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Cape Chatter

Chattering and chirping aplenty ...

Since last *Cape Chatter*, bird activity in particular, has ramped up. There is plenty of chirping and chattering among the birds and signs that nest building and breeding are imminent if not already started. A pair of male *Crescent Honeyeaters* have been busily courting a female in the home garden—she is yet to decide; an *Eastern Rosella* pair have been checking out the nesting boxes in the creek line stags; and the *Little Wattlebirds* are going non-stop from dawn to dusk—who needs an alarm clock! And in the wetlands, a pair of secretive and vulnerable *Lewin's Rail* are loudly staking their claim to territory among the thick reeds and rushes. It is lovely listening to nature in the throws of seasonal change and watching the behaviours of the different species—this is the beginning of peak birding season!

Crescent Honeyeaters—female (below) and two earnest males (left). Still no decision by the lady!



Eastern Rosellas



Energetic and noisy Little Wattlebirds



Yearly wildlife observation numbers are in ...



Above: The *Crimson Rosella* is the latest bird species to be added to the bird list, thanks to a sighting by resident Duncan B. Thank you Duncan! While a very common and conspicuous species throughout Australia, this is not the case at **The Cape**, where the lack of mature treed vegetation (which they prefer) makes them a rare visitor.



The animal species list remains unchanged

Frogs—9 species

Reptiles—8 species

Turtle—1 species

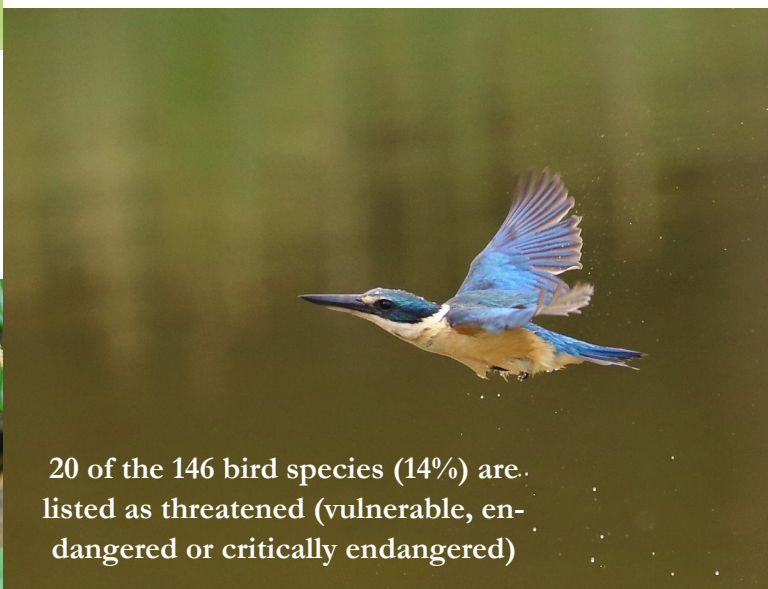
Land Mammals—16

4 of the 16 (25%) of the land mammal species are listed as threatened species

July 31st each year marks the end of the yearly observation list for bird and other animal species in and around **The Cape** estate. With six years worth of records, we are starting to see some trends in respect of where wildlife are benefiting from the rewilding and regeneration within the estate, it's interface with the adjoining Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park and where there are potential negative impacts from the development.

There are many variables in trying to assess the impacts, including: climate change, seasonal weather variations, vegetation type and growth, pollution and rubbish, human disturbance, loss of habitat and the impact of feral/invasive species.

Overall, while the total species count continues to grow, the relationship between the natural world and the expanding development has been a positive one. But challenges remain, particularly for those species that rely on open, grassy spaces as more housing is constructed and for coastal shorebirds, as more people and companion animals use the nearby beach for recreation and exercise.



20 of the 146 bird species (14%) are listed as threatened (vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered)

Above: The beautiful *Sacred Kingfisher* was one of the new species observed near the *Bittern Wetland* in the estate's south west in early spring.

