# Field Nats News No.313

*Understanding Our Natural World*
Est. 1880

**Newsletter of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Inc.**
1 Gardenia Street, Blackburn Vic 3130
**Telephone 03 9877 9860**
P.O. Box 13, Blackburn 3130 www.fncv.org.au
**Newsletter email: joan.broadberry@gmail.com**
(Office email: admin@fncv.org.au)

**Editor: Joan Broadberry 03 9846 1218**
***Founding editor: Dr Noel Schleiger***

**Reg. No. A0033611X**

Patron: The Honourable Linda Dessau, AC
Governor of Victoria

**Office Hours: Monday and Tuesday 10 am - 4 pm.**

November 2020


## From the President

The 2020 Annual General Meeting was successfully held via Zoom on Monday August 31st. This is my sixth year as President and I congratulate and thank the members of the incoming Council for their continuing commitment to the Club. On behalf of Council and FNCV I thank Audrey Falconer and Leon Altoff for their continued support of the Club. They have served on Council for the past 17 years and have been the principal organisers of the Marine Research Group. They have now retired from Council and I would like to warmly welcome Michael Lyons as the new MRG representative.

Like all of you I look forward to a resumption of some normal activities in the coming months, if safe to do so. In particular, the resumption of some of our field excursions would be most welcome. In the meantime, I urge everyone to keep interested and busy. Your photos and articles about the natural world around you during this lockdown are most welcome for the FNN. I have had some excellent images sent to me by people walking around their local parks and gardens. There seems to be a lot of photographic potential at Blackburn

*(Continued on page 2)*

**The due date for FNN 314 is, as always, the first Tuesday of the month, November 3rd. This will be the December 2020– January 2021 issue.**
**joan.broadberry@gmail.com**

Photo 2. *Helpis minitabunda* 10 mm

Photo 1. The highly evolved eyes of a near perfect predator, a tiny jumping spider (*Helpis minitabunda),* perhaps the last thing its prey sees.

| Index | Page |
|---|---|

*(Continued from page 1)*

Photo 3. *Araneus talipedatus*, body 7mm long in its web at night

Lake at the moment with a surfeit of wildflowers and animal life to be seen.

The increase in sunshine and the warmer weather has led to a major increase in the number of spiders in my garden. The jumping spiders (Salticidae) are very active, small orb weavers are setting up in most of the shrubs and their webs are capturing many tiny, flying insects. A few huntsmen spiders, spanning the range from tiny to full size are moving about at night.

There are many small salticids moving about and catching small insects all over the garden and house walls, in every imaginable nook and cranny. The most common, or perhaps simply the least secretive, is *Helpis minitabunda* (photos 1 & 2). The large front eyes are equipped with moveable retinas which enable the animal to see a wide-angle view without moving. Most of the jumping spiders were eating prey so there appears to be plenty of small insects about.

The green orb weaver, *Araneus talipedatus* was represented by a single specimen which eventually moved on or was eaten. (Photos 3 & 4). This spider did not set up a web every night and retired behind a leaf each day to consume catch from the night before.

The common garden orb weaver, *Eriophora transmarina* (Photo 5) has also appeared, with a number of very tiny individuals establishing their webs. Enamel spiders, *Plebs bradleyi*, (Photo 6) are also present in reasonable numbers.

Photo 5. *Eriophora transmarina*, body 4mm

Photo 4. *Araneus talipedatus* body 7mm long hiding on the back of a leaf during the day eating a victim from the previous evening's catch.

A spider I have not seen for many years has established itself in a *Callistemon*; it is *Araneus circulissparsus* (Photo 7 & 8), a very attractive green species. A characteristic white, bat-like abdominal badge outlined in red appears on some individuals. It is likely that this group of spiders (*continued p3)*

Photo 6 Right.A tiny Enamel Spider, *Plebs bradleyi*, 5mm. The web has dual stabilimenta.

*Photo 7. Araneus circulissparsus* group, body 10 mm.

*(Continued from page 2)*
includes a number of different species. A number of orb weavers may be listed in various sources as *Eriophora* or *Araneus;* Australian spiders are currently undergoing significant and long overdue taxonomic review.

A small *Dolophenes conifera* (Photo 9) with its intricate abdominal pattern was anything but camouflaged as it wandered about over the leaves. It would normally be wrapped around a twig during the day, resembling a small knot in the wood.

It is very encouraging to see so many young spiders after last year's high temperatures and extensive bushfires. Many spiderlings drop into suburbia from the bush each year, carried by prevailing winds.
In previous years large numbers of Golden Orb Weavers have been blown into suburbia but not this year at Clayton. Despite high numbers of St Andrews Cross Spiders in previous years and many egg cases last year, none has yet appeared this year. Similarly, mantids have not appeared in my garden as yet although there were many fresh oothecae in evidence over last summer and autumn.

