

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



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Website: www.mfn.org.au

Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com

Objects of the Club

To facilitate and promote the knowledge of natural history, and to encourage the preservation and protection of the Australian natural environment, especially that of the Murrumbidgee River Valley



**Meet Bidgee,
the Australasian
Bittern that MFN
have sponsored.**

**Photo by
Matt Herring**

See page 9 for story

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CONTRIBUTIONS

**For the March issue by
Wednesday 1 March**

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

***Outings this month to
Rankins Springs,
Cocoparra Nature Reserve***

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

President:	Graham Russell	0419 350 673	Editor:	Rowena Whiting	6953 2612
Vice President:	Nella Smith	6959 1210	Committee:	Johanna Botman	6963 4855
Vice President:	Eric Whiting	6953 2612		Phillip Williams	6953 3524
Vice President:	Virginia Tarr	6962 5614		Betty Bradney	6959 2901
Secretary:	Penny Williams	6953 3524			
Treasurer:	Phil Tenison	6953 4869	Website Co-ordinator:	Phillip Williams	6953 3524

MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND THURSDAY EACH MONTH, EXCEPT JANUARY, AT THE Yellow Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street at 7.30 PM

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

Membership enquiries:

Leeton	Eric Whiting	6953 2612	Griffith	Virginia Tarr	6962 5614	
Narrandera	Nella Smith	6959 1210	Coleambally	John Wilkinson	6954 4129	
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Welcome to a new year – Planning has started for 2017 and it is proposed at the meeting on Thursday to discuss outings, weekend trip and evening talks; so come along with your ideas and places you'd like to visit. The year has started well with our trip to Tumut and the high country, an evening outing to Lake Coolah and Rocky Waterholes was well attended. First we will reminisce on the last outing for 2016 which saw a good crowd at Yarrabimbi for Christmas fare. **Rowena**

Christmas Breakup at Yarrabimbi - 10 December 2016



Back at the house we assembled in the outside eating area and were soon tucking into the main meal of various cold meats and salads followed by a wonderful selection of deserts and chocolates; all very delicious. As usual it was also a chance to catch up on news and other happenings with old and new members alike. We are truly grateful for Ana and Andrew's hosting the event. Also we were fortunate that the weather was kind and we did not have to tolerate excessive heat as we so often do at this time of year.

Our Christmas festivities were held at one of our favourite locations – "Yarrabimbi" in the Brobenah Hills. Do you realise this is the 4th year we have been there? Around 30 of us gathered around 6 o'clock and most people took the opportunity of a walk down to a dam, while a few were able to be driven; here we sat around for a bit in the hope that some glossies would make this their drinking point. Some of us decided to venture further to a second dam and met along the track Warwick Bradney coming to tell us of their presence. Most of us had a good view of 3 and some saw a further 7 being a bit further away. A glorious sighting.



Members watching for glossies – Virginia Tarr
Glossy Black Cockatoos decided to visit another dam – Phil Tenison.

Rowena Whiting

Summer Camp at Tumut on 13th to 15th January, 2017

Summer camp this year was to Tumut and up to the higher altitudes.

Max and Neil were the first to arrive on the Thursday 12th and they already had a good number of birds on the list by the time that Dione, Nella and I arrived at around 6:30 that evening.

Accommodation was at the Riverglade Caravan Park with 24 people sharing 7 Cabins on the Friday night and 26 on Saturday night after Phil and Kathy arrived on the Saturday afternoon and another cabin was added. The accommodation was comfortable and most importantly on the Friday afternoon, air-conditioned. The caravan park is located on the Tumut River and adjacent to the wetlands.

These are a credit to the local volunteers that had the vision to create them and keep them maintained. Rehabilitation of the wetland area was first conceived in the early 1990's and a Management Concept Report for Tumut River Common was accepted by Tumut Council in 2001. The rehabilitation project commenced in 2003. In 2004 the group successfully received \$98,000 from the NSW government's Environmental Trust. Works included removing invasive weed species, planting of 5000 trees, fencing to exclude stock and the construction of walkways and bridges to allow access for passive recreation. I am sure that many of us enjoyed this area for our pre breakfast walks.

