feeding on insects ahead of changes to weather systems. They have long wings and are very agile in flight, changing direction quickly as they pursue prey. I have recorded them here over the past four years bar one, and usually only see them once or twice in a summer season. Remarkably, they rarely land on the ground in Australia the whole time they are here.

## Other migratory birds ...

It's that time of the year again when birds are on the move. Migratory birds from the northern hemisphere that spent summer here are beginning their long flights back to their breeding grounds. The last *Latham's Snipe* I recorded at **The Cape** was on 11th March so they are probably gone and will be back in September. On the beaches, keep your eyes out for *Pacific Golden Plover* fattening up on the rocky shelves before their return to Alaska, and also *Double-banded Plover* a winter migrant from New Zealand which we have seen on the beaches while monitoring *Hooded Plovers*. The *Hoodies* have just about finished breeding and will soon disperse to their local winter flocking grounds where you can see them in small flocks. And, it will not be long before the beautiful *Flame Robins* return to **The Cape**, they are a joy to behold!

## 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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