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## Cape Chatter

### *The winds of change ...*

**The Cape** (along with a good proportion of the Victoria coast and inland) was blasted with a strong series of wet, windy cold fronts since last *Chatter*, and it is only now we are getting some reprieve. With no major landmass protection between Cape Paterson and the Antarctic, we certainly felt the full brunt of nature's power. This was particularly evident on the nearby beaches behind the estate with extensive damage to the beach and foredunes, which are now looking very fragile. I managed one walk around **The Cape** with the camera when we had a brief break in the winds, and was quite surprised to see a variety of birds and animals about—I wonder where they hang out when it's blowing a gale, especially the small birds? We are in a seasonal change with some of our migratory birds arriving both on land and along the coast, including the first *Latham's Snipe* from northern Japan.

### *It is whistling time ...*



Following on from fellow resident Joe Spano's report of the *Golden Whistler* calling around Cape Paterson in the last *Chatter*, closer to home, two other beautiful songsters have been seen and heard calling at **The Cape**. The *Olive Whistler* (above left) and the *Rufous Whistler* (above right) have been belting out some stunning calls in the coastal bush. The *Rufous* is nationally widespread and more common than the *Olive*, which has a smaller range and is more often heard than observed. The *Olive* is a regular spring/summer visitor here, feeding low in the coastal bush, but occasionally it pops its head up to perform a song!

## *Pristine coast ... not quite, and it's very fragile at the moment*

Our beaches may look perfect, but when you take a closer look, they are not as pristine as they may appear. Over the past month, volunteers from **Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast, Cape Paterson Residents and Ratepayers Association** and **South Gippsland Conservation Society**, came together in a series of weeding bees along the Bunurong coast to help eradicate the invasive weed, *Sea Spurge*. Organised by **BirdLife Australia** with funding from the Federal Government's **Saving Native Species** Program, it was conducted under strict environmental and cultural heritage permits in approved areas. *Sea Spurge* is one of many threats *Hooded Plovers* face when breeding, as it causes thick monoculture weed thickets on foredunes, one of the *Hoodies* preferred nesting locations. As *Hoodies* like to see any approaching threats, *Sea Spurge*, if left unchecked, can block the line of sight when birds are incubating eggs on nests, inhibiting any protective action they may be able to take.



*Photo credit: Barry James*



*Photo credit: Jim Barritt*

The coast is a sensitive cultural and ecological area, particularly the foredunes and dune systems, and following the wild weather, they are in a very fragile condition. Presently, (see pictures above) large fracture lines are present along the dune fronts and foredunes have been undermined, causing some areas to collapse. These areas will reshape over time, but presently, they are just hanging in there. The upper beaches and foredunes constitute around 70% of *Hooded Plover* breeding habitat in this region, and the foredunes are extremely important, so it will be interesting to observe how this breeding season rolls out and how the birds adapt to the 'new' beach morphology.

*Staying out of the dunes and not walking on the foredunes is more important than ever! If you can, avoid high tide and keep to the waters edge when walking — it's the way to go, not just for the birds, but for beach health and cultural heritage protection!!*



*Thanks to the great work over previous years by volunteers of the **Cape Paterson Resident and Ratepayers Association** who have contributed greatly to keeping invasive plant species at bay on the local foreshores, unlike many other beaches along the coast.*

## *Plastic and rubbish ... not so pristine!*

During the weeding bees, various items of rubbish and beach detritus were collected, including a road traffic stop sign on a metal pole and a 'witches hat' found deep in one of the dune systems! Go figure! Along with broken glass bottles and evidence of camp fire sites, there is obviously plenty of human action in the dunes (and no permit required!!). Another alarming fact is the amount of fishing tackle and small plastic debris washed up along the high water mark—let alone the amount of micro and nano plastic items that cannot be seen in the sand and water. These are serious issues for the health and ecology of our beaches and dune systems which are important habitats for our wildlife.



A Tasmanian study in 2023 found *Hooded Plovers* were very much at risk of being affected by micro and nano plastics, consumed either directly from the sand or from their prey. It found *Hoodie* guano (their poo) contained three times more plastics on average than the larger *Pied Oystercatcher*, another shorebird, probably because *Hoodies* forage in more shallow water where plastic concentrations are higher. Plastics can leach toxic additives and accumulate to obstruct digestive systems of the birds.



While large items of rubbish are not commonly seen on our beaches, beyond the dreamy social media images of our coastline, a problem lurks, especially for our seabirds and shorebirds. Plastic consumption and entanglement is a serious threat for birds and other animals, small to large.

This small sample of detritus (left) was collected in a very short section (about 1 m x 20 m) of the local 2nd Surf Beach while *Hoodie* monitoring a couple of days ago. It contains synthetic strands, fishing tackle and an array of broken down plastic in various shapes and sizes. At first, most of the white stuff looks like broken cuttlefish and shell, but a closer look reveals the true source.

Entanglement is a problem for many creatures at sea, but on the beaches, it can also lead to a painful death or serious injury.

Locally, there is one *Hooded Plover* (flagged **Orange KK**, below) who has one foot missing from a fishing line entanglement. **KK** is a very lucky bird, as she was able to survive and get on with life. She is now approaching 15 years of age and is the proud mother of five fledglings over many years of breeding.