All of the remaining campers had arrived well before our scheduled afternoon outing time of 3:00pm but due to the extreme heat this was delayed to 4:00pm when we headed to Log Creek Bridge. This area proved to be good for birding (see Max's Report). After some birding we moved down to sit on a spit on the edge of the dam. The weather was kind and had clouded over and there was a very strong breeze that kept us all cool as we enjoyed the usual nibbles, drinks and conversation. One of the highlights for me was Jane fishing with Laura and Jenna, it is great to see the young and young at heart mixing. Dinner that night was at the BBQ area at the caravan park so that we had somewhere to go if the predicted rain arrived before we had finished. It didn't arrive until after we had all eaten. After we had packed up it was off to bed to be ready for the next full day of activities.



Joanne, Dione and Jenna at Log Bridge Creek – Graham Russell

Saturday began early for some with a pre-breakfast walk to the wetland or further afield for others that had already done the wetland. The organised activities began when we all formed a convoy and headed off at 9:00. The first stop was to turn down Lobs Hole Ravine Road to stop at the Journama heritage walk. This was a 3.2km return walk that passes the ruins of three homesteads dating from the late 1800's and early 1900's. There isn't a lot left of any of these houses and the most notable feature is the introduced plants especially the very large pines. There was much discussion on the merits of leaving these introduced species for the heritage value as opposed to their possible invasive spread into the surrounding bush. For birder this wasn't the most exciting walk but I think that the plant people had some things to look at (see Eric's report). After we had all had a good look around we sat at the beginning of the walk and had lunch.



Setting off on the Journama Heritage Walk
Rowena Whiting

From the Journama heritage walk we headed to Yarrangobilly Caves, we had a cave tour booked for 3:30 pm so after paying our park entry fee we all headed our separate ways to meet up again at the car park of the Jillabenan Cave. We divided into two groups for our cave tour as our group was so big (26). The cave tour was very informative and some of the features in the cave were very beautiful, the Park ranger that led our tour was very informative. After the cave tour some of the first

group headed back to camp to start preparing dinner. Most of the second group headed down the road to look at Landers Falls lookout. By the time that we left Yarrangobilly we were already running behind schedule but we thought that we would be able to fit it in and still get back for dinner.

The drive into Landers Falls is a four wheel drive track but is a very interesting drive and provided the only Flame Robin sighting for the weekend. The Landers Falls walk is short and steep, it is only 1.6km return but from the car park it goes down 20 metres then rises 75 metres to the second of two look outs. As we were already running late it was a sprint to the top with four of us making it up to the second look out and the rest making it to the first. There were a few birds and plants to look at on the way up and down and it



The top Lander Falls lookout from the lower - Rowena Whiting
The lower lookout taken from the upper - Graham Russell
Flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos - Graham Russell
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos - Phillip Williams

would have been nice to have more time to look around but with tea waiting we headed back down the hill toward camp. The trip down the hill was a little eventful, the first was the number of Kangaroos on the road but with no real incidences only Phil bumping one that kept going and no damage to his car. The other distraction was at Humes Crossing where we had an unscheduled stop to look at a flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. There was some hard braking to pull up and get into the car park, when we counted there where over 50 and we suspect that they had gathered to drink, after some photo opportunities it was time to head to camp to make our apologies for being an hour late for dinner.

Once again Neil and Johanna with help provided a wonderful meal and everybody went to bed full of food. The highlights of the night other than the food and conversation were Max reading the bird list and the resident Possums that were very fast to steal the leftovers from any plates that where on the ground.

Sunday was again quite warm but after our individual pre-breakfast walks we again gathered at 9:00am to head off for the mornings outings. This time to Journama Creek by the time that we got there it was hot and the birds where few except for the Superb Fairy Wrens and Yellow faced Honeyeaters that had been in abundance for the whole weekend. There were a few sightings but I will leave these to Max. After a walk we had lunch and headed off to our final stop on the way home at Yolde camping area on the dam. Once again it was hot and the birds where few but there was some sightings.

Finally I would like to thank everybody that participated in a great week end with much knowledge sharing. It is this knowledge sharing that makes all of our outings into learning experiences, but practical learning with good company. So thank you to all.

Graham Russell

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



Tumut Camp Bird Report

After arriving in Tumut around lunchtime on the Thursday and unpacking, a very brief check of the nearby wetlands indicated it a perfect spot for an early morning walk the following morning. It was quite hot at the time of arrival and birds were scarce – **White-browed Scrubwren** and **Brown Thornbill** were seen on the banks of the raging Tumut River along with what proved to be one of the most common birds of the



weekend, namely the **Superb Wren** – they were everywhere! Likewise for the **Yellow-faced Honeyeater**.

