

# YELLOW THROAT

The newsletter of BirdLife Tasmania:  
a branch of BirdLife Australia

Number 121, Autumn 2023

## BirdLife Tasmania Annual General Meeting

The BirdLife Tasmania Annual General Meeting will be held on **Thursday 9 March 2022 at 7.00 p.m.**

**UTAS Law Seminar room 132 and by Zoom**

You can join in by copying the link below and sitting back in the comfort of your home

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/4657617274?pwd=QTIDUWhFNFF5aFZwck5hRHkyMk16dz09>

pwd=QTIDUWhFNFF5aFZwck5hRHkyMk16dz09

The AGM business will be followed by guest speaker:

**Dr Sue Jones**

(see details below)

**Please email the secretary if you intend to attend by Zoom**

[tasmania.outings@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tasmania.outings@birdlife.org.au)



White Tern: Photo by Sue Jones



Mounts Ligbird and Gower. Photo by Sue Jones

Guest speaker following AGM  
Thursday 9 March  
UTAS Law Seminar room 132  
7pm

**Birds of Lord Howe Island  
- a personal perspective**

**Dr Sue Jones**

# The Orford Bird Sanctuary A Jewel in the Crown

By  
Mel Kelly

In the small coastal town of Orford on the east coast of Tasmania there is a very special place. A small coastal sandy patch at the mouth of the Prosser River known as the Orford Bird Sanctuary (OBS).

The OBS is recognised by BirdLife International as an Important Bird Areas (IBA)/Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). It is a site that is contributing to the conservation of global biodiversity by protecting a small area of critical beach habitat for nesting shorebirds and small terns.



*Drone image of the Orford Bird Sanctuary and altered river: Photo by Murray Kelman*

There are just over 300 IBAs in Australia and 43 in Tasmania. The OBS was identified as an IBA in recognition of its breeding population of Fairy Terns, Hooded and Red-capped Plovers and Pied Oystercatchers.

The Orford Bird Sanctuary is the southern-most breeding site for Fairy Terns, and of national and international significance. In recent years, as many as 30 chicks have fledged from the colony.

BirdLife Tasmania undertakes a census of the shorebirds and seabirds in the IBA each breeding season, mapping their breeding territories and monitoring the bird numbers during the season.

Sadly, due to the increasing spectrum and intensities of the pressures and threats facing the OBS, the IBA has been listed as 'In Danger' – a poor reflection on the lack of protection afforded it by land managers.



Orford Bay Sanctuary: Photo by Andrew Menzies

Despite years of education and awareness activities, people (and at times their dogs) continue to threaten the survival of the breeding and foraging birds in the OBS through disturbance. The complex nature of the land tenure at this site has had land managers handballing responsibility for management and refusing to take leadership in protecting the important bird values.

The management of the site is further complicated by the sandbags installed by MAST which have much altered the entire coastal river mouth system.



Monitoring with Greg Wing, Eric Woehler and Gary Whisson (FOBS chair): Photo by Jane Wing



OBS stickers are available for purchase

The fence around the nesting area, initiated years ago by Glamorgan Spring Bay Council (GSBC) Natural Resource Management (NRM) staff together with the local community members and BirdLife Tasmania, aims to keep people and dogs out of the area and has been the cause of much controversy over the years.

That said, over time, anecdotally there has been a gradual change in how the area is used and this summer has seen very few dogs or people within the fenced area compared to previous years.

After pressure from BirdLife Tasmania and local advocates for the birds of the OBS, the GSBC and Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) developed a 'Masterplan' for the greater Orford foreshore area incorporating the OBS.

This document formally recognises the bird values within the OBS and maps forward the steps to protect them in the context of the greater area. This document is yet to be formally approved by PWS despite having been through an extensive public consultation process and being endorsed by the council in 2022.

The draft is available here <https://gsbc.tas.gov.au/community-projects/major-projects/>

The Friends of the Orford Bird Sanctuary (FOBS) is a group of committed locals who continually advocate for the protection of the area at all levels of government and undertake a variety of initiatives to protect and inform people about the birds, and to celebrate this wonderful place. The group has undertaken weekly monitoring at the OBS since 2019. This dataset value-adds to the census work done by BirdLife Tasmania.

For information about the OBS or to contact the Friends group please go to the website <https://friends-of-orford-bird-sanctuary.org/> or go to Facebook and [Instagram @orfordbirdsanctuary](https://www.instagram.com/orfordbirdsanctuary). New members are always welcome.

Melanie Kelly on behalf of the Friends of Orford Bird Sanctuary



*Fairy Tern and chick: Photo © Eric Woehler*

# Where? Where? Wedgie! – where are we at?

By

Clare Hawkins

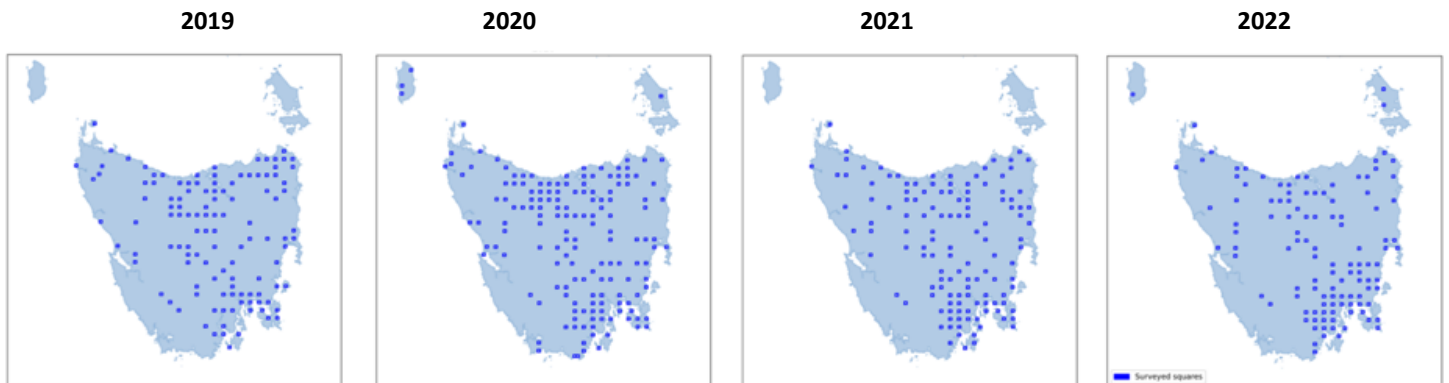


Can you help make 2023 the year we hit the high-quality hundred-square-survey for Tasmania's endangered Wedge-tailed Eagles? The surveys are going well, but we just need a few extra people to take part each year. Pick an interesting area, good company and some quality food — for a very rewarding experience!

Photo: WWW22 – 'Eagle!' by Clare Lond-Caulk

It's that time of year again: bookings are about to open for the next Where? Where? Wedgie! (WWW) surveys. Anyone can take part in these, on any or all of Friday–Sunday 12–14 and 26–28 May 2023.

Following the 2018 pilot, this will be the fifth year in which the 'NatureTrackers' survey for raptors has been held in May, across Tasmania.