Left: *White-lipped Snake*—a cold tolerant reptile and much less commonly seen than the *Lowland Copperhead*. I have observed this snake several times sunbaking on top of kikuyu grass and tussocks in the autumn.

Total bird species—146 (10 new species)

Marine & Coastal bird species—29 (2 new species)

Freshwater bird species—27 (1 new species)

Land bird species—82 (7 new species)

Introduced bird species—8 (no change)

I have uploaded a new *Bird Species List (v 9)* for **The Cape** to the *Cape Chatter* website which can be found at:

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

A very secretive bird is doing my head in!!!

Key features of **The Cape** landscape include the wonderful constructed wetlands, ponds, creek line and retained natural, 'boggy' habitats. The constructed water features are now six years into their development, with dense plantings of native reeds, rushes and sedges knitting together to form a complex habitat which has attracted a range of bird species, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. While it may be difficult to observe some of these species, their calls often give an indication of their presence. One such bird species that I have never seen, let alone photographed over the past six years, but have heard on numerous occasions, is the **vulnerable** *Levin's Rail*. One day soon I hope!! The *Levin's* is a small, but very vocal waterfowl which is making its presence known at the moment as we lead into the breeding season.

So what are we looking out for or listening to?

If by a flukey chance you see this elusive bird, the most similar bird to the *Levin's* is the *Buff-banded Rail* (**right**) which is more common and occasionally seen out in the open at **The Cape**. The *Buff-banded* is less vocal than the other small waterfowl observed at The Cape—the *Spotless Crake* (**below right**) and *Spotted Crake* (**below left**). The main differences in appearance are: the *Levin's* is about half the size of the *Buff-banded*; it does not have the gingery breast band; nor the white 'eyebrow' and has a longer bill.

Based on the fact you are very unlikely to see this bird (and if you do don't let me know haha!), here is a quick guide to it's calls.

The *Levin's Rails* has three distinctive territorial/advertising calls: a loud *krek-krek-krek* repeated 10-20 times which increases in volume; a 'farty'/grunting sound; and a drumming sound followed by what sounds like a galloping horse! All three calls can be heard at the moment from the vicinity of the central wetlands area, especially around dusk and dawn. And I can tell you there are currently at least two birds in close proximity calling to each other, merely five meters from the walking track. How fortunate are we to be this close to a threatened species? So if you are walking the track beside the central wetlands, keep an ear out to 'see' if you can hear them calling.

Holy cow! Hope they survived the intrusion of 34 cows into the wetlands last evening from a neighboring farm.



Above: *Buff-banded Rail* crossing a walking track at **The Cape**.



Above: *Australian Spotted Crake* in the creek line at **The Cape**



Above: The very secretive *Spotless Crake*

A 'lesson' in shelling a seed - the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo ... a master at work!

We have been fortunate to get some close-up looks of this majestic *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo* munching it's way through the seed cones of the *Coastal Banksia* trees lining **The Cape's** streets. There is something special about banksia flowers—such exquisite structure and beauty—and even the seed cones have smiling personalities of their own! These two species have certainly evolved together. Is the yellow patch on the birds head representative of the *banksia* flower, to help it blend in within the trees vegetation? It is fascinating to witness the versatility of the cocky's claws, beak and tongue—all designed perfectly to collect, remove, dismantle and peel the seed with strength, touch and efficiency.

I only noticed this bird when it moved slightly in a tree as I was walking past. It allowed me to photograph it from about 10 metres distance, so they are quite confiding. A sign they are about? Look for chewed seed cone debris under the tree!



Bird sounds & sightings ...