In the afternoon, a drive to the Tumut Golf Course proved worthwhile. The surprise bird there was to hear and then see a lone **Superb Parrot**. Next, a drive towards the Blowering Dam wall was also good and at a stop on the way, an **Eastern Spinebill** and several **Golden Whistlers** were seen.

Friday morning, at 6.30, the wetland walk proved very promising for the Group walk the next morning – **White-throated Treecreeper** and **White-throated Gerygone** being the best birds seen.

After breakfast the plan was to drive to Log Bridge Creek 26km out of Tumut to see if the area was worth bringing the group to later that afternoon after everyone arrived. A good selection of birds including **Scarlet Robin** (adults with 2 juvenile birds), **Diamond Firetail**, **Varied Sitella** and a **Peregrine Falcon** were added to the list.

Back at camp everyone had arrived by 3pm and had settled into their respective cabins so the convoy of vehicles returned to the Log Bridge Creek site for some bird watching and then for late afternoon nibbles and drinks by the lake's edge. As well as the birds seen earlier, a pair of **Gang Gangs** were seen by most of the group on the drive out – everyone, that is, except me!



On Saturday morning most people did the Wetlands walk before gathering to spend the day in the Yarrangobilly Caves area (see Eric's plant report). Best bird seen (only by Neil and I) was a **Brush Cuckoo** which took some time to get a clear view of the bird.

At the caves, a lone **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo** was seen by most of the group but later many of these birds were seen in greater numbers in other areas.



On Sunday, those who stayed on went to the Jounama Creek walk opposite the Talbingo turnoff. However, it was quite hot and people began to disperse and eventually head for home after an early lunch.

Thanks to Graham and Dione for organising the weekend – a great time should have been had by all – I know I certainly did.

Max O'Sullivan

Bird list from the weekend compiled by Max O'Sullivan

Magpie (some white-backed birds)	Wood Duck	Black Duck
White-faced Heron	Crimson Rosella	White-browed Scrubwren
Brown Thornbill	Silvereye	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Superb Wren	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Rainbow Bee-eater
Welcome Swallow	Little Corella	Yellow-rumped Thornbill

Top: Olive-backed Oriole Tumut Wetland – Graham Russell
 Left: Gang Gang Cockatoo – Phil Tenison
 Above: Welcome Swallow feeding young – Graham Russell

Sacred Kingfisher
 Laughing Kookaburra
 Masked Lapwing
 Pee-wee
 Striated Thornbill
 Eastern Spinebill
 White Cockatoo
 Dusky Woodswallow
 Double-barred Finch
 Spotted Pardalote
 Grey Teal
 Striated Pardalote
 White-winged Chough
 Varied Sitella
 Peregrine Falcon
 Australian Hobby
 Australian Kestrel
 Gang Gang Cockatoo
 Wonga Pigeon
 Flame Robin
 Hardhead
 Little Black Cormorant
 Weebill
 Grey Currawong (H)
 Painted Button-quail (?)

Common Blackbird
 Satin Bowerbird
 House Sparrow
 Willie Wagtail
 Olive-backed Oriole
 Pied Butcherbird
 Eastern Rosella
 Red Wattlebird
 Australian Raven
 White-throated Treecreeper
 Red-rumped Parrot
 Australian Reed Warbler
 Scarlet Robin
 Diamond Firetail
 Emu
 Whistling Kite
 Little Pied Cormorant
 Purple Swamphen
 White-eared Honeyeater
 Grey Shrike-Thrush
 Australian Pipit
 Satin Flycatcher
 Little Black Cormorant
 Powerful Owl (H)

Grey Fantail
 Red-browed Finch
 Superb Parrot
 Noisy Friarbird
 Golden Whistler
 Galah
 Eastern Yellow Robin
 White-plumed Honeyeater
 Jacky Winter
 White-throated Gerygone
 Dollarbird
 Dusky Moorhen
 Black-chinned Honeyeater
 European Goldfinch
 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo
 Brown-headed Honeyeater
 Straw-necked Ibis
 White-necked Heron
 Brush Cuckoo
 Wedge-tailed Eagle
 Australian White Ibis
 Common Bronzewing
 Southern Boobook (H)
 Little Button-quail (?)

(?) indicates a possible sighting.

The Tumut Weekend – A Vegetation Overview

Our January high country weekends are generally regarded as an opportunity to escape the extreme heat of the plains. They are also an opportunity to visit landscapes and vegetation communities (with corresponding flora and fauna makeup) scarcely visited by club members.

