

**THE FIELD NATURALIST**

**NEWSLETTER NO. 150: AUTUMN 2024**

**ALBURY-WODONGA FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.**

Reg. No. A0023416K



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Contributions or corrections to this newsletter are welcome and should be emailed to Editor as above.



Woohoo – I'm in! "Stacks on the mill!" (P Spencer)



...NOT asleep. Resting my eyes (P Seely)



Hey - look at ME!! (P Spencer)



OK, OK. I know it's *not* a cow. (P Seely)

**Autumn Issue, 2024:**

	Page
Winton Wetlands	2
Thurgoona	4
Mt Beauty	5
Wonga Wetlands	7
Eldorado Area	8
Corowa	10
<b>Articles:</b>	
Turtle Workshop	12
Case Moths	12
Contrails	13
Eagle Release	13
<b>Upcoming Outings</b>	14

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**OUTINGS**

**WINTON WETLANDS**

**3<sup>rd</sup> March 2024**

Fifteen Birdlife and 2 Field Nat. members attended this joint outing. The day provided a good light for birdwatching; conditions were sunny with no wind. We hit the 72 species, which may be a group record for 4.5 hours birding.



White-breasted Woodswallow (J Palmer)

Rob and Bill visited Naison Springs Track on their way to the wetlands and were rewarded with sightings of Rainbow Bee-eater, Diamond Firetail, Rufous Songlark and a lovely flock of turquoise parrots.



Diamond Firetail (R Boehem, via Jan)

Spotted Crake, Cormorants, Darters, Egrets, Ibis, Grey Butcher Bird, and Imperial Jzebels were seen. Golden Orb's were present in huge numbers throughout the areas visited.

1. The **duck pond** was our first stop. Water levels extremely high for this time of year. No Babblers seen. A variety of water birds and a photogenic Swamp Wallaby who seemed to enjoy the cameras, was the highlight.
2. Next stop was **Mt. Meg Conservation Area** – very quiet with only a handful of woodland birds present.



Coy Swamp Wallaby (J Palmer)

3. Morning tea at the **Old Jetty** provided a very good panorama over the wetland with the water level high.



Wetland panorama (J Palmer)

4. We had been alerted by the resident Winton Wetland ecologist, Sarah May, who was very generous with her information and time – to a pair Latham’s Snipe at **Sergeant’s Swamp** outlet drain. No snipe sighted but a bonus were four whistling kites feasting on carp.
5. **Boggy Bridge Road** – always worth a look at the Bridge site which provides a good view on both sides of the causeway. Black-fronted and Red-Kneed Dotterel being the highlights.
6. **Green Hill** for lunch – were hoping for Antechinus amongst the fallen timber, but no such luck, and no luck at the herping [searching for amphibians or reptiles] site at the boulder streams downslope of the “Changing Water Levels” sign. Two Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes provided some excitement, devouring a Boulenger’s Skink (thank you David Watson), a cicada, and a large larva. A pair of Turquoise Parrots were sighted, but otherwise only a few woodland species.



Feasting Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes (J Palmer)

**Humphries Hill** was recommended by Sarah as a good spot to view both White-browed and Grey-crowned Babblers, and rocky areas for herping. We only found Babbler nests - very quiet. Bernie pointed out 2 Dainty Swallowtails to the group, but they proved too flighty to photograph.

Thank you Sarah for providing Winton Reptile and Bird Lists, and to Rob, Bernie and Bill for the birdlist on the day. Notable absences were Grey Shrike-thrush and honeyeaters (only two sighted).

## Jan & Jenny

## THURGOONA

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2024

On a fine, cool autumn morning David Coleman led 12 of us in a quiet wander around the David Mitchell Wetlands at Charles Sturt University (CSU), Thurgoona.



King Parrot, female (P Spencer)

I had not been here before and could see evidence of survey work, plantings and nesting boxes. I was interested to hear from Dick that the wetland was named in 2004 to honour his immense contributions to the evidence-based management of Australia's aquatic ecosystems. So with Dick's help, I investigated further.

David Mitchell was born in 1935 and died on the 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 - just before our visit.

In 1995, Professor Mitchell accepted an adjunct position at CSU's School of Environmental Sciences after retiring as Chief Research Scientist with CSIRO at Griffith. After an eminent academic career in irrigation and freshwater research, he chose to immerse himself in the development of the campus. He was an advocate for environmental responsibility at all levels. Personally, he was actively involved with the Anglican Church and chaired its Environment Working Group.

At the campus he made use of existing lakes on the site to help design an integrated wetland system for treatment of the campus wastewater, via a series of gravel and reed bed wetlands.

At the time, the design was augmented with an evaporating mound and adjacent ephemeral wetland to ensure all effluent was contained, however the design has since proven to be safe, effective and sustainable.