**Max Campbell**
*All photos M. Campbell*

Photo 8. *Araneus circulissparsus* group, body 8 mm.

Photo 9. *Dolophones conifera* 9mm, not so well-camouflaged on a green leaf.


**Spot the problem?**

**Thanks to the editorial and layout team who put together FNN 313**

Joan Broadberry
Wendy Gare
Sally Bewsher

**Special thanks to those who have shared their observations and photos so we can continue to produce newsletters that inform and inspire us.**

# Members' news, photos & observations

Welcome

**Warmest greetings to these new members who were welcomed into our club at the last Council meeting:**

***Tim Zeigler, Noel Gross, Anne McCluskey, Gareth Hutchings, Fergus McManamny, Quinn McManamny, Shaun McManamny, Tegwyn McManamny, Frances Butterfield and Martin Butterfield.***

## Geology Group Report: *Zoom meeting*

## River Avulsions

On 23rd September, the Geology SIG welcomed Professor Ian Rutherfurd who spoke about River Avulsions worldwide and in Australia. He described these avulsions which are changes of a river's course, as occurs on river flood plains where the water flow slows down. Since river flats are often highly populated because of their rich soil, a sudden change in the river course can cause considerable hardship. In addition to looking at recent examples, (eg. in India, Bangladesh, USA and China), Professor Rutherfurd described local examples such as those in the Thompson and Murray Rivers and the history of past avulsions. The possible role of indigenous engineers modifying the flow of the Murray River was also discussed briefly.

It was a most interesting and informative talk and was attended by 33 people, which included both country and interstate members. Many thanks to both Professor Rutherfurd and Max Campbell who facilitated the evening.

**Ruth Hoskin**

## European Wasps

A thoughtlessly discarded apple core provides sustenance for this introduced pest, the European Wasp *Vespula germanica* .

Photo taken along Ferres Track, Bunyip State Park on the 8th March 2020.

**Virgil Hubregtse**

## Congratulations Craig Morley winner of the 2020 Australian Natural History Medallion

The 2020 Australian Natural History Medallion has been awarded to Craig Morley, Geelong Field Naturalists Club Inc. for his contribution to Ornithology, Conservation and Education.

The presentation will be made to Craig at the FNCV Hall in Blackburn, Melbourne, at a time yet to be determined, dependent upon prevailing Covid 19 restrictions. We extend our congratulations to Craig.

**bookshop@fncv.org.au**

for any orders or bookshop queries.

If you don't have access to email, the FNCV office will pass on your message. Kathy will then be in contact with you.

**Spring in the Grampians, Friday 25th September 2020** Photo*: Lauren Burns*

**Photo:** *M .Lyons*

## An as yet unnamed anemone species

This stunning crimson-coloured sea anemone was found in 12 metres of water in Port Phillip Bay off Portsea earlier this year. According to the Taxonomic toolkit of Port Phillip Bay https://portphillipmarinelife.net.au/ there are 21 species of anemone to be found in Port Phillip. This potentially un-named species must rank as one of the most spectacular. The tentacles were around 20-30mm and the disk was approximately 30mm in diameter.

When disturbed the animal quickly retracts beneath the sand.

**Michael Lyons**

# More about Case Moths

Photo: *Kathryn James*

Photo: *Joan B*

Photo: *Sally Bewsher*

I have been studying Case Moths for several decades and can testify that it takes a sharp pair of scissors to cut into the tough silken case of a Saunders Case Moth.

Just recently I learned that the Little Raven is able to pull the case apart with its beak and make an easy meal of the caterpillar inside. The bird pictured above was observed by my daughter searching her garden for cases and then, after a few minutes work with its beak, opening the case and eating the caterpillar.

The Ribbed Case Moth, above right, *Hyalarcta nigresens*is is a member of the bag or case moth family. Unlike other species no vegetation or twigs are attached to the case. It is characterised by several strong longitudinal ribs. Ribbed Case Moths are usually found on eucalypts. I am observing a case at home at the moment and am hoping that when pupation is complete, a moth will emerge. Of course if the case contains a wingless female, she remain in the case, lay eggs and only tiny juveniles will leave it after they hatch.

