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Nature Observations around The Cape



Cape Chatter

Whistling and buzzing ... the sounds of nature

A stroll around **The Cape** habitat zones and along the coastal reserve pathways to the beach is revealing a symphony of natural sound ... the birds are in full voice and the pollinators are buzzing, making the most of the flowering weeds, herbaceous plants and flowers on the native plants. There has been an explosion of native *Hoverfly* competing with the introduced *European Honey Bee* which are everywhere. A walk in the home garden reveals the same! What a great time for connecting, observing and listening to the natural world. It really is the time for the 'birds and the bees'.

Here is a small example of the invertebrates which have been seen recently in the home garden and around the natural habitat—*Long-legged Fly*, *Hoverfly*, *European Bee* and a pair of *Hoverfly*—making more!



Olive Whistler!

I have quite a few 'favourite' birds. It's hard to pick 'the one', but this bird has to be near the top of the list. The *Olive Whistler*, along with the cuckoos, are the real indicators that we are in a seasonal change for birds. The cuckoos, the *Fan-tailed*, *Horsfield's Bronze* and *Shining Bronze*, have distinctive calls ringing out in the bush. They are currently being very evasive at my attempts to photograph them. But, a day or so ago I had some luck and did manage to cross paths with an *Olive Whistler* in the south east of the estate—a true songster! What a few minutes of delight it was!



This is a male *Olive Whistler*. This uncommon species usually spends much of its time in the thick undergrowth of the coastal bush habitat, but occasionally pops out to make contact calls. Their song repertoire is very impressive. Is there a partner out there?



New Bittern habitat area ...

Over the past couple of weeks, the final piece of wetland habitat in the southwest of the estate has been planted out with thousands of plants. The “**Bittern Wetland**” has been designed to attract the endangered *Australasian Bittern*, a rare and secretive wetland bird known to be in the area. The wetland, designed by expert Damien Cook, comprises an island planted with *phragmites* reed and is surrounded by a range of ephemeral, shallow marsh and deep marsh plantings. There are further plantings of mixed native plants and shrubs on the outside edges to buffer the wetland from disturbances. The plant selection and design may also provide additional habitat for two other vulnerable bird species that visit **The Cape**—*Latham’s Snipe* and *Blue-winged Parrot*.

Australasian Bittern in flight at Piccaninnie Ponds, South Australia.



Australasian Bittern love thick reed vegetation to hide, forage and breed.

On 13th October, a community planting day was held and around 40 residents of **The Cape** including 10 children, got their hands dirty and did their bit to help in the conservation of the species. It was a fun time and we all learnt a little more about this secretive bird and the basis of the design and plant selection of the wetland.



A number of photo-points have been established to photo-document the development of the wetland over time. We are very interested to see how this takes shape and look forward to the range of animal species that will use it. Again, many thanks to **Brendan Condon** and his **landscape team** from **The Cape** for establishing this wonderful habitat as part of the estate’s conservation strategy. Thanks also to the volunteer planters and ‘**Farmer AJ**’ and the **Cape Community Farm** for propagating some of the plants.

Bird breeding ...

All quiet on the *Hooded Plover* breeding front—the birds seem to be struggling with both the adverse weather and the changes to the coastal morphology, as much of their breeding territories have been washed away by storm surge and strong winds in September. We are hoping as things settle, the birds will begin nesting and they may breed later into the season if conditions are right.



All the breeding pairs (like nearby locals **White XR** and **White AS** pictured **left**) are back on their territories but are sometimes joined by other birds forming small flocks, which is normally a behaviour we see in the non-breeding period.



The four egg *Masked Lapwing* nest found in Stage 4 area (pictured **left**) has **failed**. Last time I checked all the eggs were gone before the estimated date of hatching. Not sure what happened, but most likely predation by *Raven* or *Fox*, hopefully not human!



Today, I noticed the first hatchling from Mr and Mrs **Darcy**, the *Australian Magpies*, in the breeding area in **Green Beach** beyond the central wetland and oval. Both mum and dad were feeding the young one with worms. I am not sure how many hatchlings there are at this stage. **Beware, Darcy is a notorious swooper!** I recommend avoiding the area for a few more weeks as he will become even more protective until the young can fend for themselves against threats. I do avoid the area, but a few days back, **Darcy** still managed to swoop me at the top pond of the central creek line, some 400m away, where I thought I would be safe. He had a gob full of worms as he swooped over me and dropped a calling card (poop) as he flew away! Put me in my place! **Enter his territory at your own risk!**



Little Pied Cormorant roost ...and other bird things

There is a natural wetland/melaleuca swamp at the southern end of the central wetland complex where water fills the area before finding it's way to the coast. I have noticed several times now around dusk a number of *Little Pied Cormorants* descending into this area, returning from feeding around the estate and along the coast during the day. It is obviously a good spot because up to six birds were seen in the area recently preparing to roost for the night. Maybe a little *cormorant* colony is forming here!