You can read more about the study in this article at: [Shorebird breakfasts come with a side of plastic – Earth News | Particle \(scitech.org.au\)](#)

*Just another thing Hooded Plovers need to deal with, along with their struggle against habitat disturbance, invasive species and climate change.*

**Left:** The high water mark where the plastic and other detritus was collected on 2nd Surf Beach.

You can do your bit to help by picking up any rubbish or plastic items you see before it has a chance of breaking down in the ocean or causing entanglement of the wildlife.

## *Don't get ahead of oneself ...*

Back in *Cape Chatter* #117, I mentioned that it looked like we might be getting ahead of mange in our local *wombats* with no sightings of affected animals around the estate for some time. Well, that didn't last long—I came across an adult *wombat* (below) with mange last week! Not in really bad condition, but enough to know it won't get any better without treatment. Late yesterday, resident 'wombat whisperer' Jeannie, observed another wombat but it was in 'pristine' condition—so not all hope is lost!



If you see a wombat with mange, please call **Mange Management** on **0431 600 125** and they will arrange for treatment if it's possible.

## *Newest member of the mob ...*

Also back in *Cape Chatter* #117, I wrote about the *Red Fox* problem and asked for any 'out of the box' ideas that could address this issue. I also wrote about what has been done in the past. I still believe a holistic approach by Land Mangers and land owners can control this issue. Something needs to be done otherwise all the great local conservation work will be for nought and we will see many threatened native species disappear for good. I still welcome any innovative ideas to jot down on my blank piece of paper!

*Red Fox, casually hanging out with the mob in 'Green Beach' a couple of days ago!*



## Honeyeater time ...

Despite the windy weather, there is a lot of *Honeyeater* activity currently around **The Cape** with both the numbers of birds and species looking good. Here is a selection of what's about (other than the *Wattlebirds*!)



**Clockwise from above:** *Crescent Honeyeater* in the bird bath at home, *Yellow-faced Honeyeater*, *New Holland Honeyeater* and *White-eared Honeyeater* in the coastal bush.

## New bird species spotted ...

Hawk-eye resident Joe Spano spotted and heard a female *King Parrot* in Periwinkle Pl a few days back. He didn't manage to get a photo, so I have used one of mine (below) from another location for reference. Keep your eyes out for this bird—I wouldn't expect to see it very often as it is not ideal habitat. But you never know!



**Right:** Have you noticed the noisy flock of *Little Corellas* are beginning to appear around the estate? Expect them to get louder, and for the *Galab* flock to thin out as they go off to breeding areas where there are tree hollows (wherever they are!)



## *Bird observations between the squalls...*

Like I said, I wonder where all the little birds go too when the gale force wind and rain is about? When there is a break in the weather, they make the most of it. These particular birds are quite active—well it is breeding season—and when they get the chance, they are into it! Most of these are resident birds of the area, however, the *Grey Fantail* (in full voice **bottom left**), their numbers fluctuate and are at their peak over spring-summer period and the *Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo* (**bottom right**) is a migratory bird, just arrived.

*Photo credit: Joe Spano*



**Clockwise from left:** I just love this photo by resident Joe Spano of the *White-browed Scrub-wren* with a tasty snack. These are extremely active and fast birds usually hanging about thick scrub, and Joe has done a wonderful job getting this picture. Thanks for sharing Joe.

*Eastern Yellow Robin* (**below**) is seriously giving me the stare! A bit easier to photograph because they generally pause for a moment perched in the open before diving to the ground to pounce on prey. **Below left:** is the tiny *Brown Thornbill*—again, a very active and fast bird. I managed to get a couple of shots while it was preening!

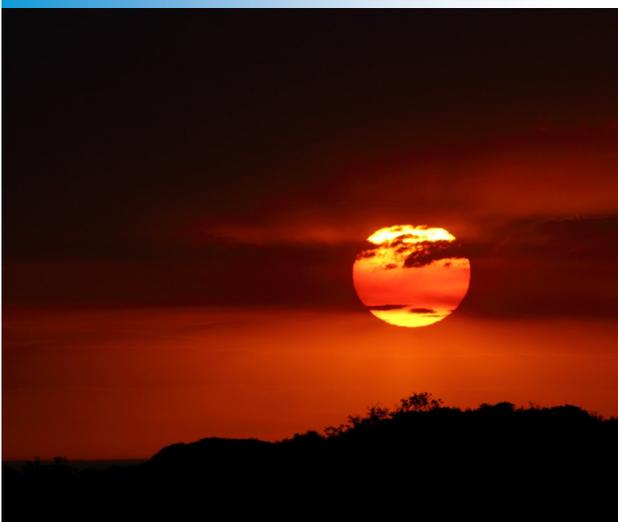


## Promiscuous Fairy-wrens ...

I took this photo of a breeding pair (?) of resident *Superb Fairy-wren* a few days back in the coastal heath in the south east of the estate. The male in his striking, blue coloured suit and the female dressed in brown predominantly, the male with the black bill and female, a rusty brown. But, did you know that *Fairy-wrens* are socially monogamous and **sexually promiscuous**: pairs will bond for life, though both males and females will regularly mate with other individuals. So, a proportion of young will have been fathered by males from outside the group, with research indicating 95% of broods and 76% of young are linked to extra-pair paternity!!



### 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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