

**THE FIELD NATURALIST**

**NEWSLETTER NO. 151: WINTER 2024**

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

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**PRESIDENT**

Bernard Datson  
0490 497 032

**VICE PRESIDENT**

Peter Spencer  
(02) 6043 3431

**SECRETARY**

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0419 124 724

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Jenny Bleakley  
Phillip Seely  
David Coleman  
Robert Robinson  
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**NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

Gail Steed  
glesley28@gmail.com

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



Red-capped Robin, female – Kentucky SP (P Spencer)



White-naped Honeyeater,  
Everton (P Seely)

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'Sprinter' or a taste of Spring – Golden Wattle,  
our national floral emblem, Killawarra (P Seely)

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**OUTINGS**

**MT GRANYA**

**1<sup>st</sup> June 2024**



Group at summit (P Spencer)

Disappointingly, I missed this winter, joint BirdLife outing which took in some less-familiar territory - the Granya campground, the scout hut area, Firebrace Track and summit. Bernie provided the bird list (electronically distributed) of 25 mainly woodland birds, with good viewings of a Wedge-tailed Eagle and Satin Bowerbird.



Scarlet Robin, male (P Spencer)



Satin Bowerbird, female (P Spencer)



And thank you Peter for this photo of a bracket (White Punk perhaps?) – fungi have been notably absent this winter!

## HORSESHOE LAGOON

22<sup>nd</sup> June 2024

Due to the wintry conditions this half day outing took place at Horseshoe Lagoon and Kremur Street - not Bright as scheduled. We were rewarded with a beautiful sunny day after a very crisp morning. Bernie's birdlist (as distributed electronically) recorded 42 species - a good number, especially considering the time of year and only a half day outing.

The highlights were the resident pair of Whistling Kites, a Collared Sparrow Hawk and a very tame Azure Kingfisher which would not be deterred from its perch, no matter how many binocular or camera lens were trained on it. Cockatoos feeding their young was another highlight.

[This is a wonderful local, accessible recreational area, reliable for good and close bird viewing – many seem relatively unconcerned by our comings and goings.]

The pelicans seemed to be making a comeback too – having been absent for the last couple of years, although still outnumbered by their replacement, the White Ibis.



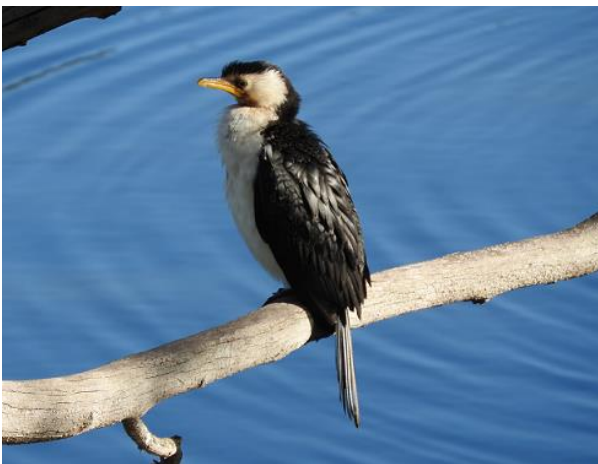
White Ibis (P Spencer)



Azure Kingfisher, Horseshoe Lagoon (P Spencer)



Pelicans, Horseshoe Lagoon (J Palmer)



Little Pied Cormorant, (P Seely)



Little Black Cormorants (P Spencer)



Striated Pardalote (P Spencer)



Eastern Shrike-tit (P Spencer)



Superb Fairy Wren (P Spencer)

No luck with any Rakali sightings on the day, but one was spotted later that week.

**Jenny Bleakley**

Our annual 'social' day. We spent a still and cool, but sunny morning chasing birds in the Kentucky State Park, before lunch at the Balldale pub.

No notes I'm sorry – other than about the few, sad, soggy & sorry mushrooms.

Fortunately the photographers weren't as slack as me...



