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Cape Chatter

What season is it ???

It is still officially winter, and last Sunday started out as a beautiful spring like (if not summer) day reaching a top temperature of around 23 degrees celsius. There was a ‘strange’ explosion of *dragonflies*—they were everywhere. I came across a *Short-beaked Echidna* wandering about—a bit earlier than normal? There were the calls of continental migratory birds in the area. There had been hints of early *Hooded Plover* nesting on the beaches. By late afternoon, a hailstorm arrived and since then, strong to gale force winds have continued to hit **The Cape** from the north-west. If you’re confused, imagine what it is like for the animals and birds trying to eke out a living. I haven’t seen a *dragonfly* since Sunday (they’re probably in New Zealand now) and any chance of *Hoodie* eggs surviving the wave surge and wind on the upper beaches is well and truly gone—washed into the wild waters of Bass Strait. And what about the full/blue/sturgeon moon on 19th August rising above Moonshadow Avenue!! Nature!



Animal Species List ...

After five years of observations, I have finally put together a handy brochure and species list for animals seen around **The Cape**. You can download it from the link below but it is also available at any time under the menu on the home page of the *Cape Chatter* website.

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

You can also download the latest version of **The Cape's Bird Species List and Brochure**, with the species total sitting at 136, at:

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



Darcy's domain ...

Those of you who have been following *Chatter* since it's inception would know **Darcy**, the male *Australian Magpie* (left). He has become a bit of a cult figure at **The Cape** over the past few years.

Darcy's territory encompasses the wetlands, mini-oval, central creek line and surrounds (including my lot!) east to Sunlight Blvd. **Darcy** also happens to be quite virile, has bred every year since I began observations in 2019 and produced quite a few offspring.

He is also very territorial and earnestly protects his breeding territory. Once you are mapped into his brain for being seen as a threat, you are an intruder for life. Such is my lot in life!

Well, **Mrs Darcy** (below) is nesting in **Green Beach** on the west side of the wetlands and **Darcy** has started defending his territory by swooping at humans and chasing other birds away. **So be warned!!**



Did you know?

- Only 25% of *Magpie* pairings breed
- Only the males swoop and of the breeding males, just 10% swoop to defend their territory
- The males defend the territory, the females build the nest and incubate the eggs. The male will feed the female while incubating.
- **Darcy** is not being aggressive, but defending his territory—after all, he was here before any of us moved in!
- **Darcy** will continue to defend the area, increasingly so, until the chicks fledge and will remain doing so for a bit longer until they are strong enough to look after themselves.
- **My advice if he has a go at you—stay well away from the area. Both you and him will be much less stressed.**



A quick stroll in between squalls ...

I managed a stroll with the camera a couple of days ago in the estate's south east sector protected from the majority of the wind and between rainy cold fronts. Quite a few small birds about—they're probably bunkered down at the moment!

Eastern Yellow Robin



European Goldfinch



Red-browed Finch



White-browed Scrub-wren



New Holland Honeyeater



Superb Fairy-wren—male breeding plumage



Continental migrants ...

Many of Australia's native birds move about the continent between seasons. Other birds remain resident in a particular territory. Resident Joe Spano has been hearing the calls of the *Fan-tailed Cuckoo* in the bush, returning south from inland parts of Australia to breed here over summer. They will soon be joined by the smaller *Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo* and *Shining Bronze Cuckoo*—producing lovely and distinctive calls in the coastal bush. Joe also heard a *Golden Whistler* a bit further afield and observed a *Flame Robin* on the Weathertop Crest ridge.



Flamin' interesting ...

Flame Robins (male flame red and female drab brown) move between summer breeding grounds in the higher country to lower areas in winter. Some even cross Bass Strait to breed in the Tasmania summer.

We generally see these birds at **The Cape** for a period in April and then they reappear around August-September, which leads me to think they may in fact be Tasmanian birds coming and going. Imagine trying to cross Bass Strait in these windy conditions (all 11-15 grams of them)!

Another bird we see at **The Cape** I suspect does something similar to this is the vulnerable *Blue-winged Parrot* of which a lot is not known, but it is known that some do return to Tasmania to breed just like the critically endangered *Orange-bellied Parrot*. I saw five of the BWP recently near the F Break car park on Wilson Rd. Both the *Flame Robin* and *Blue-winged Parrot* have loved using the ridge on Weathertop Crest in the past—possibly a launching place for the return with views of the Strait.



Another tiny bird, the *Silvereye* (*spp. lateralis*), pictured above, also crosses the Strait. This little tiny ball of energy (weighing in between 9-15 grams) is a Tasmanian bird that prefers not to spend winter there. It comes north in autumn and moves up into Queensland for the warmth. We tend to see a few around as they travel through, but there is another sub-species—*westernensis*—which lacks the brown flank of the Tassie bird above, that is common here in summer but not so in the winter months. And then there's the *Crescent Honeyeater* (left) which I also think is possibly a Tasmanian bird!

So many comings and goings!

Adaptable Ducks ...

Ducks don't always just float around on water quacking! They use a variety of habitats to forage and breed. Of the species observed around **The Cape**, some use both freshwater and salty/brackish habitats, including the coast, some nest in tree hollows or old, disused bird nests, while others nest on the ground among dense vegetation. It all depends on what is available.

The *Pacific Black Duck* is our most common duck species. They can be seen hanging about home gardens, wetlands, creek line ponds, marshy bogs and open space grassy areas. Keep your eyes peeled in coming weeks for ducklings, especially around the wetlands, where they use the thick sedges and reeds for protection.