Tumut is near the foot of the mountains and as such does not afford much respite from the heat from the rise in altitude (Tumut is 260 metres above sea level opposed to Narrandera at 150 metres). It is however a convenient accommodation venue to travel daily up to the high country. It is also convenient to sample the differences between Lower and Inland Slopes Bioregions and the Sub-alpine Bioregion.

Travelling east from Narrandera at the western side of the Lower Slopes Bioregion there is a gradual increase in altitude, annual rainfall, and relief across to the eastern side at Talbingo. With the gradual changes there is a steady change in vegetation communities. Thus at Tumut the dominant trees are Broad-leaf Peppermint *Eucalyptus dives*, Red Stringybark *E. macorhyncha* and Red Box *E. polyanthemos*. (The latter not to be confused with the Gum-bark Coolibah *E. intertexta* which is also called Red Box in areas where it occurs going north west from Griffith.)

The average canopy height also increases from 20-22 metres to 30+ metres – as many of the group noticed during our first excursion to Log Bridge Creek on the Friday evening.

Typically the Lower Slopes Bioregion has dry sclerophyll woodlands to forests. (The difference between woodland and forest is either defined as below or above 20 metre canopy height or alternatively as crown separation greater or less than one crown diameter.)

The Log Bridge Creek area showed the impact of

Hyacinth Orchid – Rowena Whiting
 Twining Fringe Lily – Eric Whiting



agriculture and forestry with its largely depleted understorey and mostly exotic ground cover. The other area west of Talbingo that we visited, Journama Creek was not as badly impacted. Also had we ventured further up the walking track we would have soon climbed into the Inland Slopes Bioregion.

By travelling further and climbing up the steep windy hill above Talbingo on the Saturday we were in the mountainous Inland Slopes Bioregion (Upper Slopes would be a better name but need to be distinguished from the eastern slopes of the Great Divide.) Apart from the pocket of open Kangaroo Grass area – a natural feature – at the start of the Journama Heritage Walk (Saturday morning), the density of the shrub layer was noticeable. The variety of the pea and heath families had us guessing at names, all the more so as many had finished flowering. Several wattle varieties were new to us as well and again not flowering. The even denser shrub layer experienced along the Landers Fall track for those members who had the second of the Caves tour further stretched our botanical knowledge.

The higher annual rainfall of the mountains gives rise to Wet Sclerophyll vegetation communities. Altitude has a strong controlling effect on what are the dominant tree species. From the lower levels Broad-leaf Peppermint and Narrow-leaved Peppermint *E. radiate* give way to Ribbon Gum (or Manna Gum) *E. viminalis* and then to Mountain Gum *E. dalrympleana*. Both Manna and Mountain Gums can reach heights of 40 metres.

The even taller Alpine Ash *E. delegatensis* that can get to 80 metres does occur near Tumut but only in small isolated areas. Unfortunately for our timber industry the

tallest hardwood Mountain Ash *E. regnans* only grows south of the divide in Victoria.

