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Cape Chatter

As time goes by ... following more of the water

In this issue, following on from *Cape Chatter No. 114*, we will look at the progress of another of the major water features at **The Cape**, the west-east 'chain of ponds', a series of three water bodies which were constructed in mid 2022, which are fed with water flow from the north western and north central part of the estate. With the winter solstice behind us and cooler weather about, animal activity, especially on the bird front, is subdued. The majority of birds about at the moment are the permanent residents or winter visitors, and it is not until late August/September, when we will start to see bird numbers rebuild and the visiting migrants from other parts of Australia and overseas arrive. In the meantime, here are a couple of colourful honeyeaters (*New Holland* and *Eastern Spinebill*) that are busy around **The Cape** at the moment, in battle for precious nectar against the larger honeyeaters, the *Red* and *Little Wattlebirds*.



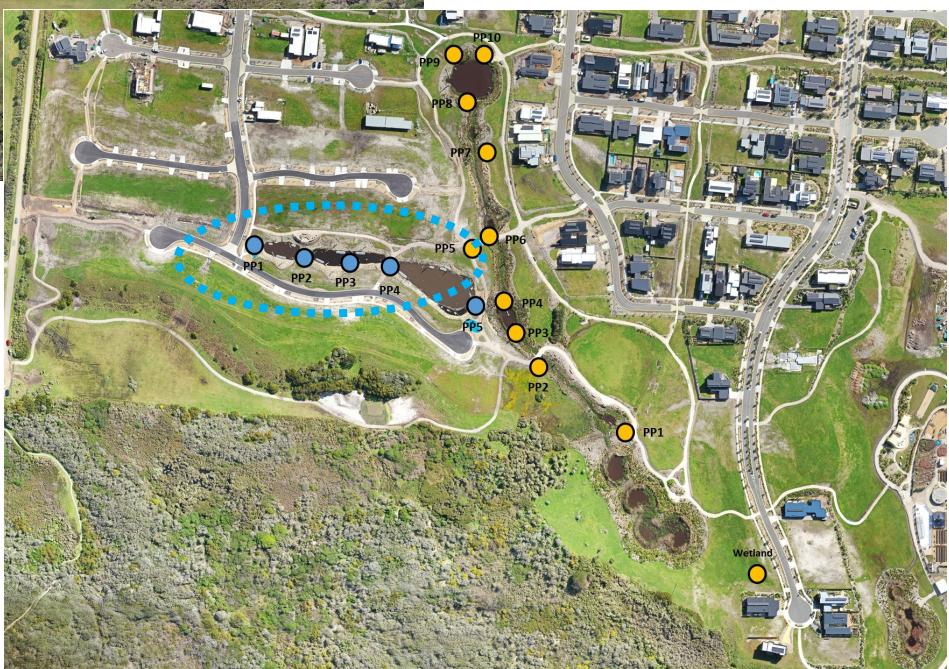
The west-east 'chain of ponds' ...

Last issue (No. 114), we looked at the progress of the central creek line and wetlands (from photo points annotated in yellow dots in the aerial below right). This issue, we look at the progress of the chain of three ponds, a natural drainage line that runs west-east through the estate, taking water from the west and north west of the estate, and feeding it into the central wetlands. Several photo points have been installed along the chain of ponds, which are annotated in the blue dots below within the blue dotted line.



Left: Aerial view of the natural drainage line within the dotted blue line, provided by **The Cape**, taken in September 2020. The area was boggy pasture grasses, interspersed with small tussocks of sedges and herbaceous ground covers.

Below: Landscape construction started mid 2022 building three separate but interconnected water bodies. Photo by **The Cape**.



Fauna count ...

The 'chain of ponds' are less vegetated than the central wetlands and creek line. Since August 2019, **44** bird species have been observed, comprising **13** freshwater, **23** land, **2** coastal and **6** introduced species, of which three, the *Great Egret*, *Blue-winged Parrot* (pictured below) and *Latham's Snipe*, are listed as **vulnerable** species. *Lowland Copperhead* snakes, several species of frog, *Eastern Snake-necked Turtle*, *Eastern Grey Kangaroo*, *Common Wombat* and *Short-beaked Echidna* have also been seen using this habitat.