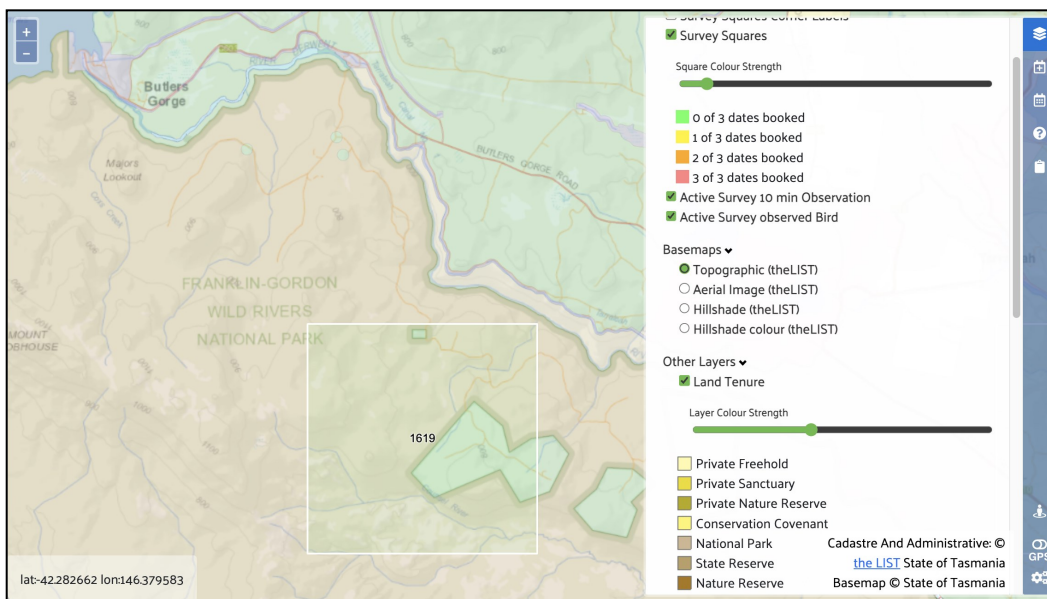


The aim is for a broad spread of surveys across Tasmania, to cover all common environmental conditions and potential threats, recording where raptors are both common and rare. There are plenty of easily accessible squares to choose from, but if you're up for a weekend adventure, then north-western, south-western, Midlands and Bass Strait Island surveys are exceptionally valuable in achieving this. (You can build even more value into getting 'out there' with a few Birddata, eBird and iNaturalist records too!).

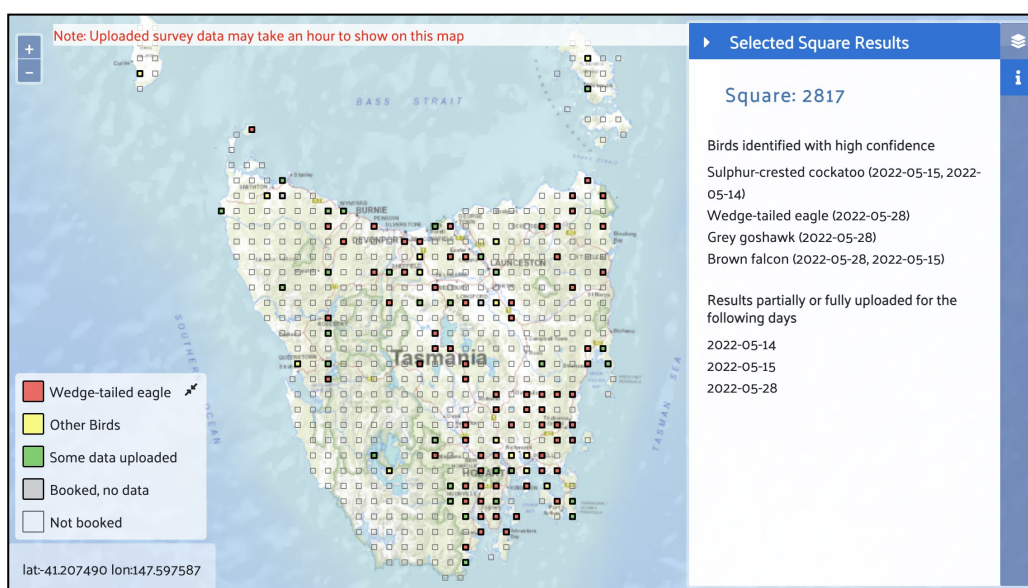
To quickly detect any concerning change in size in the endangered Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle population, we would, between us, preferably visit at least 100 survey squares each year across Tasmania. Two days of survey are needed in each (though one-off, single-day surveys may still come in useful for additional analyses, and a third day is a bonus). One 'day' comprises six 10-minute scans, each in a different location within the 4 km x 4 km square, separated by at least 30 minutes. The more squares adequately surveyed, the more sensitive the monitoring to population changes.

We've actually never yet, quite, achieved 100 squares. However, we've always surveyed more than 80 squares for two days each. Some of us just manage to squeeze in the odd morning's effort every year or so, while some heroic stalwarts contribute an invaluable two squares a day for multiple days! The resulting dataset is still sufficient for analyses to pick up any major short-term change in population size, as well as the overall long-term trend.

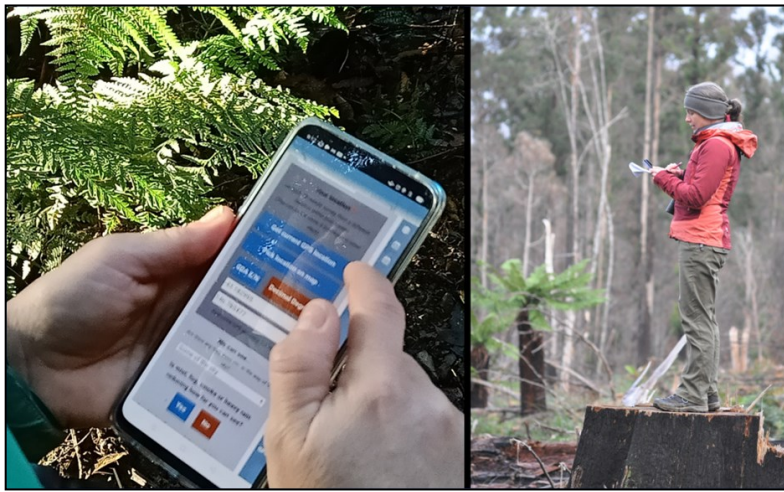
In promising progress, almost 500 NatureTrackers are now signed up to the new WWW app and web app created in 2021. This set-up enables people to: book where they will survey, to help avoid big clumps and gaps in survey coverage; check that they're inside their survey square once they're about to start (the app works even when you're not in mobile coverage); enter, edit and upload their data; and see everyone's results.



*Got your eye on a particular survey square? Some are literal walks in the park; others are major adventures! The WWW web app and app use the List map, including a layer showing basic land tenure, to help you figure out what you'll need to do to access it. This can come in very handy for other explorations, too...*



*Your data are visible on the Results map within an hour of uploading, until the following year's surveys are about to start. Click on a square to get the full details [webapp.naturetrackers.com.au/map\\_results](http://webapp.naturetrackers.com.au/map_results).*



*Not enamoured with apps? Datasheets are also available. After surveying, you can either enter your data online once back at home, or post them off for a trusty volunteer to enter: Photos by Stephen Anstree.*

Between 2019 and 2021, the analyses have found no major change in population size of the Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle from year to year. It's certainly reassuring to see no sign of anything catastrophic over this short period. However, several more years of data are needed before the overall trend becomes clear: whether the population is stable, declining or recovering.

