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Issue No. 132

Nature Observations around The Cape

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Cape Chatter

Difficult times ...

The local countryside continues to look really dry and brown with little rain. My few walks around the edge of the bush adjoining the estate reveals an eerie quiet from the small bush birds we would expect to hear this time of the year. Much of the bush is dotted with brown vegetation, displaying signs of stress and death from a lack of moisture. There is a little tinge of green in the open spaces, but the growth is nowhere near lush! Several of the constructed ponds are empty and water levels in the wetlands is just hanging in there while the creek line is down to a very slow trickle. These green arteries of the wetlands and moist home gardens continue to provide vital habitat. Tough times continue for our native animals as they eek out a living. Nectar, a few seeds and the occasional invertebrate are keeping the small birds going while the larger birds and invasive species seem to be well adapted to these times.



Above: A female *Grey Shrike-thrush* in the home garden. One of my favourite native birds because of its beautiful whistling and song calls which ring out distinctively around the estate and the coastal bush. It is doing well at the moment, gleaning and probing for invertebrates among trees and on the ground, and making the most of home garden habitats. Usually seen and heard in pairs calling to each other as they forage. Remember to keep the bird baths topped up and filled with clean water regularly!

Hooded Plover podcast ...

I recently had the opportunity to be part of a podcast with Dr Kasun Ekanayake from BirdLife Australia produced by the West Gippsland Catchment Authority on the work going into saving *Hooded Plovers* from extinction by BirdLife Australia, partners and volunteers. The podcast which goes for around 23 minutes provides very good background into this community-based conservation program, the challenges facing these shorebirds and the work done by volunteers and other authorities like the WGCMA in helping save the species. The program is a great team effort. In my opinion one of Australia's most successful community based conservation programs and I am privileged to be a part of it and helping in some way to protect this highly vulnerable species. You can listen to the podcast, *No 76: Hope for Hoodies* in the *Gippslandscapes* series through this link: <https://wgcm.vic.gov.au/podcast-76-hope-for-hoodies/> or wherever you get your podcasts.

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Podcast #76: Hope for Hoodies

There's a whole lotta plover love in this episode of *Gippslandscapes* when we chat with Hooded Plover guru Kasun Ekanayake from BirdLife Australia about the plight of the plover, their tenacity in raising chicks on busy summer beaches and how devoted volunteers like David Hartney from Friends of the Hooded Plover – Bass Coast and South Gippsland, are helping to save the species from extinction by protecting their vulnerable nests and chicks from threats of people, pets and predators.