Grey-crowned Babbler (P Spencer)



Red-Capped Robin (P Seely)



Yellow Thornbill (P Spencer)



Buff-rumped Thornbill (P Spencer)

## EVERTON

27<sup>th</sup> July 2024

An earlier 'reccie' had indicated that the Everton Railway Station Bushland Reserve 14 presented few birds and plants were yet to flower (I would like to go back soon however because it is a lovely spot and an easy, very pleasant walk). To our rescue came Richard Loyn and Gerard O'Neill.

(I met Richard as President of Swamps, Rivers & Ranges - <https://www.swampsriversandranges.org.au>, a community-driven landscape restoration group. Do have a look at their excellent work & their resources page. Richard is a forest ecologist with great field experience in bird monitoring programmes.

More recently Gerard presented "Stories of Saving Our Wildlife" at a Rutherglen Landcare meeting & spoke of his conservation experiences whilst CEO of Bush Heritage Australia. As well as being an enthusiastic 'birdo', his deep, personal commitment to sustainable and collaborative bush health is inspiring)

In 2016, Gerard and his wife purchased the property alongside Hurdle Creek and adjacent to the Murrumbidgee 175 Bushland Reserve. It was cleared & grazed after WWII but they have continued its ongoing restoration following the regeneration initiated by previous owners.

We began an informative and leisurely guided circuit from their off-road carpark, through the reserve, up to the ridge and back via his house block to our cars. We learnt of the property history and their observations over time, along with the rewards and slow success of woodland landscape restoration.

Gerard firmly believes in the value of restoration, especially in conjunction with remnant old growth forest.

"Remnant native vegetation is so important for rebuilding connectivity across the rural landscape. Roadside reserves, bushland reserves, rail trails, parks and private land all add to the opportunity."

The Swift Parrots eluded us this visit but a small flock were present throughout the winter and had been moving between their property and the reserve, feeding on lerps in the White Box: further evidence that reconstructed woodlands have a place in threatened species conservation

While loitering over a few fungi, I missed some observations but miscellaneous and fascinating information included that:

- In over 8 years they have not seen either Noisy Miners or Indian Mynas (Gerard was unsure of the reason – elevation? canopy closure?),
- Wallabies are responsible for the lack of understory,
- The engine noise of a Dash 8 motor sets off the male Koalas,
- The alarm cries of White-plumed Honeyeaters vary according to the specific raptor threatening them, &
- The only local honeyeater they have not seen on their property is the Regent Honeyeater (a good result, particularly for a regenerated area)

My thanks to both gentlemen for their comprehensive observations, generosity & knowledge. It was a marvellous visit.



Olive-backed Oriole (P Seely)



Yellow-tufted Honeyeater (P Spencer)



Spotted Pardalote leaving burrow (P Spencer)



Brown Thornbill (P Spencer)



New Holland Honeyeater (P Spencer)



Swamp Wallaby (P Seely)

Everton Bird list (P Seely & B Datson)

Australia Magpie	Galah	Weebill *
Australian Raven	Grey Shrike Thrush	Welcome Swallow
Brown Thornbill *	New Holland Honeyeater *	White-browed Cuckoo Shrike (h)
Buff-rumped Thornbill *	Olive-backed Oriole (overwintering)	White-eared Honeyeater *
Common Bronzewing	Peaceful Dove *	White-plumed Honeyeater
Eastern Shrike-tit	Red Wattlebird	Wood Duck
Eastern Spinebill	Spotted Pardalote	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Eastern Brown Treecreeper	Striated Pardalote	Yellow Robin
Fuscous Honeyeater	Superb Fairy Wren	
		<b>Total = 26</b>

\*Everton Railway Station Reserve

**Gail Steed**

PS My unconfirmed list of fungi genera - Mycena, Macrolepiota, Tremella, Scleroderma, Gymnopilus & Hygrocybe.