Amongst other awards, in 2003 he was recognised as an International Fellow of the Society for Wetland Scientists for "a lifetime of contributions to wetland science and management".

In David Mitchell's words:

*"...we must, as a community, as a nation, as citizens of the world, look after the world which is our home..."*

References:

A Beautiful Mind: Our Water Warrior, 2014. Margrit Beemster, Border Mail  
Wetlands Australia 2018, Commonwealth of Australia 2018

After lunch, we moved to the nearby section of the Hume & Hovell Track, adjacent to the community garden. The wetland bird count was 36, with a further 7 added after lunch. It was a good mix of woodland and wetland birds with about 2/3 of count being wetland species. For me the morning highlight was the fine viewing of a Hobby, spotted by the 'eagle-eyed' Philip.



Australian Hobby (P Seely)



Great Eastern Egret (P Spencer)

And after lunch, a juvenile Little Friarbird presented an excellent opportunity to view the distinctive yellow under its chin, as photographed by Philip.



PS Not many mushrooms, but two very determined puffballs were seen along the path...

**Gail**

## MT BEAUTY

14<sup>th</sup> April 2024

The weather gods were smiling and we had a perfect autumn day for our outing to Mt Beauty. For a lot of us this was new territory and we relied on the “Walks and Tracks Guide for Bright and Surrounds” available at the Information Centre.

Our day of exploring began at the **Junction Creek Nature Walk** – a 1km shady track, criss-crossing a pristine creek with tree ferns, a few fungi and a towering overstory of Blue Gum and Manna Gum.

Morning tea was at the **Pondage foreshore**. Of note here were Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos and Black-fronted Dotterels.



Black-fronted Dotterel  
(P Spencer)



Probably Mica Ink Cap /Glistening Ink Cap  
(or the very similar *Coprinellus truncorum*, previously *Coprinus truncorum*)



[And just for information, this common fungus – a ‘Shaggy Ink Cap’ or ‘Lawyer’s Wig’ - emerging amongst leaf litter in my back garden, is similar to the Mica Ink Cap above: the caps of both dissolve into an inky, black mess to distribute their spores]

[Fungi: The recent dry weather limited the range of fungi I noted, even along Junction Creek.

Some gilled fungi seen were - Spectacular Rustgill, Rainbow Fungus, Ink Cap (see text & photo above) and a *Crepidotus sp.* as well as an unidentified white bracket fungus.]



[I enjoyed Peter’s Mudlark series, culminating in its successful capture of the luckless critter under the rock ☺] Next was a 1.2km walk to **Mermaid Pool** and the **Rock Pool** – a lovely meander along the East Kiewa River before lunch. Possible siting of a Rose Robin, but not confirmed.



Superb Fairy Wren, female  
(P Spencer)

Crested Shrike-tit  
(D Andrews)

Austral Stork’s-bill (*Pelargonium australe*)

After lunch we went walking along the **Gorge Track** on the West Kiewa for 1km till we came to the swing bridge, with great views up and down the river and quite a bit of insect activity.



Australian Emerald Dragonfly  
(D Andrews)

Mountain Dragon  
(D Andrews)

Meadow Argus  
(P Seely)



Yellow Robin (P Spencer)

Over 30 bird species typical of the ‘High Country’ were noted, with everyone agreeing it was a very enjoyable day and that Mt Beauty would be worth a second visit.

**Jenny & Jan**

Thirteen well wrapped-up members visited Lagoon 1 and the Wiradjuri Campsite area before morning tea. We saw a good mixture of birds and were able, in one tree, to compare the Little Black and the Great Cormorants. These two species and the less seen Pied Cormorant, are in the same genus (*Phalacrocorax*), while our common Little Pied Cormorant is now in a different genus (*Microcarba*).



Great Cormorant



Little Black Cormorants  
(P Spencer)



Little Pied Cormorant

Fitting then, that Wonga means ‘Cormorant’ in Wiradjuri language.

We re-welcomed new member Ross to the fold and then headed off for our longer walk, the 2.5 km Red Trail walk through Wonga Wetlands and in part Wonga Drylands! (Lagoon 6 was empty with the remains of a very old farmer’s fence running across it.)

For a second outing in a row we recorded the once common but now scarce Striated Thornbill, which was most pleasing. The bird tally for the day was 50: male and female Australasian Shovelers added to the diversity of our list. Black-fronted Dotterels strutted around at their leisure and Red-browed Finches abounded in happy profusion.



Red-browed Finches (P Spencer)

Our sunny, still autumn weather continued for this outing and we started the day with a grassy woodland walk on the northern side of Reedy River. My 'reccies' had recorded some personal favourites including Red-browed Finches, Satin Bower-birds, White-browed Babblers, Tree-creepers, a Peaceful Dove, various parrots, Diamond Firetails, an Eastern Spinebill, Yellow Robins, lots of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters.....and many of the woodland birds and parrots turned up again on the day.