We had planned to include the 2022 result for this article, but in the end haven't quite managed it. Unfortunately, NatureTrackers HQ has had a horror year, beset by serious illness and family bereavements! Things are generally on the up, however, and the full story should be on the website News section — [naturetrackers.com.au/news](https://naturetrackers.com.au/news) — within the next couple of weeks. We're also planning to bring together more information soon, on some of the other species commonly recorded during the survey.

Adding further value to the achievements of WWW so far, a successful recent Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grant application, led by the University of Tasmania's Drs Christopher Johnson and James Pay, includes funding for a PhD student. Starting late in 2023, the student will be investigating ways to get the most detailed population information out of the annual survey data, including an estimate of overall population size, in order to assess whether or not the Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle is recovering from its 'endangered' status.

The PhD study is likely to involve extra WWW surveys in the vicinity of James' tagged eagles, to calculate the probability of spotting a nearby eagle during a WWW survey. Who knows – you might already have seen a tagged eagle during one of your surveys – or perhaps you will this year! Keep an eye out in NatureTrackers' News section for stories of these eagles, starting with Maria Island's timid Ernie: [naturetrackers.com.au/news/ernie-the-maria-island-eagle](https://naturetrackers.com.au/news/ernie-the-maria-island-eagle).

In the meantime, bookings for WWW 2023 are due to open in the next week, so it's time to start choosing your next adventure. Will you survey Bellerive, Bathurst Harbour –or both? **Start here:** [naturetrackers.com.au/news/ernie-the-maria-island-eagle/](https://naturetrackers.com.au/news/ernie-the-maria-island-eagle/).

For updates on WWW activities for schools, and other NatureTrackers events, **subscribe:** [naturetrackers.com.au/get-involved/subscribe](https://naturetrackers.com.au/get-involved/subscribe) or keep an eye on the **Calendar:** [naturetrackers.com.au/about/events-calendar](https://naturetrackers.com.au/about/events-calendar) .



Data on the scans and days when you don't see a raptor are equally important to record and upload—in fact, these are essential for the analyses. But of course, spending time with your eyes to the skies increases your chances of spotting one, and it's undeniably rewarding when you do! *Wedge-tailed Eagle: Photo by Bill Brown; WWW22, Buckland.*

# Northern Birdata Workshop

By

Central North Field Naturalists (CNFN) and BirdLife Tasmania members

## The workshop—Richard Ashby

On 16 Feb 2023, after extended discussion between north and south, a Birdata workshop was set up at the Tasmanian Arboretum at Eugenana, a little way inland from Devonport.

The birding fraternity in Tasmania, much as in the rest of the country, has a high average age and there needs to be some attempt to attract youthful vigour before us old fogies fall off our perches.

Sarah Lloyd, editor of 'The Natural News', the newsletter of the Central North Field Naturalists (CNFN), and Mike Newman and Warren Jones of the Tasmanian branch of BirdLife Australia were the main drivers. Dr Amanda Lilleyman, the Key Biodiversity Areas coordinator of BirdLife Australia, flew in from warmer climes to check out what these southerly folk were up to and to offer her own perspectives.

The PowerPoint presentation by Mike and Warren was aimed at entry-level Birdata surveyors but I, with 24 years' experience of that platform, found it very instructive. Those of us who wanted to ask questions found our curiosity accommodated. There was a large contingent of Central North Field Naturalists who have an interest in all things botanical/zoological/ecological/environmental and, happily, at least a small contingent of young people whose enthusiasm and curiosity need to be fomented.

After the presentation we were treated to a splendid array of delicious quiches and salads orchestrated by Martha Howell, CNFN president, and Judy Wilson and their culinary slaves. Much networking, a beneficial sideline of conferences/seminars/workshops, accompanied the sound of munching.

Walks around the Tasmanian Arboretum, which is splendid, were organised by Philip Milner, with five groups each led by a bird enthusiast who could recognise all of the calls, behaviours, and momentarily-seen profiles. Youthful eyes and wits complemented the experience of those of us with one foot in the grave!

Sarah Lloyd collated the sightings of the five groups with their unavoidable overlaps in a finite space, and entered the results of each walk as a 500 m radius survey to Birdata.

I missed the public gathering in Smithton (unfortunately planned for the same day) to discuss issues arising out of the proposed large wind farm on the shorebird hotspot Robbins Island but it was reported in the media and I shall be able to pick the brains of attendees later.

These workshops are an essential tool, especially for those of us living away from urban centres, for getting birds of a feather (sorry about the puns) flocking together, putting faces to names, and permitting a healthy exchange of ideas.

All credit to the organisers and central characters.







From L to R: Amanda Lilleyman, Sarah Lloyd, Mike Newman and Warren Jones



Photo by Philip Milner

Other photos on pages 8 and 9 by Perviz Marker

## Evening with the birds—Philip Milner

The Tasmanian Arboretum at Eugenana was an ideal venue for the Central North Field Naturalists' Evening with the Birds event which was a follow-on from the Birddata Workshop held in the Arboretum's Education Centre during the afternoon (see article on page 8).

One of the main objectives of the bird walks was to survey the birds across the whole Arboretum in a single survey time, in this instance between 5.15 pm and 7.00 pm, and to submit the observations to Birddata. There were five separate walks, each with a guide, of varying grades and distance to suit the personal fitness levels of participants.

The five walk routes extended across most of the property to include all the key areas of known and potential bird habitats; four of the walks passed by Founders Lake at some point to include the waterfowl.

### **Walk No. 1: Western Hill and Nature Trail, guided by Philip Milner**

This walk route followed the bush edge (boundary), up and across the Western Hill through the Gondwanan and Australian Collections. At the far end of the western hill we zig-zagged down to the Tasmanian Collection and then linked up with the nature trail which loops through the remnant forest at the northern end of the Arboretum and returns along the western bank of the Don River. We then followed the roadway through the European Collection to the mature *Eucalyptus viminalis* and veered right to follow the shoreline of the lake back to the picnic area. We had nine keen bird observers on this walk. Notable observations on this walk were an immature male Pink Robin accompanied by a Grey Fantail on the banks of the Don River, a Blue-winged Parrot seemingly settling down for the night in a bushy tree in the Tasmanian Collection, and numerous Silvereyes feeding on the fruits of the Native Currant *Coprosma quadrifida*.

### **Walk No. 2: Wet eucalypt forest and riparian habitats along the old railway formation track following the Don River, guided by Sarah Lloyd**

The vegetation and natural forest along the Don River at the northern end of the Arboretum is most important bird habitat for numerous bird species that prefer wet forest and riparian vegetation.

The walk followed the old railway easement which extends along the eastern bank of the Don River to the property's northern boundary. The walk passed by Founders Lake and through the New Zealand Collection to reach the riverside track.

### **Walk No. 3: The Dickenson limestone outcrop with the mature White Gums via the fernery and Melrose Creek, guided by Bob Read and Simon van der Veen**

The old-growth trees of White Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* and Swamp Gum *Eucalyptus ovata* on the Dickenson limestone outcrop and along Melrose Creek, including trees with hollows, form an important pocket of bird habitat within the Arboretum. This walk also included the fernery adjacent to Melrose Creek and the Nothofagus forest area which forms part of the Gondwanan Collection.

20 different species were seen on this walk including 15 Grey Fantails, 12 Superb Fairy Wrens, a single Dusky Woodswallow, Black-headed Honeyeaters (4), Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike and a single Bassian Thrush in the Nothofagus grove.

