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## Cape Chatter

### *Winter 'blues' ... not for these folk!*

We are now into the depths of winter—cool to cold days have set in along with some much needed rain, but we need so much more water to rehydrate the environment. Recent strolls around the various habitats of **The Cape** revealed not too much in the way of wildlife and bird activity—not unusual for this time of year—but there are some species that actually chose to be here during these wintry times and you'd be surprised what may pop up if you are lucky and patient. The real action will start in the next month or so when we start to see migratory bird species arriving from various parts of Australia and the northern hemisphere. So here is a snippet of some recent observations.



Believe it or not, these two birds actually choose to spend the cooler periods of the year in our coastal environment. Both are honeyeaters, *Eastern Spinebill* (left) and *Crescent Honeyeater* (right), two of the **11** honeyeater species so far observed at **The Cape**. In the words of my bird reference book, both are '*gregarious, noisy, and pugnacious*' - they are very active and fast as well! Read on ...

### *The Birdman of Cape Paterson ...*

*Cape Chatter* recently featured in an article in the wonderful, community based online newspaper, the digital *Bass Coast Post*. The article by editor Catherine Watson, captures the essence of what *Chatter* is all about. You can read the full article at this link:

<https://www.basscoastpost.com/nature-notes/the-birdman-of-cape-paterson>

## *The Eastern Spinebill ...*



*Eastern Spinebill* are small, fast and have a down curved bill designed for extracting nectar from flowers. They move out of the high country and wet forests of SE Australia and are regular winter time visitors to **The Cape**. They can be spotted around the various habitats within the estate, but are easily seen when visiting the home garden where they extract both nectar and skillfully catch various insects and spiders. Notice the pollen on their bill and face—most likely from the *Coastal Banksia*. So they are great pollinators as well! **Top left** is an immature bird, **top right** the female with grey head and the male **below**, with the black head. All photos taken in my home garden in recent weeks. Stunning little birds with a distinctive piping whistle which can be heard from quite a distance!





## *The Crescent Honeyeater ...*



The *Crescent Honeyeater*, a bit bigger by a couple of grams compared to the *Spinebill*, is another *honeyeater* that withdraws from the cool mountain forests and wet coastal forests to spend time along the coast of SE Australia during the cooler months. It is far more common in Tasmania and less so on the mainland, but is a regular seasonal visitor to **The Cape** where it can be found in most habitats. The pair of males (**top images**) were observed in my home garden over the weekend, making lots of noise (there may have been a female around?) and trying to avoid the territorial *Little Wattlebirds*. A female (**above right**) was spotted on a tree stag in the creek line recently along with a male a week or so ago. The female lacks the black crescent on its chest of the male (after which it is named) — and is more of a faded/shadowy brown. I have observed the birds in spring and summer as well here, like this juvenile (**bottom left**) which was observed a few years back in the November period. Like the *Spinebill*, these are mainly nectar feeders (again note the yellow pollen on head and bill and the long tongue) but will also forage on insects and spiders in the air and on the ground.



## *The 'lone' Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo ...*



The streets of **The Cape** are lined with *Coastal Banksia* which are currently flowering and causing tense, territorial battles among nectar competing *Rainbow Lorikeets*, *Little* and *Red Wattlebirds* along with the *honeyeaters*. Occasionally, *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos* drop by to pick among the cones, like this lone female. Over the last weekend, with cold weather and light rain falling, she perched quietly for a rest late in the day. Normally, cockatoos hang out in pairs or small family groups, however this lone bird has been hanging around the estate for several weeks now so I am not sure what's going on. *Yellow-tailed Cockies* also move to coast/lowland areas after breeding in the higher ranges in summer. Back in July 2020, an aggregation of over 100 birds was seen in the 'Lone Pine' near the central wetlands. It was a sight to behold and nothing like that has been observed since at **The Cape**.