Blue-winged Parrot country ...

The *Blue-winged Parrot* (left) was listed as a vulnerable species in 2023. Since observations started at **The Cape** in 2019, each year, varying numbers of these stunning parrots have been observed on the ground and in *Coastal Banksia*, either side of the natural drainage line in which the ponds now sit. They have normally congregated in small flocks during September to October, ground foraging on the seeds of chick-weed and cape weed, giving rise to the thinking that they are Tasmanian birds, returning to the island for summer breeding, much like its close relative, the critically endangered, *Orange-bellied Parrot*.

So much is unknown about this species. Observations at **The Cape** have been provided to the Bass Coast Birdlife Australia *Blue-winged Parrot Project* to help better understand the bird's breeding and movement behaviours. As new housing encroaches either side of this area, measures are being taken to provide more habitat. Specific species of plants favoured by these birds are to be planted in new wetland habitat in the south west corner of the estate. It is hoped the habitat buffer provided by the chain of ponds will continue to support the birds 'dropping by' in the September-October period as they have in the past.

The west-east 'chain of ponds' ... the top/western pond



Then—6th June 2022



Now—8th June 2024

Either side of this water body is a popular spot for the migratory *Flame Robins*, pictured below, which arrive in late April from their summer breeding areas (possibly Tasmania as they are known to migrate across Bass Strait).



Flame Robins love sitting on structures such as tree stags and fences from which they pounce onto the ground to catch tiny insect prey.



Teal country ...

The top pond is a favourite spot for the *Chestnut Teal*, pictured below left. These ducks are generally seen in pairs, and while they occupy other parts of the estate's water ecosystems, this top pond in particular is a popular haunt, especially as they roost on tree logs in the pond which provides an 'island of protection' to rest

Left: *Chestnut Teal* pair, on the log, the male left with the colourful green head and brown chest, and the female right.

The west-east 'chain of ponds' ... the central pond

The middle pond is a shallow water body that tends to dry out during low rain periods. It is also less vegetated, and consequently, has become a favourite roosting area in the summer months for the migratory wader from northern Japan, the vulnerable *Latham's Snipe* and a foraging spot for the vulnerable *Great Egret*, which is an occasional visitor.



Then—6 June 2022



Now—8 June 2024



Above: The vulnerable *Latham's Snipe*



Above: The vulnerable *Great Egret*

Long legs probing ...

Two long-legged water birds, both similar in appearance, are attracted to this pond—the *White-faced Heron* and *White-necked Heron*.



Above: Looking east over the central pond from blue PP2.

The *White-necked Heron*, (left) is larger than the *White-faced Heron* (right). Both birds are interesting to watch as they stand still, focussing intently, alert for prey, then strike quickly when anything is detected. They like the boggy edges of the pond but also will forage in shallow water. The *White-faced* can also be seen perched on the installed tree stags in the ponds, surveying the area and preening. They are at home on the coast as well and inhabit the rocky shelves of the nearby surf beaches.

The west-east 'chain of ponds' ... the bottom/eastern pond

The bottom (or eastern pond) is the largest and deepest of the water bodies and provides habitat which attracts a variety of duck and other waterfowl species. Either side of the eastern end before it joins the central creek line, there are two shallow kidney shaped overflow depressions, which have become important day time roosting spots for *Latham's Snipe*, with the occasional *Buff-banded Rail* visiting from the nearby wetlands and creek line.



Then—6 June 2022



Now—8 June 2024

Above: The secretive *Buff-banded Rail* often ventures into this pond from the nearby creek line. It either traverses across the walking trail or the concrete culvert connecting these two water bodies.

Below: The *Australasian Grebe* is another small, diving waterbird that has taken to this deeper pond, and is a regular sight here.

Above: Bottom pond, looking west from blue PP5.



The eastern/ deepest pond (cont) ...



Below: There is one little roosting spot in the middle of this pond which I call “duck island”. It is a popular habitat feature for the *Pacific Black Ducks* and *Chestnut Teals*, to rest, sleep and preen in relative safety.