### **Walk No. 4: Founders Lake waterfowl and the internal road circuit, guided by Hazel Britton**

The main aim of this walk was to survey the waterfowl on the lake. The walk route crossed Melrose Creek on the vehicular road then turned right to follow the embankment and shoreline around Founders Lake. From the bird hide the walk continued around the lake shoreline and then re-joined the roadway and followed it around via the Tasmanian Collection and returned to the picnic area.

The lake had been relatively quiet over recent weeks so it was good to see the welcome return of quite a few waterfowl for our bird walk. As well as the resident swans (6), there were Pacific Black Ducks (16) plus 1 likely Mallard/Pacific Black Duck hybrid, 19 Chestnut Teal and 2 handsome Australian Shelducks. Other notable observations were 55 Dusky Woodswallows observed quite high above, presumably gathering in preparation to return to the mainland. Unusually, there were just 3 Eurasian Coots on the lake and of course the ever-present Tasmanian Native-hens were around the lake as well as in small groups across the property.

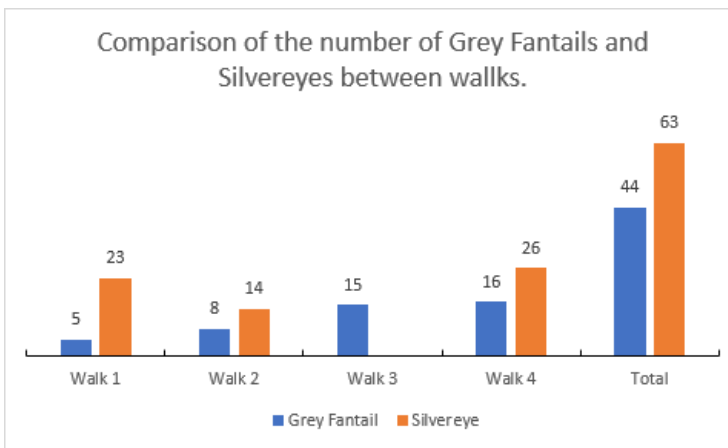
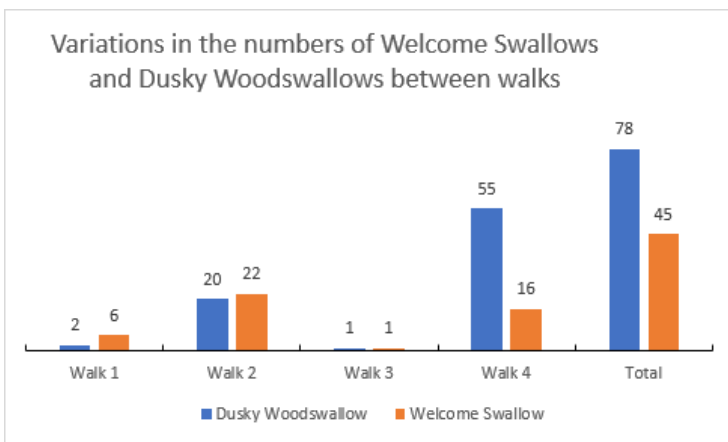
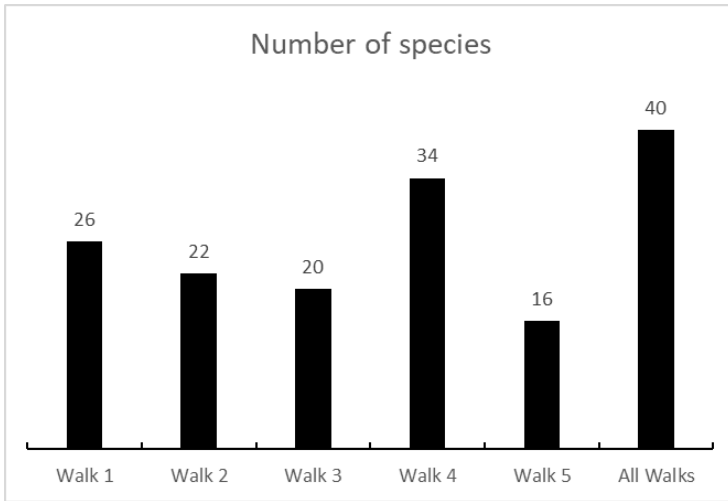
### **Walk No. 5: Hallets Quarry, over Limestone Hill to Founders Lake and return to picnic area, guided by Julie Serafin**

The key habitats on this walk were the riparian vegetation and eucalypts along the lower reaches of Melrose Creek and the remnant natural vegetation on Limestone Hill, which includes small patches of native grassland, including Tussock Grass *Poa labillardierei* and Kangaroo Grass *Themeda triandra*. The track over Limestone Hill was accessed through the old Hallets Quarry which forms part of the Arboretum. From Limestone Hill the walk then re-joined the roadway near Founders Lake to return to the picnic area.

**Species lists for five evening walks at the Tasmanian Arboretum (P indicates presence during walk)**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Walk 1	Walk 2	Walk 3	Walk 4	Walk 5	No. of-walks present
Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	P			P	P	3
Australian Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>	P			P		2
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	P			P		2
Chestnut Teal	<i>Anas castanea</i>	P			P		2
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	<i>Chalcites lucidus</i>		P				1
Tasmanian Native-hen	<i>Tribonyx mortierii</i>	P		P	P		3
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	P			P		2
Masked Lapwing	<i>Vanellus miles</i>				P	P	2
Laughing Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	P	P	P	P		4
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	<i>Zanda funereus</i>	P		P	P	P	4
Green Rosella	<i>Platycercus caledonicus</i>	P	P	P	P	P	5
Blue-winged Parrot	<i>Neophema chrysostoma</i>	P			P		2
Superb Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>	P	P	P	P	P	5
New Holland Honeyeater	<i>Phylidonyris novaehollandiae</i>	P		P	P		3
Yellow-throated Honeyeater	<i>Nesoptilotis flavicollis</i>	P	P		P	P	5
Black-headed Honeyeater	<i>Melithreptus affinis</i>		P	P			2
Eastern Spinebill	<i>Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris</i>	P		P	P		2
Little Wattlebird	<i>Anthochaera chrysoptera</i>				P	P	2
Yellow Wattlebird	<i>Anthochaera paradoxa</i>		P		P		2
Spotted Pardalote	<i>Pardalotus punctatus</i>		P		P	P	3
Striated Pardalote	<i>Pardalotus striatus</i>				P	P	2
Tasmanian Scrubwren	<i>Sericornis humilis</i>		P	P	P	P	4
Brown Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza pusilla</i>	P		P		P	3
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	P	P	P		P	4
Golden Whistler	<i>Pachycephala pectoralis</i>		P		P		2
Grey Shrike-thrush	<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>	P	P	P	P		4
Australian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	P			P	P	3
Grey Butcherbird	<i>Cracticus torquatus</i>		P	P	P	P	4
Dusky Woodswallow	<i>Artamus cyanopterus</i>	P	P	P	P	P	5
Grey Fantail	<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>	P	P	P	P	P	5
Forest Raven	<i>Corvus tasmanicus</i>	P	P	P	P		4
Satin Flycatcher	<i>Myiagra cyanoleuca</i>		P				1
Pink Robin	<i>Petroica rodinogaster</i>	P					1
Beautiful Firetail	<i>Stagonopleura bella</i>				P		1
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	P	P	P	P		4
Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	P	P	P	P		4
Silvereye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	P	P		P		3
Bassian Thrush	<i>Zoothera lunulata</i>			P			1
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	P	P	P	P		4
Black Duck-Mallard hybrid					P		1
Brown/Tasmanian Thornbill spp			P		P		2
Number of species		26	22	20	34	16	40

**A snapshot from the species data that was collected on the evening walks**



In just one evening a mine of information was generated, but a little caution is needed in the interpretation of the data presented here. A wide variety of species was found in all five walks; this diversity is associated with the type of habitat that was surveyed. Note the differences in the diagrams between the partition of the aerial hawkers (swallows) and small bush birds between the different walks. Presumably, the swallows were flocking post-breeding ahead of migration, although many Dusky Woodswallows will hang on until April. The Welcome Swallows recorded during Walk 2 were perched on emergent dead branches of a large eucalypt. The low number of these aerial feeding insectivorous species seen on Walk 3 was possibly because of a lack of open space.