Hope for Hoodies

GIPPSLANDSCAPES PODCAST - EPISODE 76

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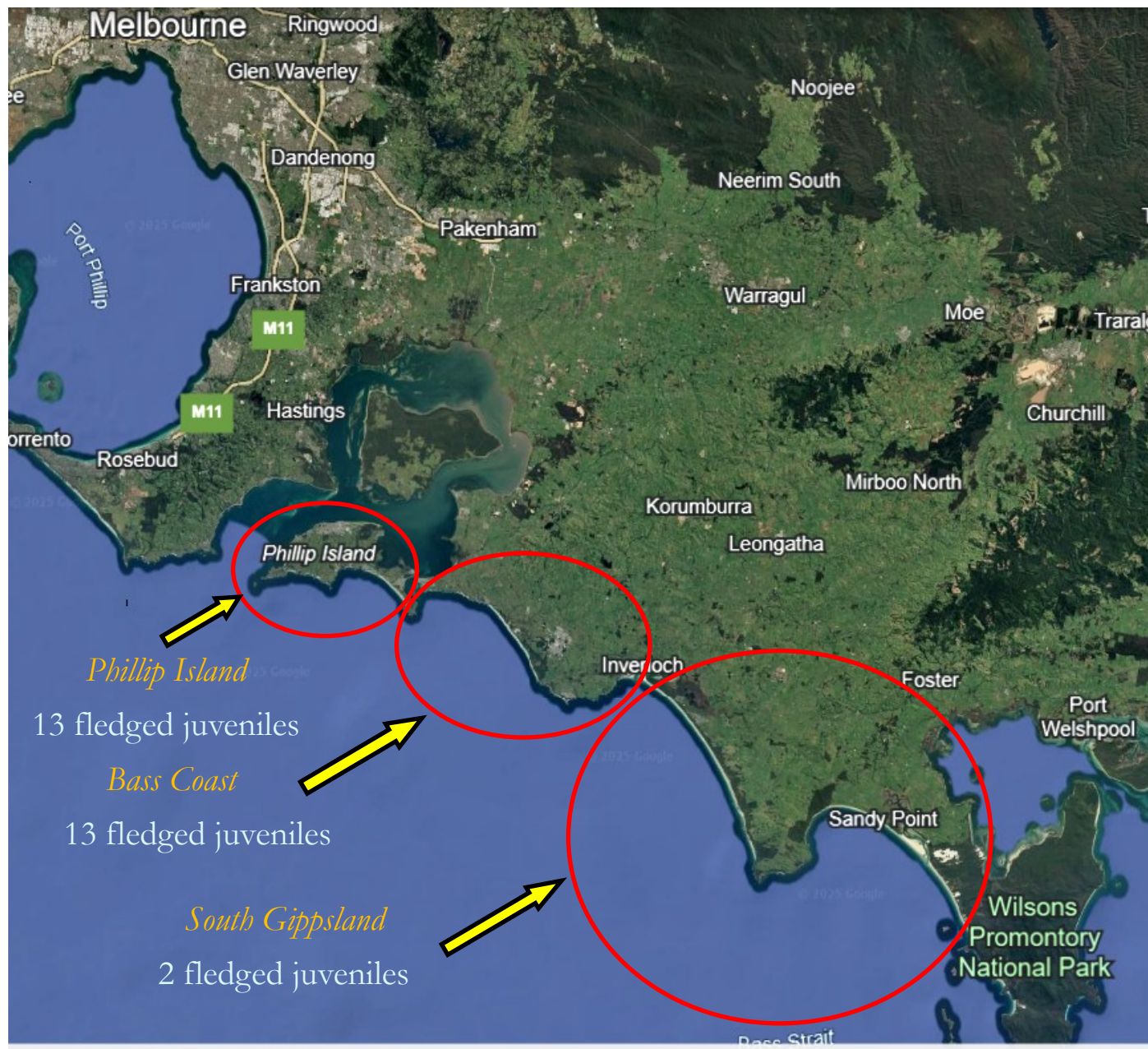
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The Hoodie numbers are in ... that's a season wrap

We have the **unofficial** fledge tally for the southwest Gippsland coastline. A total of 28 fledged *Hooded Plovers* were recorded for the 2024/25 breeding season which has now concluded. Phillip Island contributed 13 juveniles, Bass Coast 13 and South Gippsland 2! The whole total for Victoria was 67—so this area represents about 40% of the state total. Bass Coast represents the second largest population of *Hooded Plovers* in Victoria and is an important coastline for the survival of this species.



CAPE PATERSON TO HARMERS HAVEN
BREEDING SUMMARY 2024-2025

NUMBER OF BREEDING PAIRS	NUMBER OF EGGS	NUMBER OF CHICKS	NUMBER OF FLEDGE
			
7	31	9	2
LT Av 11 yrs	38	8.8	2.7

Left: Our local summary with the 11 year average below in small print.

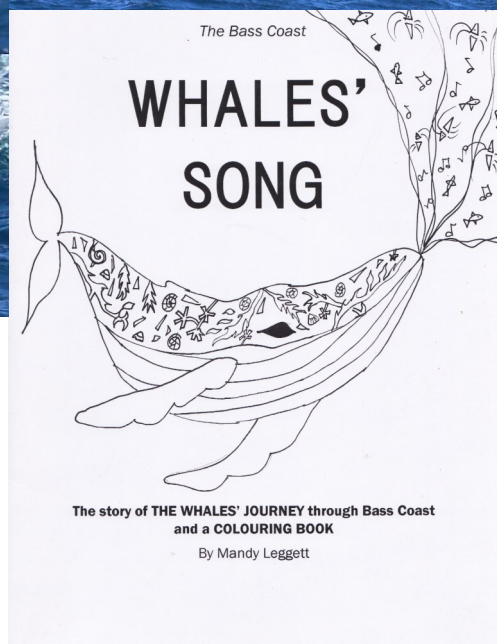
A huge thanks to our local volunteer Hooded Plover monitors who completed around 520 individual monitoring visits between early August to late April looking out for the seven breeding pairs between Cape Paterson and Harmers Haven. A huge effort—now that is some volunteering!

Speaking of pods—whales are moving northwards ...