We took 3 further walks - along the Swing Bridge end of Reid's Walk, overlooking the Top Cut dam and finally the Dredge Walk. All were very pleasant but didn't yield many new sightings, bird or otherwise.



Autumn view of Reedy Creek from the 'new' Swing Bridge

Again, different Mistletoe species were apparent on both Eucalyptus and Acacia plants and Neil explained how these could be differentiated in the field.



Grey Mistletoe (*Amyema quandang*) on Silver Wattle



Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*), on Ironbark





Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*) (flower is being held upright). Note the stem on the central flower. This helps distinguish it from the less common Drooping Mistletoe (*Amyema pendula*, not pictured), which has no stem.

As we walked, Neil patiently identified flora as we passed – my limited notes include River Red Gum, Apple Box, Blakely’s Red Gum, Cherry Ballart, Silver Wattle, Varnish Wattle, River Bottle-brush, Fringe Myrtle, Narrow Rock-fern, Tall Bluebells & of course, the introduced Prickly Pear and Wheel Cactus.



Jumping Spider (D Andrews)



Lerp

Over a late lunch we examined lerp on a gum leaf found by Bernie. These are the sweet, protective covering of Psyllid insects. Lerp vary enormously in size, shape and design. They may be simple cones, univalves, bivalves or intricately woven basket or fan shapes. Each species has its own characteristic shape. They are eaten widely by flying foxes, possums, gliders and a variety of birds such as Pardalotes, Honeyeaters, Friarbirds, Whistlers, Silvereyes and Thornbills. Some birds such as Pardalotes, Weebills and small Honeyeaters virtually live off lerp in some seasons.

A delightful & informative day – thanks Neil

**Gail**

On a pleasant cool morning we started the day at the Whitehead Street Wetlands. A pair of Black-shouldered Kites confined us to the carpark, watching while they unsuccessfully pursued small prey in the grass.



Black-shouldered Kite (P Spencer)

After they moved on, the various water birds seemed largely unperturbed by us, but the highlight here was a great viewing of Zebra Finches. Bernie noted that this spot is proving to be reliable for sighting them.



Zebra Finch, male (P Seeley)



Zebra Finch, female (P Spencer)

Two nests were also seen, low in dense shrubs. Although late in the season, it was recorded in The Compact Australian Bird Guide (2022, CSIRO) that it is an “irruptive breeder when conditions suitable”. One juvenile bird alongside the path seemed to either enjoy being photographed or was too frightened to move!



Zebra Finch, juvenile (M Parnell)

And yes, more Mistletoe. This time we saw Fleshy Mistletoe – *Amyndema miraculosa* – the greener, more upright plant, growing on Box Mistletoe (with brownish, elongated & curved leaves). Fleshy Mistletoe grows on other Mistletoes and semi-parasitic plants, including Cherry Ballart.



Mistletoe plants have been prominent at various sites over autumn and Neil has helped us identify those encountered (also see his recent article for the Friends of Chiltern May newsletter (#338) when it is posted on their website)

<https://friendsofchiltern.au/topics/documents/newsletters/>

As ever, the sewage ponds presented most of our area's water birds with good views of the Australasian Shoveler and the stunning Azure Kingfisher (beautifully photographed by new member, Mark).



Azure Kingfisher (M Parnell)

Of note however, was the absence of Magpie Geese. There were over 50 birds the last time we were here in August last year. Resident numbers had been steadily increasing since my first sighting here 10 years ago. A highlight for those lucky enough to be in the right place, was a Water Rat, spotted by Helen. It sat briefly on a log beside the path, then moved ahead of us along the pond's edge, before quickly scuttling across the path & into the adjacent pond.

## Gail

## **ARTICLES:**

### **1. Turtle Workshop**



Eastern Long-necked Turtle (J Palmer)

The event was arranged by Turtles Albury Wodonga, a group created in 2019 to address the serious, overall declining turtle numbers in Australia. Its objectives are preservation of population and habitats, education and protection strategies, and support of research projects.

We have three species of turtles in our area: the Broad Shelled (Endangered), the Short neck (Vulnerable), and the Eastern Long-necked (data deficient). Over 90% of turtle nests fall victim to foxes.

Besides having live exhibits, the workshop had much useful information about what we could do to help. For example, identifying and protecting nests, recording turtle sightings, where to take injured turtles. Turtles Albury Wodonga has a rescue service - The Family Vet offers free treatment for injured wildlife.

On our property we have three separate areas where turtles have been sighted, and we'll be monitoring in November for any nests that we can identify and protect. In addition, over the past three years we have averaged an annual elimination of 26 foxes from our property, ensuring the optimum opportunity for turtle survival. We are also carrying out a feeding program to monitor turtle numbers and species in each dam.

We recommend Turtles Albury Wodonga Facebook page for further information.