There are some limitations with the data which limits any further interpretation at this stage.



Black Swan: Photo by Philip Milner



Blue-winged Parrot: Photo by Greg Close



Satin Flycatcher (f): Photo by Greg Close



Satin Flycatcher (m): Photo by Greg Close



Pink Robin: Photo by Greg Close

Tasmania trip report

By

Amanda Lilleyman

KBA Program Coordinator

The backbone of the KBA Program is the volunteers. The role of BirdLife Australia in coordinating the KBA program is to support and partner with relevant stakeholders within and surrounding KBAs. And so, part of my role in the KBA program is to engage and support volunteers across Australia. I was lucky to be able to visit and spend time with a range of volunteers in Tasmania/lutruwita in February 2023.

The purpose of the trip was to meet with volunteer members of BirdLife Tasmania to discuss the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) program, attend a Branch-led Birddata workshop, and provide direct support as a national office staff member to the Branch.

I had such an adventure and many, many conversations. I travelled from Hobart up the east coast, then through the midlands to northern Tasmania, before travelling back to the south, all within the space of a week.

During the KBA workshop hosted by BirdLife Tasmania, we discussed the KBA program in Tasmania, how it has been going, and how to prioritise KBAs for monitoring as there are currently 45 KBAs across the state, and many are hard to access for regular visits. I spent time with donors during a walk and talk session at the Waterworks Reserve in the South-east Tasmania KBA. I then had a productive discussion with the Friends of Orford Bird Sanctuary at the Orford KBA, and learnt about the conservation challenges of the site. I then travelled to Moulting Lagoon KBA and Douglas-Apsley KBA and experienced the beauty and expansiveness of these areas. I counted thousands of birds at the Tamar Wetlands KBA with one of BirdLife's Distinguished Services Awardees. I was then lucky to visit another Distinguished Services Awardee and get a personal tour of the Rubicon Estuary KBA and the Three Sisters (Bass Strait) KBA, before getting up close to Little Penguins at the Lillico penguin colony.

The biggest day of the trip was with the Birddata workshop hosted by Central North Field Naturalists and run by experienced BirdLife Tasmania members and a group of enthusiastic community members at the Eugenana Arboretum, followed by early-evening bird walks around the area. I finished the trip with more conversations with some of BirdLife Tasmania's amazing volunteers and came away feeling inspired by the considerable grassroots conservation work being done in the region.

It was a privilege to spend time with BirdLife Tasmania volunteers, donors, medallists and BirdLife Fellows – thank you to all who hosted me, spent time talking, and welcoming me to your beautiful state.

### Trip statistics

- >1000 km travelled across Tasmania
- 55 people (including 2 BirdLife Fellows, 2 Distinguished Service awardees, 1 Serventy Medallist awardee, 1 Hobbs Medallist awardee) engaged on BirdLife Australia, KBAs, Birddata
- 43.25 hours of engagement with BirdLife Tasmania and local community groups
- 7 KBAs visited
- 9 Birddata surveys completed (standardised surveys: 2-ha 20-min, 500 m area search, 5 km area search, shorebird count)
- 5.35 hours surveying birds
- 55 bird species recorded (including 5 Tasmanian endemics)
- >1500 individual birds counted during standardised surveys

Central North Field [Naturalists https://www.disjunctnaturalists.com/](https://www.disjunctnaturalists.com/)

Birddata for Tasmania [https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-41.7571808\\_146.4035970\\_7&region\\_id=44](https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-41.7571808_146.4035970_7&region_id=44)

Birddata for the Eugenana Arboretum site [https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-41.2273183\\_146.3039606\\_16](https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/explore#map=-41.2273183_146.3039606_16)

# Bird Interactions

By

Mike Newman

In the February e-bulletin we drew attention to recent reports of Azure Kingfishers interacting with fishermen and even perching on their rods to take advantage of disturbed insects.

We regularly experience similar interaction with other species, the Grey Fantail being a good example; it follows us as we go about our birdwatching in order to harvest the insects we disturb. Australian Magpies befriend us in the garden in the hope that we will dig up worms.

But Grey Fantails also form associations with other birds for similar reasons. On the mainland the Grey Fantail has been recorded following White-throated Tree-creepers as they forage on the trunks of trees for insects, some of which escape only to be hawked by the waiting flycatcher. In Tasmania I have seen a similar interaction between a Grey Fantail and a Scrubtit near Shoobridge Bend on Mount Wellington. Another example is that Noisy Miners assist Eastern Rosellas by deterring starlings, thus reducing competition for nestholes.

However, these interactions can be more sinister. For instance, it is well known that the Christmas Island Goshawk follows visitors hoping that they will disturb birds, which it then predated. Although not so well known, the Brown Goshawk adopts this strategy in Tasmania. While climbing Hartz Mountain I was aware of the presence of a Brown Goshawk on several occasions. On reaching the col below the summit I decided to do some birdwatching and was delighted when a Blue-winged Parrot popped up on the top of a low shrub. Next moment there was a 'whoosh' as the goshawk swept over me. The story has a happy ending as the Blue-winged Parrot escaped by climbing rapidly in a very tight circle, thus out-manoeuvring the goshawk, a tactic presumably evolved by parrots over many years (I have a bias to Blue-winged Parrots).

The formation of mixed foraging flocks is an example of a more complex interaction in which many species are involved. Bush birds form these flocks in late summer, at the end of the breeding season. For some species this may involve moving into more open habitat, with increased risk of predation. Associating with other species is a useful strategy to decrease this risk, as discussed below. A Tasmanian example is a mixed flock of Grey Fantails, Superb Fairy-wrens, Brown and Yellow-rumped Thornbills. Such flocks systematically glean the resources of an area and then move on to a new area. There are several advantages in adopting this strategy, particularly the advantage of many look-outs for predators, with species like thornbills and scrubwrens, when present, sounding the alarm. Fantails benefit from the insects stirred up by ground- and foliage-foraging species. On the Australian mainland these flocks can become quite large and involve a dozen or more species.

Associations also occur in waterbirds, but are less apparent because the action takes place beneath the surface of the water. In the Hunter Region of NSW we were perplexed to see large flocks of Hardhead, each of which had an accompanying Hoary-headed Grebe. Persistent observation indicated that when the Hardhead dived, the grebe followed, diving into the vortex left by the Hardhead. Examination of HANZAB showed that grebes feed on aquatic insects disturbed by foraging waterfowl, providing an aquatic equivalent of the Grey Fantail and the Scrubtit. This observation helped solve a long-term mystery: Why would an Australasian Grebe follow in the wake of a large snake; presumably in an expectation of the snake disturbing aquatic insects.