**BARANDUDA**

**11<sup>th</sup> August 2024**

A large enthusiastic group spent another cool, still and pleasant winter's day in various locations around Baranduda, beginning with the Baranduda Conservation Park and generously guided by Bernie and Glenda. My personal 'take-homes' for this outing were:

- The value of well-planned bushland conservation in urban development,
- Our hosts' remarkable local knowledge,
- the good range of birds (total count of 36 – see Bernie's list below),
- the remarkably solid plant guards protecting threatened species local to the Baranduda Range &, oh yes, it's conviviality ☺

My recollected bird highlights are the Flame Robin's display, excellent views of a Mistletoe bird, and finally, the Choughs' nests where I saw 2 nests about a meter apart on the same side of the same tree. The higher nest appeared newer compared with the other so I was happy to imagine that the family had moved up in the world!



Flame Robin, female (P Spencer)



Scarlet Robin, male (P Spencer)



Grey Shrike Thrush (P Seely)



A deluxe plant guard!

Baranduda Birdlist (Bernard Datson)

Australian Magpie	Satin Bowerbird
Magpie-lark	King Parrot
Australian Raven	Kookaburra
Blue-faced Honeyeater	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Black-chinned Honeyeater	Grey Shrike-thrush
Common Myna	Welcome Swallow
Spotted Pardalote	Crested Pidgeon
Striated Pardalote	White-naped Honeyeater
Weebill	Brown-headed Honeyeater
Black Duck	Yellow Thornbill
Crimson Rosella	Golden Whistler female
Common Starling	Flame Robin
Galah	Grey Teal
Chough	Pied Currawong
Mistletoebird	Brown Thornbill
Scarlet Robin	Superb Fairy Wren
Noisy Miner	Fuscous Honeyeater
Wattlebird	Australian Wood Duck



On a beautiful warm, cloudless, windless day 6 members travelled to see the Killawarra Box Ironbark Forest a little earlier than we have in the past to catch the early Spring. We were not disappointed.

The Ironbark is Red Ironbark “Mugga’ (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*) and the predominant Box on our walk was Grey Box (*E. microcarpa*). The colour was in the flowering wattles – Golden (*Acacia pycnantha*), Varnish (*A. verniciflua*), Silver (*A. dealbata*) and some early Gold-dust (*A. acinacea*). The Spreading Wattle (*A. genistifolia*) was at the end of its flowering season.

Amongst the lower shrubs the Urn Heath (*Melichrus urceolatus*), Nodding Blue-lily (*Stypandra glauca*), Mountain Grevillea (*Grevillea alpina*), Common Hovea (*Hovea heterophylla*) and Purple Coral-pea (*Hardenbergia violacea*) were flowering, the Peach Heath (*Lissanthe strigosa*) was spectacular with its pink buds and the Spoon-leaf Beard-heath (*Styphelia rufa*) had immature green fruits.

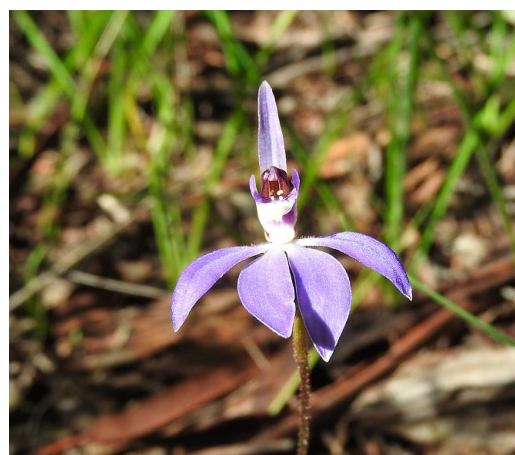


*Stypandra glauca* - Nodding Blue Lily (P Seely)     *Lissanthe strigosa* subsp. subulata - Peach Heath (P Seely)



*Melichrus urceolatus* - Urn Heath (P Seely)

Flowering herbs included Pale Sundews (*Drosera hookeri*), Early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*), Narrow-wing Daisy (*Brachyscome willisii*), Yam Daisy “Murnong” (*Microseris walteri*) and 4 orchid species – widely scattered Blue Fairies (*Cyanicula caerulea*), a single early Leopard orchid (*Diuris pardina*) and patches of Dwarf and Nodding Greenhoods (*Pterostylis nana* and *nutans*).