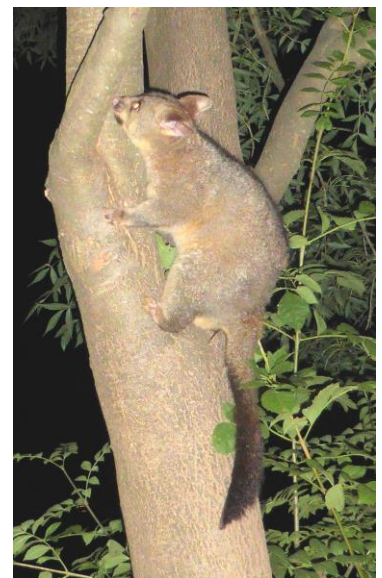
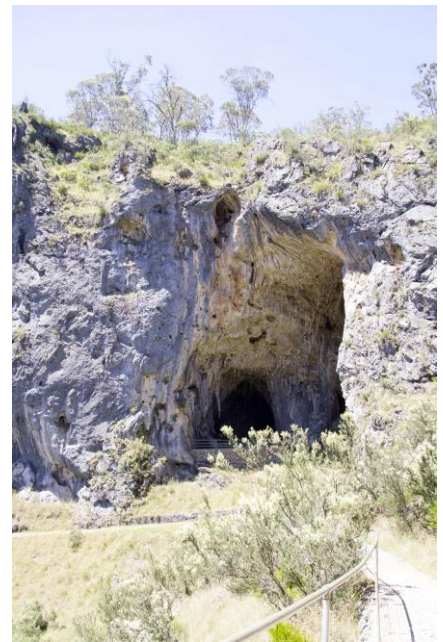
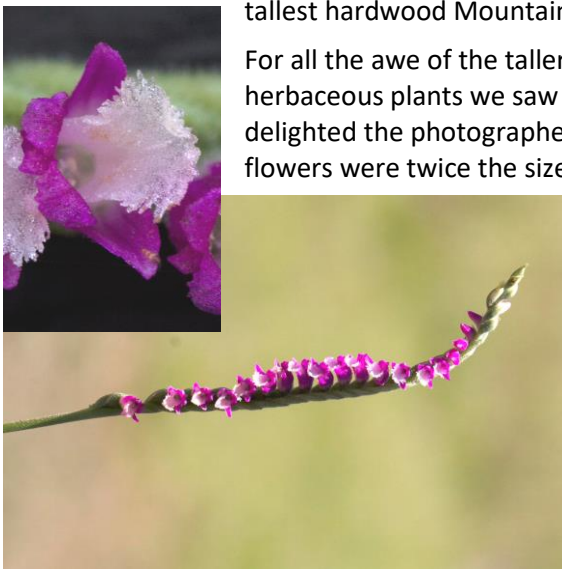
For all the awe of the taller trees, it was the few herbaceous plants we saw in the Wet Sclerophyll that delighted the photographers. The Twining Fringe-Lily flowers were twice the size of those we get here; the feathery edges of the petals clearly visible. The Hyacinth Orchids we saw were past their best, but the prize of the weekend was the finding of the orchid Ladies Tresses *Spiranthes sinensis*. The way the small rosy-red flowers spiralled up the stems was fascinating.

Although the afternoon visit

to Yarrangobilly Caves was essentially for a tour of one of the caves we did have a little time to explore the vegetation and a few other features of karst country. Caves and their wondrous formations are the tourist attractions of karst, there is much more geomorphologically to them. Take the sheer sided deep gorges for example. (For other surface features go to Blue Water Holes or Wee Jasper.) With the calcium rich and thereby alkaline soils formed from the limestone, there are a host of plants that are found here but not in the surrounding areas. We noted Silver Banksia *Banksia marginata*.

Eric Whiting

Photos anti-clockwise from top
 Lobelia found on the Landers Falls track
 – Rowena Whiting
 Ladies Tresses with single flower inset –
 Eric Whiting
 Scarlet Robin – Phillip Williams
 The well-fed possum at camp – Phil
 Tenison
 The Glory Hole Cave at Yarrangobilly –
 Rowena Whiting



Lake Coolah and Rocky Waterholes Outing - 29 January 2017



Despite the unbelievably hot conditions, 12 brave members met at the Leeton Post Office at 5pm and headed to Lake Coolah where we were met by 2 more keen participants.

We set ourselves up under the shade of a lone gum tree by the roadside and actually enjoyed the birdwatching. Having 3 scopes helped everyone get good close looks at a pair of Brolgas as well as a good assortment of ducks and other waterbirds feeding close-by in the rapidly receding water of the northern section of the lake. Lots of egrets and herons were easy to identify and there were even some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Spotted Crakes to

be seen. In all at least 25 species were seen by most of the group before we packed up our gear and headed for Rocky Waterholes.

We arrived there about 6.30pm by which time the sun was quite low and the area was in total shade which made things more comfortable for us. The majority of the group crossed "Terry's" bridge and walked along the channel bank where they found 3 Koalas and an assortment of birds to make it all worthwhile. Just at the end of the bridge, in a small hollow in a red gum, a pair of White-breasted Woodswallows were feeding two fully fledged chicks which was a delight to see.

Neil Palframan had reported seeing a Little Bittern there on Australia Day so a couple of us were intent on waiting patiently to see if we could see it. The bittern didn't show but Phil Tenison saw 2 Latham's Snipe fly out of the swampy grass just near to where we were standing which was a good compromise to the bittern.



When people returned, we all settled on the bridge to have drinks and food and lots of chat. Even there lots of birds were seen flying up and down the channel heading for their roosts for the night.



Photos by Kathy Tenison
Group at Lake Coolah
Group on the bridge
and by Graham Russell
Koala at Rocky Waterholes

In spite of the fear of it being too hot to venture out, the outing was most enjoyable and everyone seemed quite happy about coming along.