*Grey Fantail: Photo by  
Helen Cunningham*

Instances also exist off-shore and I am sure fishermen and dolphins both watch where gannets are diving, as do birdwatchers on pelagic trips. Again, these interactions can become extremely complex, involving multiple bird species harvesting fish collaboratively, as vividly recorded in Attenborough's films. Locally these associations can involve gannets, Black-faced Cormorants, Little Penguins and Crested Terns corralling schools of fish in against the coast and indulging in a collective feeding frenzy, a never-to-be forgotten scene.

Many of the interactions I have described involve a one-sided advantage termed commensalism. However, there are other associations where both parties benefit, termed mutualism. One that might fit this pattern is the association of Cattle Egrets with cattle, where the egret may reduce the impact of insects on cattle and other animals. For instance, pigs are exceedingly tolerant of Cattle Egrets foraging round their snouts.

There is much to be discovered from watching birds' interactions with each other. Some of the above observations were previously unrecorded. Our publication editors eagerly await your observations – please send them to [yellowthroateditor@gmail.com](mailto:yellowthroateditor@gmail.com).



*Interloper amongst Eurasian Coots: Photo by Michelle Turner*

## Book Sale at Risdon Brook Dam outing December 2022



*Photos by Heidi Krajewsky*

# A LETTER FROM THE RAPTOR REFUGE

By Kate Shaw

Hello raptor fans!

This is my second time writing the Raptor Refuge letter for *Yellow Throat*. This time I thought I would introduce myself properly and share with you my experience at the refuge. So, here we go.

My name is Kate, and I am one half of the Raptor Refuge Artistic Duo (the other half being the wonderful Juliet). I have been working at the refuge for a little over two years now, and I can proudly say that it has been one of the most rewarding pursuits of my life. I have always loved and been interested in birds, and from a young age was often rescuing birds at the family home (usually from window collisions). The world of raptors was quite foreign to me though. Raptors always seemed to elude me and most of my birdwatching enjoyment came from sitting with the wrens, honeyeaters, corvids and parrots in the garden or in the bush. It wasn't until I met the beautiful birds at the refuge that I realised just how special birds of prey are. With those heavy brows, intense eyes and menacing talons, they are such fierce and strong birds with some truly impressive adaptations.

Over my two years at the refuge I have learnt many things about Tasmanian raptors, the man-made threats that they face, as well as the hard work and determination that is required to make a difference within this sector. I have had the pleasure of carrying out various jobs at the refuge such as animal husbandry and feeding, raptor taxi driving, grounds work, administration and fundraising, as well as tour guiding. These days, the majority of my time is spent painting, and hosting our popular Painting an Owl Workshop.

These workshops include an educational walk of the grounds to see our resident birds, followed by a guided session of drawing and watercolour painting of a Tasmanian Masked Owl. What I find really enjoyable about these workshops is chatting with people and talking about all the interesting facets of Masked Owls as well as their basic anatomy. They are truly a unique-looking bird with their big, forward-facing eyes and glorious facial ruffs. Monty and Bentley are our two Masked Owl ambassadors and are the highlight of the evening, proving to be the most beautiful live models one could hope for in an art class. If only they knew how much joy and inspiration they bring us.

If you would like to learn more about the Raptor Refuge please visit our website ([www.raptorrefuge.com.au](http://www.raptorrefuge.com.au)) and don't hesitate to get in touch with us on Facebook or via email ([info@raptorrefuge.com.au](mailto:info@raptorrefuge.com.au)) – we would love to hear from you.

If you have any questions about our art workshops in particular, or would like to be notified of the next one, please feel free to contact me ([kate@raptorrefuge.com.au](mailto:kate@raptorrefuge.com.au)).

Take care all and we hope to see you soon!

Happy birding!



*Our last painting workshop from January this year*



*Montgomery the Tasmanian Masked Owl*

*Photos by Raptor Refuge*



# BIRDLIFE TASMANIA NEWS

## Annual General Meeting 2023

### 2023 AGM—nominations received

The following nominations were received for the BirdLife Tasmania Committee for 2023:

**Convenor:** Eric Woehler

**Secretary:** Karen Dick

**Treasurer:** Cathy Bulman

**Committee members:**

Perviz Marker

Mel Kelly

Heidi Krajewsky

Sue Wragge

Keith Reid

As a result of the nominations, no election is required and all nominees will be accepted to the Committee.

The Convenor and Committee would like to thank committee member Mark Holdsworth who has contributed 15 months to BirdLife Tasmania but resigned earlier in 2022.

## Donating to Tasmanian bird research and branch activities

BirdLife Australia runs many worthy campaigns to raise funds for bird research and conservation programs at a national level. What you might not realise is that our branch receives no funding from those campaigns. Research on Tasmanian birds and other branch activities run by our members are usually carried out voluntarily, or funded from the branch's own fundraising efforts or directed donations from generous members.

The Donation web page has changed recently and it may not be clear how you can direct your donation to the Tasmanian branch, so read on if you wish to do so.

When you visit <https://birdlife.org.au/donate> to complete the online donation form, please write in the 'Your Message (optional)' box, way at the bottom of the details page (step 2), something like 'to be directed to BirdLife Tasmania research'.

If you do make a donation to us and are worried about it reaching us, please drop us a line [tasmania@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tasmania@birdlife.org.au) so we can confirm receipt of the funds as they do sometimes get stuck in a backlog.

You can also make a bequest in your will to birds. You can direct funds to any bird, branch or program you like if it is clearly stated that the funds are to be used EXCLUSIVELY for the purpose you desire. More details are on the website but do seek legal advice.

Please note that all donations to BirdLife Tasmania must go through BirdLife Australia's National Office to ensure compliance with our Deductible Gift Recipient requirements and status. You will receive a receipt from National Office, and be assured of the Tasmanian branch's sincere thanks for your support of our efforts to protect Tasmania's birds and their habitats.

## Some interesting duck observations

### An influx of ducks, but from where?

#### Mike Newman

Recently I went to Calverts Lagoon and found at least 750 ducks; there had been almost none there in January. Most were teal and there was a large cohort of Grey Teal, at least 70, but maybe many more. Does this flag that ducks are starting to return from the mainland despite the amount of rain? A similar indication was provided by the occurrence of 17 Hoary-headed Grebes at the Penna Waste Treatment Ponds on 25 February. Recently most Tasmanian records of this species have involved three or less birds. If you have observed an increase of waterbirds on our dams and wetlands recently, please let us know at [yellowthroateditor@gmail.com](mailto:yellowthroateditor@gmail.com)



Grey Teal: Photo by Alan Fletcher

**Tasmanian duck hunting season starts soon but BirdLife Australia and BirdLife Tasmania maintain consistent opposition, backed by the RSPCA, to this activity.**

However there is some movement on the political front interstate::

SA is undertaking a review, however the 2023 season will go ahead: <https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/media-releases/news-items/duck-hunting-review-to-commence>

Victoria has made changes, following initial indications that the 2023 duck season would not necessarily go ahead: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-09/victorian-duck-season-premier-daniel-andrews-language-signal/101948138>

Conditions on the mainland are wet with higher numbers reported breeding throughout SE Australia: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-11/record-flooding-in-nsw-triggers-bird-breeding-bonanza-/101812042>

### Duck behaviour

#### Richard Ashby

In early February 2023 at Romaine Reserve in Burnie, a site I survey monthly for Birddata, I saw a Pacific Black Duck and an Australian Wood Duck within a metre of each other diving in shallow water. Both birds disappeared from view completely for multiple seconds and surfaced repeatedly with vegetable matter in their bills which they consumed.