There's nothing like the splashes of colour flying around in our habitats to catch your attention! The birds are making the most of the conditions with ample nectar rich food, luscious grasses and roots, and plenty of invertebrates in the air to feast on. **Clockwise from above:** the *Red-browed Finch* and *Eastern Rosella* are busy feeding on flowering weeds and grass roots; the *Silveryeye* and *Superb Fairy-wren* are frantically chasing insects to fill up and fuel their energetic behaviours.

Echidna ... tick!

Many small mammals are out and about roaming now. I have been seeing quite a few *Bush Rats* in the south east corner scurrying into the thick vegetation and *Short-beaked Echidna* are also on the move. This particular *echidna* encounter over the weekend started with this mid sized *echidna* wandering down south down Sunlight Blvd, crossing the road into Moonshadow Ave (fortunately no cars). Several minutes later it appeared in our front garden and finally in our back yard sliding under the gate! It proceeded to have a drink from a small dish of water as it meandered about under the *dianella* and over the *dichondra*. Later in the day, it was back out front again with its nose stuck into some old rotting logs we have as habitat, which are currently full of ants. It was having a wonderful time.



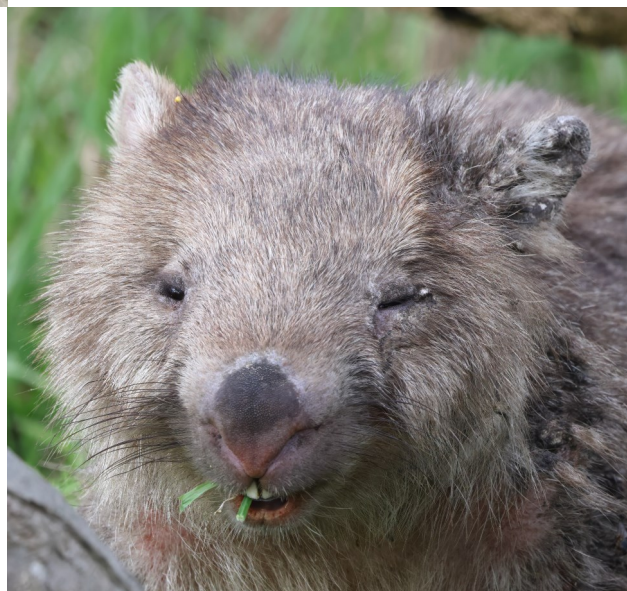
It was only afterwards when processing the photos that I noticed the strange 'white growths' in each of its ear slots which was unusual. A bit of research reveals they are most likely 'echidna ticks' (*Aponomma concolor*) which can cause amnesia and dermatitis. Many of our native, wild animals carry ticks, so let's hope this little, unique, spiky wonder can get on with life without too much of a problem. **Please drive slowly!**

Mange ... mite!

Sadly, I came across a *Common Wombat* (**below**) in the estate's southeast with mange. It was in a pretty bad way suffering from fur loss and open, bleeding wounds.

I have chosen not to show you the sides of the animal which were badly infected and raw, one eye was closed with one ear looking pretty awful. Fortunately, it was able to be located again one afternoon in the area it was first seen, and was treated under a Mange Management protocol to rid the parasitic mite which causes this terrible condition. We are hoping it has been treated at a stage where it may lead to a recovery. Again, great work by the Mange Management volunteers who work tirelessly to treat these amazing animals.

*If you see a wombat out in daylight grazing, it is more than likely got mange. It is treatable. If you see one, please call Mange Management on **0431 600 125** and they will arrange for a local volunteer to try and treat it.*

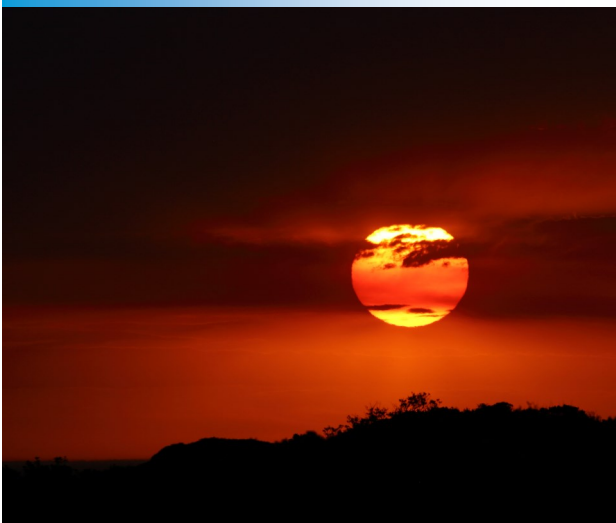


A moon half full!!

I was out early Saturday evening looking for a comet that was apparently around just as the sun sunk below the horizon! Couldn't see it, but did fluke a handheld shot of the moon—I understand it is a *waxing gibbous*! An ending on a bright note!



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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