## *A quick 'brush' with an uncommon bird ... bird species 144*

I was recently dawdling along **The Cape's** Weathertop Crest which runs parallel to the 'ancient', undulating sand dune ridge with pretty good views of Bass Strait, hoping to see a vulnerable *Blue-winged Parrot*. It has been a favourite spot for them around this time of year until early October.. But no luck!. I did, however, notice a *pigeon* shaped bird foraging on the open grassland that looked a bit different to our common species—the native *Crested Pigeon* and introduced *Spotted Dove*. I managed to get a quick distant photo (**below**) and later identified the bird as the uncommon *Brush Bronzewing*. A new species for our bird list—number **144!**

I have uploaded a new *Bird Species List (v 8)* for **The Cape** to *Cape Chatter* which can be found here:

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



It soon disappeared over the ridge—bugger—there went the chance for some better shots! Neighbour Kieran was out and about at the time and he gestured to me that the bird was further west along the ridge. Off I stumbled to get a few more shots. Turns out this other bird was in fact a female *Common Bronzewing* (**below**)! While more common than the *Brush*, this is only the third sighting of this species at **The Cape** since 2019—the other two sightings by resident Joe S. So a nice day for unusual native birds. These birds are usually very wary and difficult to see so I am pretty happy we now have a photographic record of these two species in the estate.





## *Other pigeon species at The Cape—spot the difference!*

Three other pigeon species have been observed at **The Cape**—the introduced *Rock Dove* (aka feral pigeon), the *Spotted (Turtle) Dove* and the native *Crested Pigeon*. Fortunately we don't see too many of the *Rock Doves*, but the other two are regularly seen throughout the estate and are often seen foraging together. Along with the *bronzewings*, they can look similar from a distance from their plump body shape and iridescent colourings, but the *Crested Pidgeon* is easily recognized by the 'crest', the distinctive whistling of its wings when in flight and raising of the tail when it lands.



## Love is in the air ...

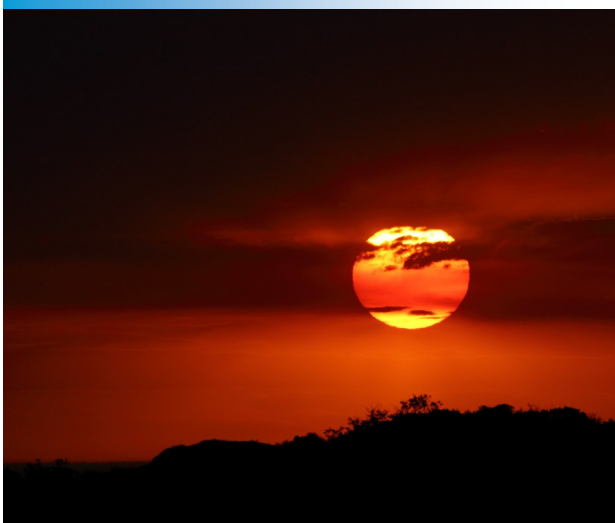
We are approaching that time of the year when the birds (and the bees) will do their thing. New relationships will be formed and established couples will give it another go if the conditions are right in an effort to keep their species going. This pair of local *Little Raven* (**below left**) hang out around our place and it has been fascinating watching them come together to preen and show affection toward one another. I am pretty sure they nest in the 'Lone Pine' and have done since our observations began in 2019. *Galah* pairs (**below right**) form life long bonds and will start breeding from now though to December, so expect to see their numbers drop off as they head off in search of tree hollows which are their preferred nesting spots (we have a dearth of such hollows due to previous land clearing). Such fun to watch these birds interact with affection and play—and the odd squabble!



Now this is when I start to have nightmares! A few days back, I witnessed Mrs Darcy (**left**), the partner of Mr Darcy the *Australian Magpie*, flying into the edge of the coastal bush with nesting material in her bill. That signals nestbuilding followed by mating, eggs and hatchlings—and one very protective male *magpie* defending its territory and protecting the nest and chicks. I expect Mr Darcy to begin 'swooping' soon so my advice is to avoid the area where Darcy lives—the wetlands and oval precinct.

**Please do not feed them to become 'friends' as I saw someone doing recently—it is a recipe for disaster and the kiss of death for the bird!**

### 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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