The northward migration of *Humpback* whales from Antarctica has started with a sighting (thanks Joe Spano) off F Break last week. The numbers of whales will slowly increase over coming weeks as part of the massive migration to calving areas off north east Australia. Keep your eyes out for blows and breaches. Occasionally, whales will come in close to shore, but most of the action is well out, and the best chance of getting a closer look is to get on board a local whale watching cruise, from which these photos were taken a few years ago. Another good time to see them is in October when they return south, but most of these whales turn off and head south from Wilson's Prom using the East Australian Current, and you are less likely to see them off the Bunurong Coast.

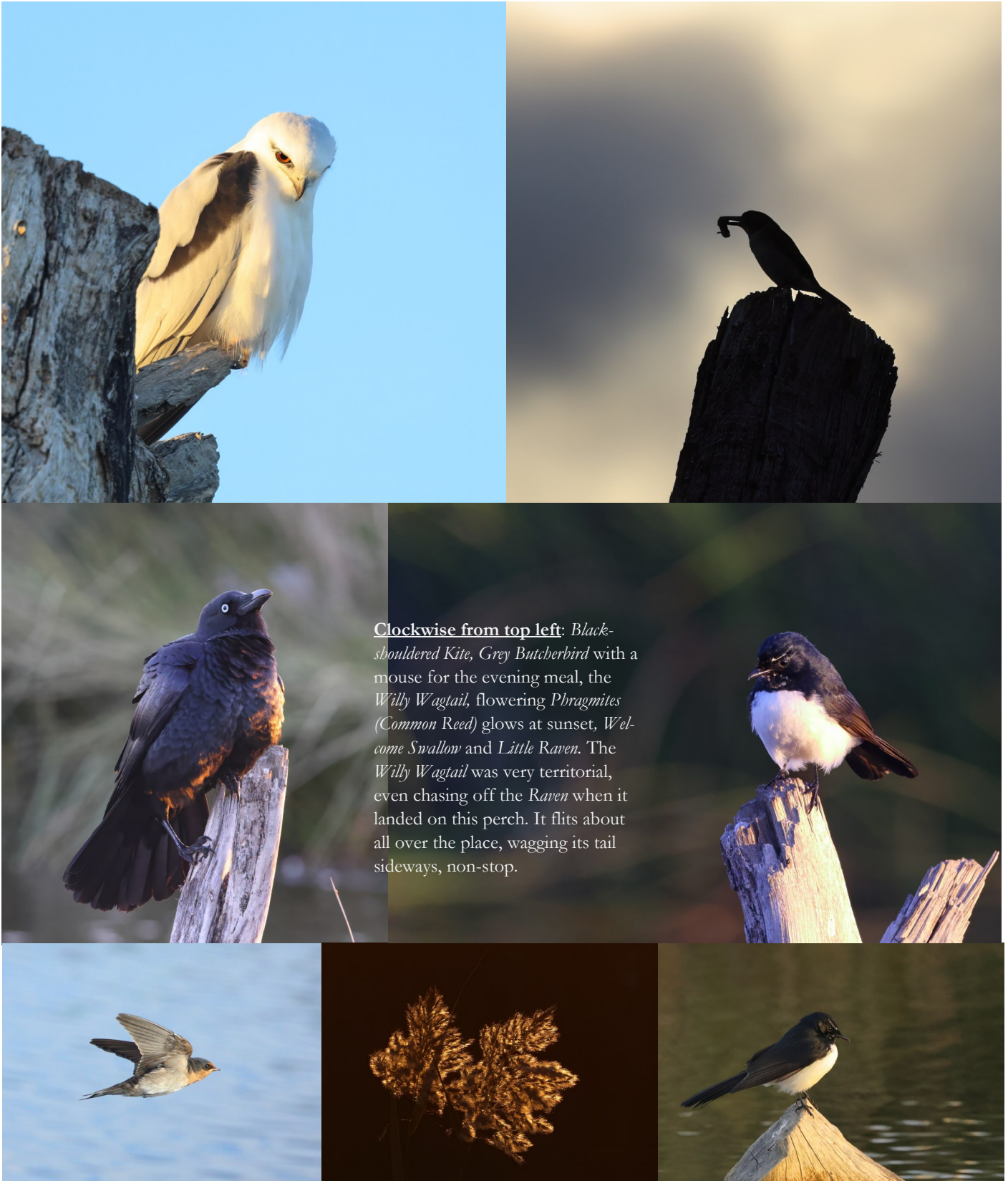


I have a few copies of local Mandy Leggett's ***'The Bass Coast Whales' Song'*** available to purchase for \$10 cash. A lovely story and colouring book for children which encapsulates beautifully the whales' wanderings along the Bass/Bunurong Coast. Get in touch with me at dwhartney@bigpond.com if you want to get hold of one.