Max O'Sullivan

Lake Coolah Birdlist

Hoary-headed Grebe	Australasian Grebe
Brolga	Intermediate Egret
Little Egret	White-faced Heron
White-necked Heron	White Ibis
Glossy Ibis	Black Swan
Hardhead	Black Duck
Australasian Shoveller	Grey Teal
Spotted Crane	Purple Swamphen
Masked Lapwing	Red-kneed Dotterel
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Black-winged Stilt
Whiskered Tern	Silver Gull
Eastern Rosella	Red-rumped Parrot
Pee-wee	

Rocky Waterholes Birdlist

White-faced Heron	Nankeen Night Heron
White Ibis	Black Duck
Grey Teal	Collared Sparrowhawk
Purple Swamphen	Latham's Snipe
Peaceful Dove	White Cockatoo
Galah	Yellow Rosella
Sacred Kingfisher	Dollarbird
Tree Martin	Willie Wagtail
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike	Reed Warbler
Variiegated Wren	Little Friarbird
Noisy Miner	White-plumed H/e
White-breasted Woodswallow with 2 young in nest	
Brown Treecreeper	

AVIAN FIVE STAR ACCOMMODATION

During the Summer months, the jungle in my back yard becomes five star accommodation for at least five species of birds.

The Banksia Rose and Bignonia conglomeration under my bedroom window is regularly chosen by a pair of Blue-faced Honeyeaters. The next tree is an Oleander which is avoided, then, on varying levels of a combination of a Yellow Jasmine and unknown huge tree, we have a Crested Pigeon, Yellow thornbill and Blackbird. A tangle of Wisteria, Buddleia and Bottlebrush is selected by the Silvereyes. Variegated Fairy wrens are constantly visiting my deck, but I don't know if they are nesting in the Pampas grass or just visiting. With constant fresh water, blossoms, seeds and berries, I guess they know when they're on a good thing.



***** accommodation in
McNabb Cres, Griffith

It is such a delight at this time of year to see the fledglings appear, but alas, the Blue-faced Honeyeater's baby was either a weakling or they were terrible parents, for I would see it begging from any bird that came close, and yesterday I found it dead by the water station...very sad. Maybe better luck next year.

Sue Chittick-Dalton

News of the latest birds to join the Bittens-in-Rice Tracking Program –

Taken from the web site: [www.bitternsinrice.com.au/tracking bunyip birds/](http://www.bitternsinrice.com.au/tracking_bunyip_birds/)

Bidgee and Cumberland are two adult males caught and released in the Benerembah area north of Griffith early January. Bidgee comes courtesy of the [Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Club](#), while Cumberland represents the [Cumberland Bird Observers Club](#). They are two of the generous organisations that bought naming rights during our crowdfunding.



Meet Cumberland, another big adult male from Benerembah.

bitterns, will they depart the Riverina and travel hundreds of kilometres to far-

flung wetlands? Beforehand, there's also the added bonus of seeing how concentrated their movements are in the rice crops during the breeding season.

We caught them using the cage traps, where territorial males are lured inside by playing the booming call and seeing their reflection in a mirror. There is no bait, just the false impression of another male threatening their position. The females have again eluded us, not least because of a broken net gun. The plan is to catch four more bitterns before the season's end and we dearly hope females are among them.

Matt Herring

Inka Veltheim checking Bidgee's harness prior to release



These are the sixth and seventh bitterns in our satellite tracking program and will provide further insight into where the population goes after rice harvest in autumn. Beyond the rice crops, it's crucial to identify the network of wetlands that these endangered birds rely on throughout the year. Will they stay local and use the nearby Mirrool Creek and Barrenbox Swamp, or like our previous tracked

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

These sightings are from members' observations. Please check with the relevant person before quoting any record.