The most dominant small birds in the bottom pond are the *Superb Fairy-wrens*, which are regularly seen flying among the sedges and reeds. During spring and summer, you are likely to see small flocks of the *European Goldfinch*, which forage in the grasses either side of the waterways and also use the water's edge to bathe and preen.

Below: Female *Superb Fairy Wren*



It is not uncommon to see several species of water-birds together on this pond, each going about their business with the occasional territorial spat.

Left: *Chestnut Teal*, *Pacific Black Duck* and *Australasian Grebe*, hanging out together.

Below: A species which has become very attached to this pond is the *Dusky Moorhen*, which can be often seen wandering the edges of the pond, constantly flicking its white tail.



Below: Like the *White-faced Heron*, the *Little Pied Cormorant* is also happy both on the coast or inland on the wetlands. The stags in the chain of ponds are a popular spot for this species to keep an eye on things.



Below: *European Goldfinch*

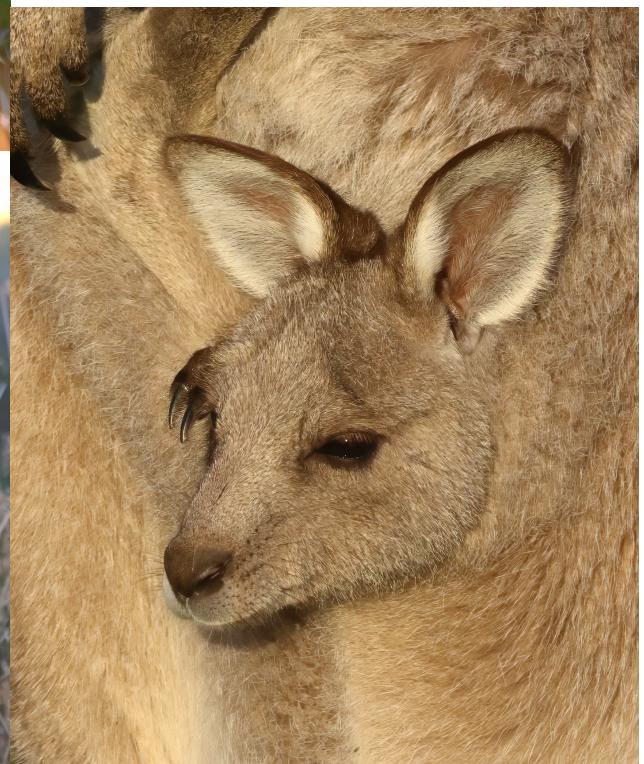


Golden hours and Kangaroos ...

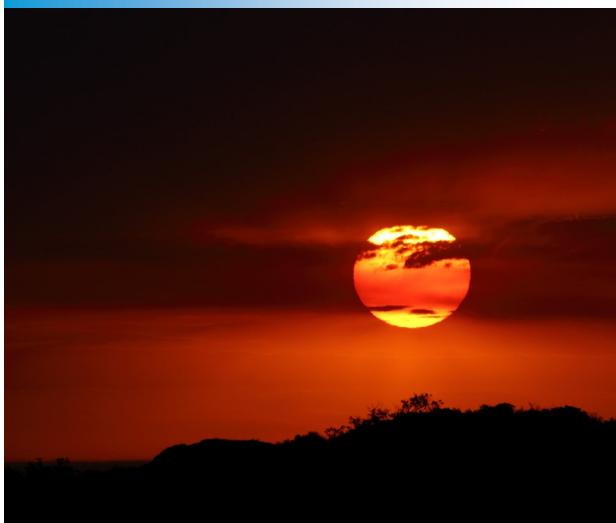


The low winter sun provides ideal light this time of year, and I have enjoyed photographing some of the local *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* mob within the estate's habitat areas, as they emerge just before the 'golden hour' to begin the nights foraging among the estate's open, grassy spaces.

It is also good to see the number of joeys presently, both in and out of pouch, which is helping to keep the mob population stable. 'Green Beach', the fenced off, habitat area behind the central wetland is a popular lay-up area for the mob—especially when the southerlies and south easterlies blow—as they tuck in behind the thick coastal reserve vegetation which acts as a windbreak! Smart!



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.

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