What's happening in the wetlands

Most of the bird action is centred on these valuable arteries of moisture and vegetation—the wetlands, creek line and chain of ponds. And it's just not the waterbirds using these areas—with regular visitations by many land based birds utilising what is available. Small birds such as the *Willy Wagtail*, *Superb Fairy-wren*, *Brown Thornbill* and *Eastern Spinebill* can be seen flitting about the vegetation in search of insects, the *Welcome Swallows* are constant visitors gliding low over the water, *Galahs* are coming in for an afternoon drink after a busy day doing what *Galahs* do, and *Little Ravens* pop in occasionally to peruse the scene. And above on the top of the stags, the *Black-shoulder Kite* and *Grey Butcherbird* are forever watchful and ready to pounce on some unsuspecting prey.

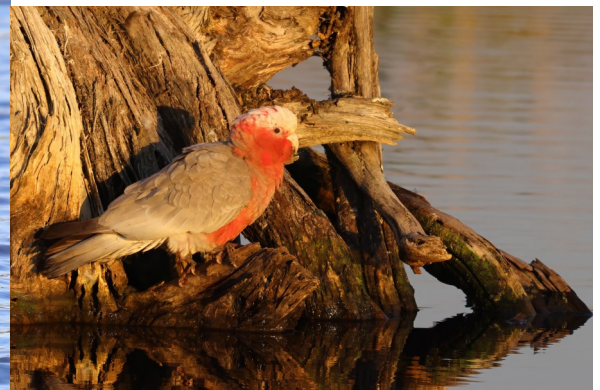


Clockwise from top left: *Black-shouldered Kite*, *Grey Butcherbird* with a mouse for the evening meal, the *Willy Wagtail*, flowering *Phragmites* (*Common Reed*) glows at sunset, *Welcome Swallow* and *Little Raven*. The *Willy Wagtail* was very territorial, even chasing off the *Raven* when it landed on this perch. It flits about all over the place, wagging its tail sideways, non-stop.

It's tiring and thirsty work being a Galah!



You could watch these amazing cockatoos for hours as they get up to their various antics around the estate. They eek a living out by chewing up grass roots and eating seeds when available, in between all sorts of play and socializing. It was all too much for this young one (top left) who had to have a little kip while the rest of the flock were madly chewing into the kikuyu grass. They make the most of the ponds and installed perches to drink at the end of a hectic day.



Scintillating Spinebills ...

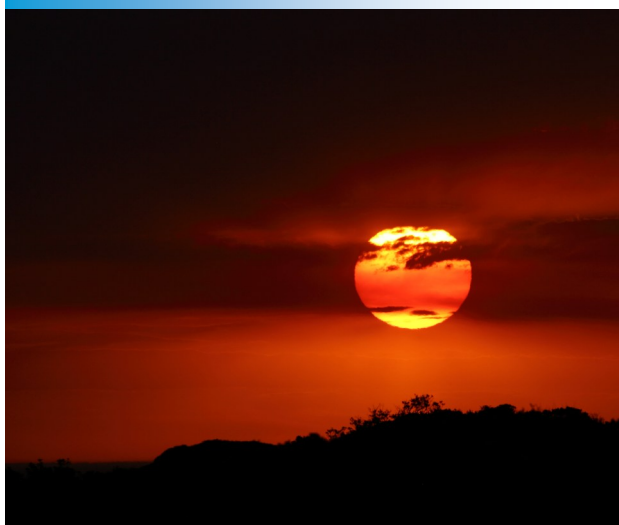


There are still plenty of sightings of *Eastern Spinebill* in the garden and among the wetlands vegetation. Last issue of *Cape Chatter*, I noted a family group of three in the home garden with pictures of the female. Here are the rest of the clan: an immature on the left (looks like it might become a male) and on the right, the male with the black head cap. Plenty of pollen on their bills and face!

Bright eyes ... love those Eastern Grey Kangaroo faces



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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