Striped Skink	McNabb Cres., Griffith	01/12/16	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Eastern Koel (H)	Narrandera	Dec 2016	Alan Whitehead
Gull-billed Tern	Fivebough Wetlands	10/12/16	Keith Hutton
Little Button-Quail + chicks	"Alambi" via Leeton	08/12/16	Peter Draper
Latham's Snipe (1)	Rice crop Murrumbidgee	09/12/16	Peter Draper
Superb Parrot (6)	Murrumbidgee area	09/12/16	Peter Draper
Superb Parrot (3)	Fivebough Wetlands	05/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
Peregrine Falcon (pr)	Googeldrie Weir	06/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
Painted Button-Quail (1)	'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton	10/12/16	Phil & Kathy Tenison
Glossy Black Cockatoo (10)	'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton	10/12/16	MFN Xmas party
Caspian Tern	Fivebough Wetlands	15/12/16	Keith Hutton
Hardhead + ducklings	Fivebough Wetlands	15/12/16	Keith Hutton
Southern Boobook (4)	Hanwood (private garden)	19/12/16	Neil Palframan
Gull-billed Tern (6)	Fivebough Wetlands	20/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
White-winged Wren (6)	Lake Coolah via Narrandera	21/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
Brolga (2) nesting?	Lake Coolah via Narrandera	21/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
Plumed Whistling Duck (10+)	Lake Coolah via Narrandera	21/12/16	Max O'Sullivan

The ducks were juvenile birds almost fully grown and ready to fly.

Magpie Goose (10+)	Paynters Siding Rd/Mejum Park Rd	21/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
Variagated Wren	Nericon caught in a web and released	22/12/16	Neil Palframan
Dollarbird (3)	Coombe Rd, Griffith	25/12/16	Neil Palframan
Australasian Bittern (2+)	Campbell's Swamp, Griffith	25/12/16	Neil Palframan
Little Bittern (H)	Campbell's Swamp, Griffith	25/12/16	Neil Palframan
Latham's Snipe (2)	Campbell's Swamp, Griffith	25/12/16	Neil Palframan
Southern Boobook (4)	Hanwood via Griffith	26/12/16	per Neil Palframan
There were the adult pair and 2 juveniles roosting together in a tree in the backyard of a friend of Neil's.			
Buff-banded Rail (2)	Fivebough Wetlands	28/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	The Basin Dam at Koonadan	29/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
Nankeen Night Heron (juv)	The Basin Dam at Koonadan	29/12/16	Max O'Sullivan
Pied Heron	Lake Coolah via Narrandera	29/12/16	Max O'Sullivan

This is a rare sighting for the area. They are very common in the Northern Territory and the Gulf Country but even unusual to see them in Cairns. So to see one here is quite amazing.

Keith Hutton also saw the bird after I reported it to him and Phil Tenison got a distant photo.

Diamond Dove (4)	Wattle Dam Binya SF	02/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
This is the first record for a couple of years at this site. They have since been seen regularly at various sites.			
Crested Bellbird (1)	Spring Hill Picnic area, Cocoparras	02/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (27)	Fivebough Wetlands	09/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Marsh Sandpiper (1)	Fivebough Wetlands	09/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
This is the first return for the season of these migratory waders. Let's hope there are more to come.			
Freckled Duck (4m and 3f)	Fivebough Wetlands	09/01/17	Keith Hutton
Great Crested Grebe (3)	Fivebough from Hooey Lookout	11/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Australasian Bittern (1)	Stanbridge Rice Farm	11/01/17	Peter Draper
Collared Sparrowhawk (3)	Wamoon (Dionee's parent's house)	16/01/17	Graham Russell
Australasian Bittern (1)	Wamoon (flyover)	16/01/17	Graham Russell
Black Falcon (1)	Cantrill Rd Koonadan	17/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Grey-crowned Babbler (6)	Leeton Golf Course	17/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Nankeen Night Heron (32)	The Basin Dam, Koonadan	21/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Black Kite (30+)	Koonadan	21/01/17	Max O'Sullivan

SIGHTINGS continued

Painted Honeyeater (1)	Irrigation Way Widgelli	22/01/17	Neil Palframan
Budgerigar (10)	Boorga Rd at Campbell's Swamp	22/01/17	Johanna Botman
The birds flew rapidly across the road in front of Johanna's car.			
Baillon's Crake (1)	Paynters Siding/Mejum Park Rd	24/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Aust. Spotted Crake (7)	Paynters Siding/Mejum Park Rd	24/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Horsfield's Bushlark (20+)	Paynters Siding/Mejum Park Rd	24/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (4)	Paynters Siding/Mejum Park Rd	24/01/17	Max O'Sullivan
There were 2 adult birds feeding 2 juveniles so they must have bred nearby.			
Little Bittern	Rocky Waterholes Narrandera	26/01/17	Neil Palframan
Lathma's Snipe (2)	Rocky Waterholes Narrandera	29/01/17	Phil Tenison

Peter Draper reported seeing more Latham's Snipe in his rice crop this year than in previous years - likewise for Magpie Geese and Night Herons.