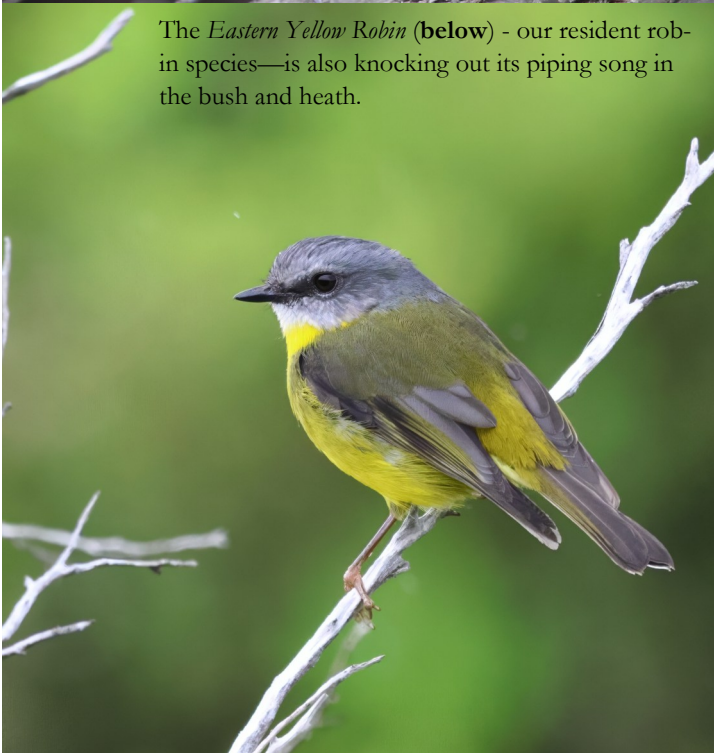
I was most pleased to see a stunning little *Spotted Pardalote* (**right**) among the *Coast Manna Gum* in the Phase 1 Project KOALA plots recently. Further proof that this emerging ecosystem is doing its job. They are normally seen in the higher canopies of eucalypt forests and woodlands. Not quite **The Cape's** habitat, so nice to see it exploring these new trees as it was flitting about feeding. We are more likely to hear their calls than see them, so this observation was a bonus. They are such a beautiful bird!



Another bird more likely heard than seen, is the most vocal *Olive Whistler* (**left**). The beautiful calls of this bird have started ringing out in the coastal bush and heath—a real indicator the seasons are changing. They occasionally come out into the open to give a wonderful vocal performance. The 'Greys' (*Shrike-thrush* and *Butcherbird*) are also prominent callers.



The *Eastern Yellow Robin* (**below**) - our resident robin species—is also knocking out its piping song in the bush and heath.



Grey Shrike-thrush



Grey Butcherbird

Those silly Galah ...

More pictures of these most adorable, noisy, playful and social cockatoos—the *Galah*—as they hang out among **The Cape**.

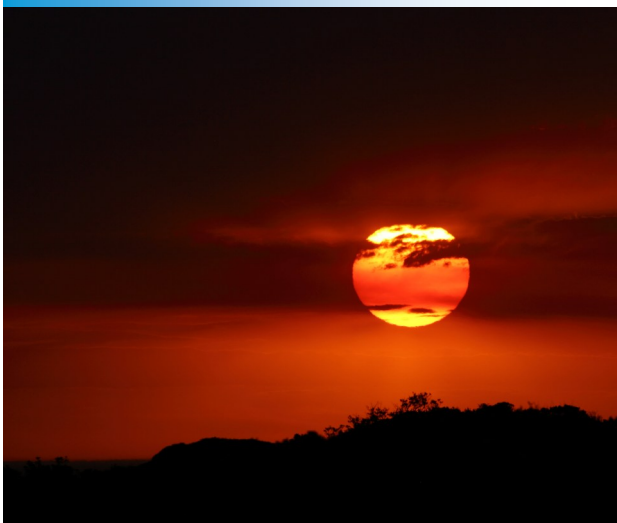


Kangaroo kapers ...

More images of the local *Eastern Grey Kangaroo* mob—the young, old and emerging ...



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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