Dotterels ...

Another continental migratory bird is the *Black-fronted Dotterel* (pictured left). They arrive as the weather starts to warm up as well. I caught a glimpse of my first *Dotterel* for the season on the edge of the Wilson Rd dam last week. They do use **The Cape's** habitat and you are more likely to see them in the creek line and east-west ponds where the vegetation is not too thick. They like to have clear lines of sight to look out for predators. Do they look similar to another bird I bang on about quite a bit?? Yes, the *Hooded Plover*, (pictured below) which was previously known as the *Hooded Dotterel*. Both are shorebirds, but you will not generally see the *Black-fronted* on the beach and you definitely won't see a *Hoodie* inland around here.



Both birds have similar breeding and behaviour patterns: they lay eggs in the open in a shallow scrape; they are very protective of their nests and chicks when they hatch; and they scurry about foraging in quick, short running bursts. While the *Black-fronted* are dispersive and found inland near freshwater sources, the *Hoodie* remains firmly planted on the high energy beaches of southern Australia's coastline. So don't get too excited thinking you have seen a *Hoodie* running around **The Cape**!

Other interesting bird observations ...

I have noticed increasing raptor activity (coinciding with the spring breeding season for many birds and animals). Both a *Nankeen Kestrel* and a *Swamp Harrier* (below) have been checking out **The Cape** habitat recently sending the *Galahs*, *Mud Larks* and *Magpies* into a frenzy! The *Galahs* in particular chase away these birds of prey as a flock which is quite interesting to see.



Resident Joe Spano and I have recently been hearing the calls of the elusive small waterfowl, the *Spotless Crake* at various locations within the estate. I finally spotted a pair for the first time in the small wetland between the off leash dog park and the community farm. These are very secretive birds, heard more than seen. I didn't manage a photograph, they are way too quick, so I have included this photo I took earlier this year at the Western Treatment Plant, Werribee, for reference.

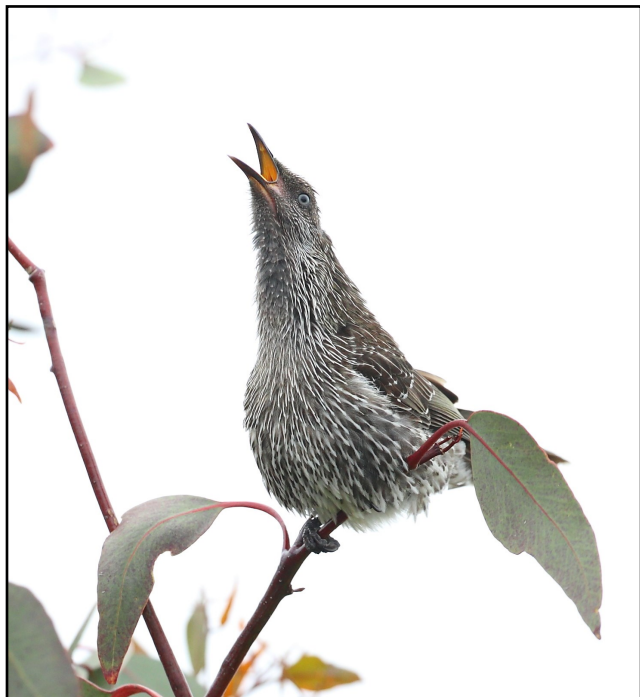


A *Little Black Cormorant*, (below) the least common of the *Cormorant* species seen at *The Cape*, was showing interest in the new south west wetland recently, by sitting on a habitat log and foraging in the deeper waters of the moat surrounding the central island. Photo taken on the coast for reference.



Who needs an alarm!!

The native honeyeater, the *Little Wattlebird*, (below) would have to be the most active and noisy bird around the estate. It is breeding time, and they are busy defending their territory and food supplies, and are particularly fond of the *Coastal Banksia* habitat lining the streets. They also happen to beat all the other birds in being the early risers in the morning, and they don't do anything quietly. No more sleep-ins for a while!



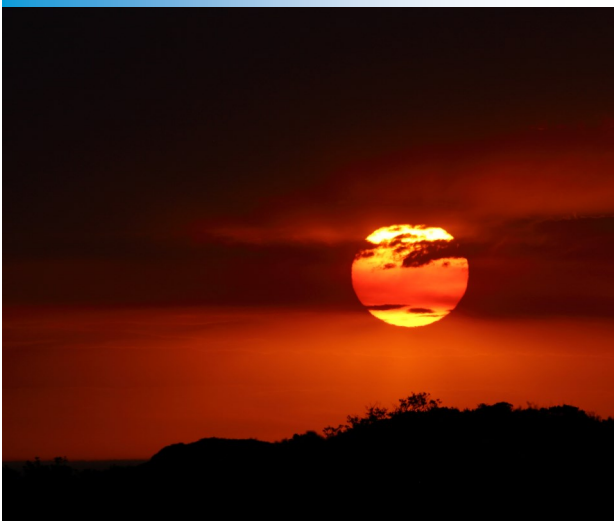
Road safety ...

I was quite taken by this series of photos I took of a *Rainbow Lorikeet* in a *Coastal Banksia* tree on Sunlight Boulevard recently. Look each way before you cross the road!



*Please drive and cycle carefully
and slowly around the estate and
be aware of wildlife moving
around.*

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.

Contact David by email or through the website to report interesting nature observations at **The Cape**.

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