Black ducks are dabblers and up-enders. Australian Wood Duck sare grazers and dabblers and occasional up-enders. This may be the first time I've witnessed either species totally submerged like a proper diving duck.



Pacific Black Duck: Photo by Alan Fletcher



Australian Wood Duck: Photo by Helen Cunningham

## Outing Report: Risdon Brook Dam—10 December 2022

Warren Jones

A keen group of 11 early risers gathered in the carpark at Risdon Brook before the 8.00 am start for the walk. We couldn't have asked for a nicer morning: sunny, mild and almost no wind. We set out anti-clockwise on the 4.5 km path around the dam, thinking that we might get half way around before being overtaken by the Park Run runners who started at 9.00 am. But there were too many birds to look at .... and we were perhaps a little over a third of the way around when the first runners shot by.

Risdon Brook offers a variety of habitats. There is the reservoir itself, with both deep water and some shallow inlets. There are lawns and shrubs around the carpark and picnic area which merge into a modified landscape with many pine trees at the southern end of the dam. The vegetation around the northern half of the reservoir becomes largely natural bushland and grassy woodland. This variety of habitats provided a broad range of birds and, all up, the group recorded 45 species in our two-hour ramble.

The highlight of the morning for most was a Blue-billed Duck, first spotted by Scott. It was a male with a stunningly blue bill contrasting with its dark head and chestnut body. It was quite cooperative in providing all of us with a good view. This species prefers deeper wetlands and Risdon Brook is one of a relatively few locations around Hobart where you have a good chance of finding it. We were also on the lookout for Blue-winged Parrots, which are known to use this area. Although we failed on this quest, we met a photographer on the western side of the dam who had seen several that morning away from the fairly busy path.

There was a good array of waterbirds, including Chestnut Teal and Pacific Black Duck with chicks. We recorded both bronzewings, Pallid and Shining Bronze-Cuckoos, cockatoos and rosellas and, in the more natural vegetation, honeyeaters and robins. Both Scarlet and Dusky Robins afforded good views and stimulated some discussion on how to identify juvenile robins. We also saw a Benetts Wallaby that seemed intrigued by what we were doing with our binoculars.

After the walk we retired to the picnic shelter to browse through the book sale, enjoy a convivial Christmas morning tea and share our stories. As we were leaving, a Wedge-tailed Eagle floated by high overhead.

The bird list from the outing has been entered into Birddata as a 5 km search, which can be viewed here :<https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=8316027&h=4548391a>.



Photos by Sue Jones

### Bird List

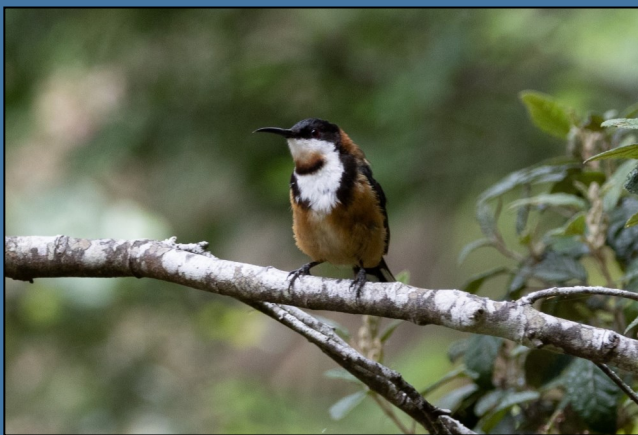
Blue-billed Duck  
Black Swan  
Pacific Black Duck  
Chestnut Teal  
Australian Wood Duck  
Hoary-headed Grebe  
Common Bronzewing  
Brush Bronzewing  
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo  
Pallid Cuckoo  
Tasmanian Native-hen  
Masked Lapwing  
Kelp Gull  
White-faced Heron  
Great Cormorant  
Wedge-tailed Eagle  
Laughing Kookaburra  
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo  
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo  
Green Rosella  
Superb Fairy-wren  
Yellow-throated Honeyeater  
Eastern Spinebill  
Yellow Wattlebird  
Noisy Miner  
Spotted Pardalote  
Striated Pardalote  
Yellow-rumped Thornbill  
Brown Thornbill  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
Grey Shrike-thrush  
Black Currawong  
Grey Currawong  
Australian Magpie  
Grey Butcherbird  
Dusky Woodswallow  
Grey Fantail  
Forest Raven  
Scarlet Robin  
Dusky Robin  
Australasian Pipit  
European Goldfinch  
Welcome Swallow  
Silvereye  
Common Blackbird

# Outing Report: Mount Field—11 February 2023

Sarah Ryan



*The Big Tree*



*Eastern Spinebill*



*Bassian Thrush*



*Pink Robin nest found on the Tall Tree walk*

Photos above by Karen Dick

Birdlife Tasmania's outing on Saturday 11 February was to Mt Field National Park where on our arrival, the six birders made the slowest recorded exit of the carpark due to the abundance of nearby birdlife. The count was well into double digits before reaching the trailhead.

Heading off on the Russell Falls circuit, the pace was gentle, with tips and information freely and non-judgmentally provided as the many highlights caused us to pause and observe. It was a surprise to see a Superb Lyrebird right beyond the viewing platform at Russell Falls and an Eastern Spinebill posed beautifully right near us when we were nearly back to the Visitor Centre.

After a coffee break, highlights on the Tall Trees circuit were a little Scrubtit that finally revealed itself and a beautifully constructed Pink Robin nest.

Coming from a novice perspective, I found it fascinating to learn how varied contact calls, scolds and flight calls can be.

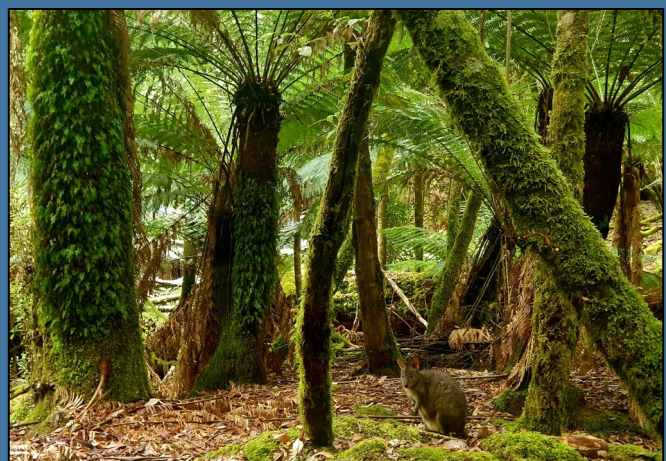
I am enjoying the immersion into the natural environment that these birding walks provide. There was an interesting

discussion following the discovery of an unusual feather on the path; it was deduced to have probably come from a Southern Boobook.

Thank you to Karen Dick and Sue Wragge for organising and leading this outing.