### **Jan & Jenny**

### **2. Case Moths**

Case Moths are members of the Psychidae family with around 350 species in Australia, with around 25 species found in the ACT region. Their larvae live in silk cases with a wonderful variety of decorations chosen from grass stems, twigs or leaves. The top of the case is secured to its substrate with silk while the larvae feed on a range of plants and lichens. The larvae also pupate inside their silk case.



Case Moth - *Clania* sp.



Case Moth - *Hyalarcta huebneri*



Case Moth - *Lepidoscia arctiella*



Case Moth, Ribbed -,  
*Hyalarcta nigrescens*



Case Moth - *Lepidoscia* or *Conoeca* sp.



Case Moth, Saunders' -  
*Metura elongatus*

Despite the protective nature of the case the larvae suffer from high rates of parasitism with a subsequent high mortality rate.

The photos shown were all taken [by Neil] in our region. Members interested in these and other moths are referred to an excellent reference “Moths in the ACT”, by Cocking, Bond and Edwards which is quite relevant to our region.

**Neil Blair**

### 3. Contrails

At the Corowa outing on the 25<sup>th</sup> May we noted an unusual feature in the sky which had a covering of Cirrus cloud.

There were a number of commonly seen white trails which are condensation trails (‘contrails’) formed by the sudden condensation of the water vapour ejected from the exhaust of a jet aeroplane.

The unusual feature was the accompaniment of associated ‘dark’ trails. These are known as dissipation trails (‘distrails’) that occur when the aircraft flies through a natural cirrus cloud, its vapour trail serving to overload the cloud with extra-heavy water droplets (or ice crystals) that then fall out, leaving a linear gap in its wake.



This information was found in “The Cloud Book, How to understand the Skies” by Richard Hamblyn.

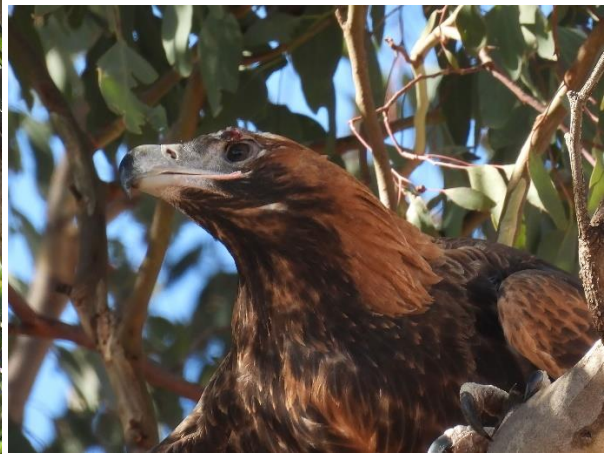
**Neil Blair**

#### 4. **Release of juvenile Wedge-tailed Eagle**

Jo Mittenier from Staghorn Flat WIRES had been looking after a juvenile Wedge-tailed Eagle since January. She nursed it back to health from a very emaciated state. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> June it was released in a healthy condition into a paddock at "Gap Flat" where three deer carcasses were strategically placed to provide food.



A brave new world (J Palmer)



(R Boehem, via Jan)

After its release, it circled the area and landed in a tall Eucalypt close by, stretching muscles constantly. A single Wedge-tail was sighted last week but we can't be sure of its I.D. as there are three resident Wedge-tails on the Allan's Flat property.

The above release was the second from WIRES. In 2021, two Barn Owls were released near our old shearing shed. That site has several mature River Red Gums and satisfyingly, the owls have been seen and heard on the property. Hopefully, it is now home for them.

#### **Jan & Jenny**

##### **Upcoming Winter Outings –**

~ **1<sup>st</sup> June** – Mt Granya (with BirdLife Australia). Complete

~ **22<sup>nd</sup> June** – Horseshoe Lagoon, (9:30 at Lagoon parking bay). Contact Jenny. Note: Late correction - not Bright.

~ **14<sup>th</sup> July** – Kentucky/ Balldale Pub, (10:30 at Ampol Service Station, Howlong). Walk followed by Pub Lunch. Contact Clare

~ **18<sup>th</sup> July** – Bird ID & Calls. Baranduda Community Centre. Contact Bernie

~ **27<sup>th</sup> July** – Everton (9:30 Beechworth opposite toilet block). Contact Gail.

~ **11<sup>th</sup> August** – Baranduda. (9:30 IGA carpark, NE corner). Contact Bernie

~ **24<sup>th</sup> August** – Killawarra. (9:30 Lake King, Rutherglen). Contact David

*Please confirm details via Ecoportal & contact the leader if you have any questions, need a lift or wish to confirm attendance (useful if weather could lead to cancellation).*

*[Also, this newsletter & club program are very kindly made available via Friends of Chiltern website under the 'News' tab. Thank you Tony 😊 ]*