*Cyanicula caerulea* - Blue Fairy (P Seely)



*Pterostylis nana* - Dwarf Greenhood (N Blair)



*Pterostylis nutans* - Nodding Greenhood (N Blair)

Faunal observations included Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Echidna diggings, active Meat Ant mounds and a number of Painted Lady butterflies. It was also noted that the spiders were becoming active and some small spiders were seen attending their webs but dropped quickly to the ground before identification was possible.



Painted Lady, Australian (male) - *Vanessa kershawi* (N Blair)

**Neil Blair**

**ARTICLES:**

**1. The Nightlife of Some Native Bees**

*The dream:* this pair of native bees (*Lasioglossum lanarium* - Woolly Sweat Bee) found each other on an Australian Buttercup (*Ranunculus lappaceus*) flower late on a sunny afternoon.



It was love at first sight and as the evening approached the petals closed over this touching love scene

In the morning sun the petals re-opened, the sun's warmth returned and alas it was back to work, albeit a little later than the others. Not all were loving couples, other flowers accommodated from 1-4 bees overnight.





*The nightmare:* the not so lucky *Lipotriches flavoviridis* males.

Left to fend for themselves in the cold night air they have to find shelter by huddling together on a twig, on this occasion on a Prickly Tea Tree (*Leptospermum continentale*). They are pictured here thawing out in the early morning sun.

**Neil Blair** (with thanks to Karen Retra for sharing her knowledge of native bees and their behaviour)

## 2. even more Mistletoe!

Last year in Cornwall (UK), a friend stopped to collect Mistletoe from a nearby apple tree. (Seemed it was essential for his pub during the festive season.)

Looking at the pearlescent berries of the European White-berried Mistletoe, I wondered about the relationship - if any - with our 'Mistletoes', as well as the origin of the mythology & customs.

This, the native mistletoe of northern Europe (*Viscum album*), is at the core of most of the popular traditions and legends about mistletoe - from its ancient, but still celebrated, associations with Druids, Romans and Norse gods to more recent links with Christmas, fertility, good wishes and the kissing tradition.



The white berries were said to be the tears shed by the Norse goddess Frigg (after whom Friday is named) when a weapon made of mistletoe wood was used to kill her son Baldr. The Mistletoe Pages (yes, its own website - [mistletoe.org.uk](http://mistletoe.org.uk)) tells me that traditionally, a berry should be removed with each kiss....

Anyway, as Neil showed us on our winter outings, local Mistletoes share the hemiparasitic habit of the European *Viscum album*. The root system is highly modified for attaching to its host via specialized structures (haustoria) which divert the host supply of water and dissolved mineral salts. However, as with almost all world-wide Mistletoe species, they have leaves and photosynthesise normally. I was interested to read that the host leaf mimicry (cryptic mimicry) of many Australian Mistletoes is unusual world-wide. The Mistletoe haustorium often restricts nutrient flow further along the host branch, which may cause the distal part to die and leave the mistletoe in a terminal position on the branch. Interestingly (well, to me at least), I also read that "most European mistletoes tend to preferentially absorb and transpire more water than their host" and wondered whether that was true of Australian Mistletoe and what it might mean for the host.

Its name Mistletoe is believed to have its origins in a Germanic word meaning dung or filth (presumably from the association of the plant seeds with bird droppings) and an Old English word for twig.