Sue Chittick-Dalton reported her regular visitors to her birdbath – Grey-crowned Babblers, Blue-faced Honeyeaters and Yellow-throated Miners.

Nan Simpson reports Variegated Wrens and Little Friarbirds in Muor Place Griffith on 02/02/17.

Phillip and Penny Williams reported the return of the Brown Honeyeaters to their birdbath and I too had a single one at my birdbath on 30 January.

Virginia Tarr reports regular sightings of Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and Red Wattlebirds on her walks in Griffith.

Keith Hutton did his quarterly survey of Fivebough and Tuckerbill at the end of January. Following are some of the more interesting counts:

At Fivebough on 26/01/17:

Magpie Goose (198)*	Plumed Whistling-duck (21)*	Freckled Duck (43)
Musk Duck (8)*	Pink-eared Duck (126)*	Grey Teal (666)*
Blue-billed Duck (3)*	Great Cormorant (216)	Eastern Great Egret (34)
Nankeen Night Heron (14)	Australasian Darter (7)	Glossy Ibis (73)
Eurasian Coot (221)*	Black-winged Stilt (147)*	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (117)
Gull-billed Tern (28)*	Whiskered Tern (164)*	Silver Gull (155)

* indicates breeding record for these species at Fivebough this season.

At The Basin Dam and Tuckerbil:

Nankeen Night Heron (32)	Glossy Ibis (32)	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (70)
Buff-banded Rail (2)		

STRIPED SKINK *Ctenotus robustus*

The front garden of my home in McNabb Crescent Griffith, is all rocks and succulents which harbour all sorts of little creatures, especially a multitude of skinks, around 7-8cm long, which constantly amuse me with their chasing each other over the rocks, pavers and up and down my house wall and especially delighted to occasionally see the diminutive babies, no more than 3-4cm long but none ever stop long enough for a photo.

Just imagine my surprise when, out from behind a stone, a large skink came onto my porch and rested on a paver. I would estimate its length to be around 25cm. It was very pretty with spots and stripes, but alas, by the time I went for the camera he had gone and hasn't been seen by me since. But I am still hoping and looking. The description in 'Australian Reptiles and Amphibians' by Leonard Cronin, is identical to Striped Skink.



Sue Chittick-Dalton

**** COMING EVENTS ****

- 9 February Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: Bush Banter with Knowledgeable Ninety Year Olds. Excerpts of recordings with Betty Bradney and Bill Draper by Kathy Tenison
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 12 February Sunday** **No outing,**
This was brought forward to ensure the water and birds were there.
- 17/18 February** **Lachlan Fold Glossy Black Cockatoo bird count at Rankins Springs**
Friday/Saturday They are asking for people to help with this: evenings and mornings when the cockies come in to drink at dams in the late afternoon/early evening on both days. Meeting at the Rankins Springs Hall (both days) at 3pm for dam assignment.
Numbers are required so dams can be allocated and for catering
Contact Nella Smith 6959 1210 if intending participating or for further information
- 19 February Sunday** **Outing to 8 Mile Tank Road, Rankins Springs**
Meet at the corner of Eight Mile Tank Road and Rankins Springs Rd at 8:30 am.
Bring morning tea and lunch.
Contact: Graham Russell if you intend coming, he can forward you a map.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 26 February Sunday** **Cocoparra Nature Reserve** A late afternoon/evening outing.
An opportunity to visit the northern area of the Cocoparra ranges with the possibility of seeing Glossy Blacks, Turquoise Parrots, wombats
Meet at the Beelbanger Store at 4pm.
Bring: nibbles / tea, drinks, chairs, insect repellent.
Leader: Michelle Ballistrin phone: 0428 668 102
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 1 March Wednesday** **Copy for the March newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 9 March Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: To be decided
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 12 March Sunday** **Outing to Fivebough Wetlands** **See the changes with the water receding**
Meet at Petersham Road car park at 5pm. Bring: nibbles/tea, drinks, chairs.
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- Other events**
- 14-16 April** **Mid-Murray Field Naturalist Club 50th anniversary** Dinner, campout and excursions
Easter Bush camp at Wandown Flora and Fauna Reserve with a spit roast evening meal on Saturday. Basic facilities only. Excursions to nearby reserves including the Boundary Bend area. For more information contact Eric or Rowena 6953 2612, they are requesting numbers and payment for the spit roast (\$10).
- 5-7 May weekend** **Camp at Whroo, near Rushworth, Victoria – Ironbark Forest**
Details later. Make a note of the date.