## Bird List

Tasmanian Native-hen  
Masked Lapwing  
Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo  
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo  
Green Rosella  
Superb Fairy-wren  
Eastern Spinebill  
Yellow-throated Honeyeater  
Black-headed Honeyeater  
Spotted Pardalote  
Striated Pardalote  
Brown Thornbill  
Tasmanian Thornbill  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
Grey Shrike-thrush  
Golden Whistler  
Grey Butcherbird  
Australian Magpie  
Black Currawong  
Grey Currawong  
Grey Fantail  
Forest Raven  
Pink Robin  
Welcome Swallow  
Tree Martin  
Silvereye  
Common Blackbird  
House Sparrow  
Common Bronzewing  
Superb Lyrebird  
Yellow-rumped Thornbill  
Bassian Thrush  
Scrubtit  
Tasmanian Scrubwren



*Photo by Sarah Ryan*

# Outing Report: Truganini Track, Tarooma — 23 February 2023

Maggie Nettleship



On a day which promised to be very warm, a dozen of us met early in cool conditions at Cartwright Reserve on the boundary of Sandy Bay and Tarooma for what turned out to be a busy morning of bird-watching through beautiful wet sclerophyll forest and fern glades.

Our leader, Sue Wragge, had checked out the track on the day before. This is a very useful protocol, as it not only identifies safety and environmental issues, it also sets expectations for what birds we may see and where along the track. We were helped by referencing a poster of birds recently sighted in Tarooma, and by several participants who had the very useful ability to identify a bird by its distant call. We also welcomed a holidaying couple of Bird-Life North Queensland members, who had flown in the night before from Cairns and who described their birdwatching throughout Australia.

We hadn't gone far before being aware of calls all around us, with many sightings of Grey Fantails and Silvereyes throughout our walk. Not far along the track we saw Strong-billed Honeyeaters, our heads

tilted back, also trying to identify pardalotes, thornbills and other small birds flitting about in the canopy and silhouetted against grey sky.

We were captivated by watching a female Golden Whistler eat a grub so close to our group, a fleeting glimpse of a Pink Robin, and a number of Scrubwrens feeding near the creek, along with Yellow-throated Honeyeaters. Some saw the elusive Grey Shrike-thrush and Spotted Pardalote, whose calls had been heard throughout our walk, but we missed the Bassian Thrushes which Sue had been seen the day before, and didn't hear any Beautiful Firetails. A small group walking in the rear on the return walk had a close-up view of a Brush Bronzewing sitting quietly on a branch.

We finished in warm sunshine, talking over the surprising variety of birds we had seen or heard, our conversation helped by a warming cup from the local coffee caravan.

*Photos by Sue Wragge*



## Bird list

Common Bronzewing  
Brush Bronzewing  
Silver Gull  
Kelp Gull  
Laughing Kookaburra  
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo  
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo  
Green Rosella  
Eastern Rosella  
Yellow-throated Honeyeater  
Strong-billed Honeyeater  
Black-headed Honeyeater  
Spotted Pardalote  
Pink Robin  
Tasmanian Scrubwren  
Grey Shrike-thrush  
Brown Thornbill  
Golden Whistler  
Grey Currawong  
Grey Fantail  
Forest Raven  
Silvereye  
Common Blackbird  
House Sparrow

## A Tribute to Dr Bruce Robertson

Els Wakefield

Dr Bruce Robertson was a veterinary surgeon and a father of two, who also worked on various long-term research projects involving Pacific Gulls and Kelp Gulls around Australia. Bruce passed away on 10 February 2023.

Since his retirement, Bruce continued to work tirelessly on furthering his gull research. This involved many projects at once, despite various battles with his health.

Bruce's contribution to Australia's scientific knowledge regarding our native and introduced gulls has been enormous.

Bruce's energy, enthusiasm and passion for gulls was infectious and an important inspiration to many.



*Dr Bruce Robertson: Photo by Els Wakefield*

# Wings on King

**Autumn  
Bird  
Surveys**

**27th- 30th  
April 2023**

**Agenda**  
27th- Welcome & Orientation  
28th - Bird Surveys  
29th Bird Surveys & dinner with guest speaker

We can't do it alone.  
We need YOU to give us a hand

**REGISTRATIONS ARE NOW OPEN** go to  
<https://www.birdsofkingisland.com/register>

Find out More  
<https://www.birdsofkingisland.com/>



King Island  
Landcare



Made with PosterMyWall.com

## BirdLife Tasmania Outings March—May 2023

We've added two new features to our calendar – quarterly visits to the same location so that we see the seasonal changes and really get to know the site, and 'themed' months. We've picked Risdon Brook Dam for our seasonal visits because there are clear variations in the presence and behaviour of birds through the year. March outings will be in drier forest, and April outings in wetter forest. We hope this will provide greater insights into the sites and presence and behaviour of birds.

To register for any outing listed here, you will need to email Sue at [tasmania.outings@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tasmania.outings@birdlife.org.au) with the particular outing in the subject line.

**It helps us if you register at least 7 days beforehand so that we can confirm the walk with our leaders in good time.**

REGION	DATE	LOCATION / LEADER	NOTES
South	Saturday 4 March	Risdon Brook Dam	Gently graded circuit of the dam with a chance to see Blue-winged Parrots and other bush and water birds.
South	Wednesday 8 March	Peter Murrell Reserve	A stroll that takes in different habitats and the birds that are found in dry bush, open areas and around water-courses and ponds.
South	Saturday 8 April	Kaoota Tramway Track	A gently graded track through several habitats including dry and damp forest. Potential to see Pink Robins, Scrubtits and Tasmanian Scrubwrens.
South	Wednesday 26 April	The Springs–Sphinx Rock and Fern Glade, Fern Tree	Two scenic short walks through varied habitat with a chance to see a good range of endemics.
South	Sunday 14 May	Knocklofty Reserve, West Hobart	An exploration of the lower tracks of the reserve to look for birds of the understorey and canopy.
South	Saturday 27 May	Where? Where? Wedgie! New Norfolk	Watch for Wedge-tailed Eagles and other raptors, see a range of other birds while in the area.

### POSTPONED - combined regions outing – Tamar Wetlands

With road work causing significant traffic delays that make a day trip untenable, we've decided to postpone the Tamar outing. Instead, we hope that conditions will allow us to run it in early December as our first combined regions outing and end-of-year barbecue.

### Calling for expressions of interest: seabird charter

Are you interested in a day trip out of Eaglehawk Neck?

The cost of \$145 per person is based on 12 passengers. Bookings and payment in advance would be necessary (and refunds contingent on finding a replacement passenger).

Boat departure at 7.00 am will require either an early morning drive to Eaglehawk Neck or spending the night in the area.

Contact Karen [tasmania.outings@birdlife.org.au](mailto:tasmania.outings@birdlife.org.au) with seabird charter in the subject line.



GPO Box 68, Hobart 7001  
tasmania@birdlife.org.au

[www.birdlife.org.au/tasmania](http://www.birdlife.org.au/tasmania)

### [BirdLife Tasmania | Facebook](#)

*Yellow Throat* is produced every quarter beginning in March. Contributions, including articles, interesting sightings, photographs, letters and news, are welcome and will be published subject to space and interest or relevance to BirdLife Tasmania members, at the editors' discretion. Please email them to [yellowthroateditor@gmail.com](mailto:yellowthroateditor@gmail.com) The deadline for the next issue is **20 May 2023**.

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Editors: Perviz Marker (Coordinator) and Sharon Moore Proof reader: Sharon Moore.

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**BirdLife Tasmania is a regional branch of BirdLife Australia**