There are traditionally, two main mistletoe families, the Viscaceae (including *V. album*) and the Loranthaceae which includes our 5 local species. Europe is on the edge of the mistletoe families' range with relatively few of the total (1500), world-wide known species found in northern temperate areas.

*V. album* is the only mistletoe in the UK, and is dioecious - each individual plant in the population is functionally only either female or male. So fruiting can only occur where both male and female plants are present. In Australia, all *Viscum* species are monoecious - both male and female flowers are present on the same plant.

In the UK, as in Australia, mistletoes can have interesting bird and insect associations eg Mistle Thrushes (*Turdus viscivorus*!) and Blackcaps. They are often associated with butterflies and provide a valuable source of nectar to honeyeaters.

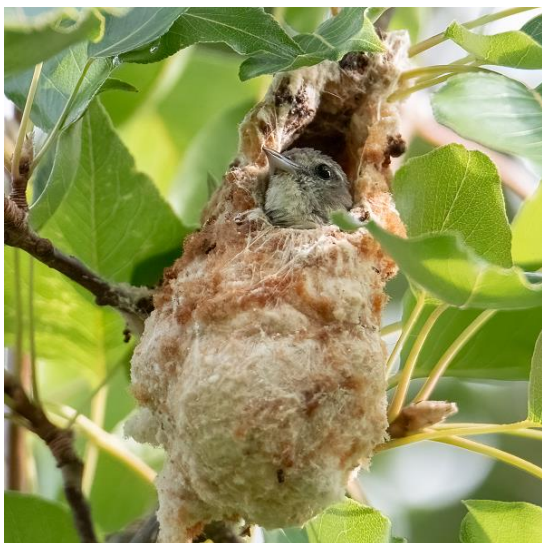
One proposed reason for an increase in the UK distribution is better spread of the seeds by continental Blackcaps, a bird species that is particularly efficient at spreading mistletoe. British Blackcaps migrate for the winter so they do not usually affect mistletoe spread, but in recent decades many thousands of continental Blackcaps have started overwintering in Britain.

Notable dispersal agents in Australia are the Mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*) and some honeyeaters. (The Australian National Botanical Garden website ([www.anbg.gov.au](http://www.anbg.gov.au)) also has a lot of Mistletoe information).

Here, the Mistletoebird is highly adapted to its diet of mistletoe berries. It lacks the muscular gizzard of other birds, instead having a simple digestive system. The berries pass through quickly, the fleshy outer parts are digested and the sticky seeds excreted onto branches, ready to germinate. The Mistletoebird will also catch insects, mainly to provide food for its young.

It builds a silky, pear-shaped nest with a slit-like entrance, made from matted plant down and spider web, which is suspended from a twig in the outer foliage of a tree. The female alone builds the nest and incubates the eggs, while both sexes feed the young.

The following, amazing photo series by Mark Parnell is taken in a Yackandandah garden, of a nest in an exotic tree.



Mum on nest



Dad on powerline



Dad feeding while Mum incubates the eggs



Chicks in nest (M Parnell)



Youngster a day or so out of nest (M Parnell)

### **Upcoming Spring Outings –**

~ **8<sup>th</sup> September** – Chiltern, (9:30 at Chiltern swimming pool). Contact Neil.

~ **28<sup>th</sup> September** – Nail Can Hill, (9:00 at Range Rd gate). Contact Bernie

~ **13<sup>th</sup> October** – Mt Pilot, (9:30 at Chiltern swimming pool). Contact Neil.

~ **26<sup>th</sup> October** – Beechworth, (9:30 Court House Ford St). Contact David Coleman

~ **17<sup>th</sup> November** – Mungabareena (9:00 Ruby Crt East Albury). Contact Gill or Tony.

~ **30<sup>th</sup> November** – Mt Buffalo. (9:30 Porepunkah toilet block beside river). Contact Neil

Note: Some members may like to stay overnight as we have in the past (eg at Mt Buffalo Caravan Park) but this is optional and for them to arrange.

*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 ☺ ]*