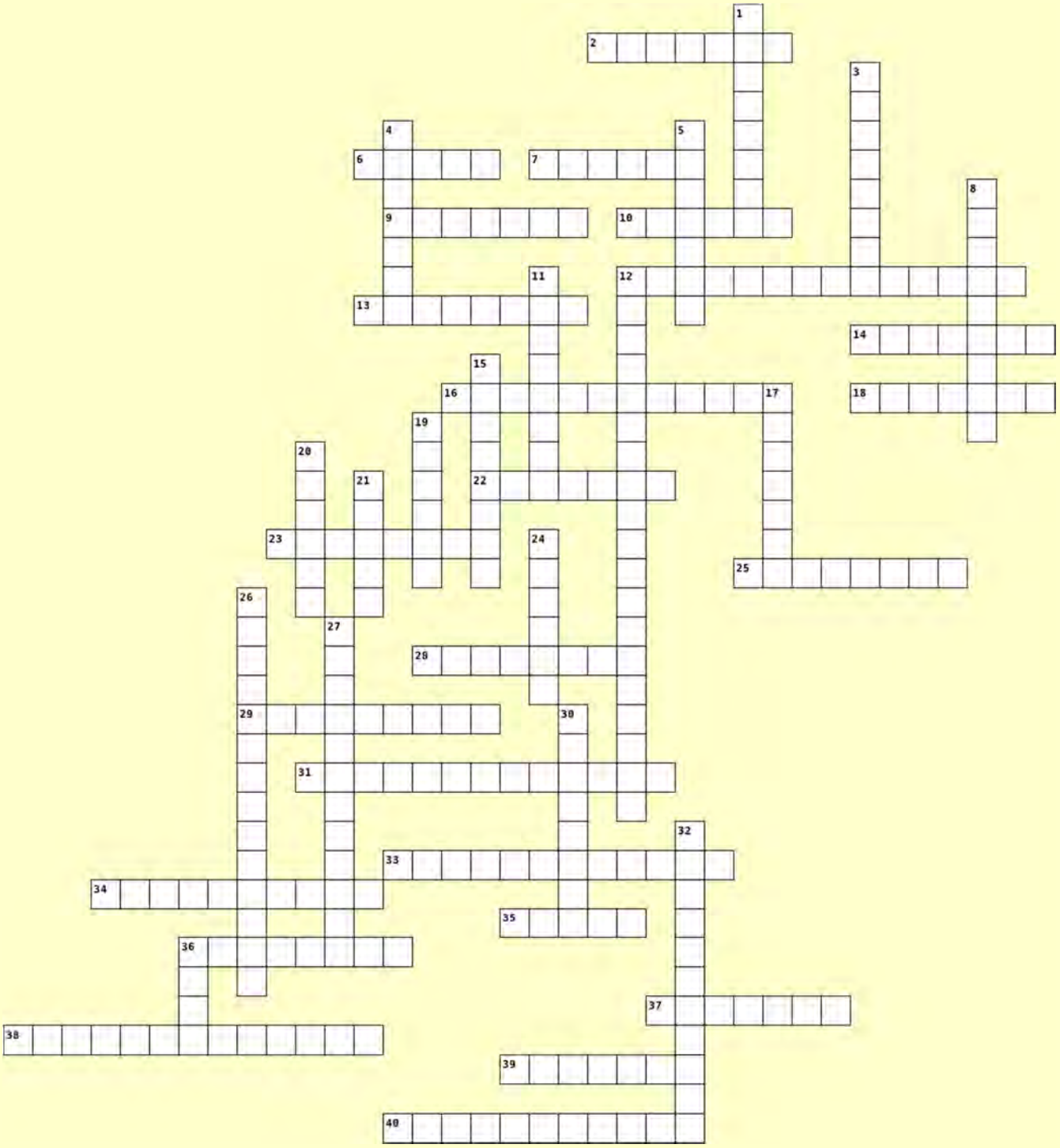
Sally Bewsher sent a photo of a Saunders Case Moth, *Metura Elongatus*, left, which clearly shows the silken steps the caterpillar makes as it climbs. The strands of silk that make the steps come from the caterpillar's mouth. As it climbs, it moves it head from side to side and attaches two or three strands of sticky silk for each step to the surface. It progresses upwards by hooking its front pair of claws over the silk and then, with a jerky, rather awkward movement, pulling the rest of its body and the case behind it. Using this method the caterpillar can even climb glass.

**Joan Broadberry**

Further information can be found at
https://australian.museum/learn/animals/insects/case-moths/

# ‘Names behind Nature’

We have all read the scientific name of an organism or geological feature and wondered who or what it was named after. There is much to be learnt about Australia’s naturalist history by delving a little further.



# ‘Names behind Nature’ clues **Compiled by John Harris**

## Across

**2.** 1948 ANHM recipient after whom a monitor, frog and seadragon are named
**6.** Genus of Proteaceae named after German baron and botanical patron
**7.** FNCV emblem named after Portuguese botanist José Correia da Serra
**9.** New common name for Victorian sugar glider
**10.** This dasyurid's species name alludes to a mistress of Henry II, due to the colour of its fur
**12.** Spider whose species name is after arachnologist von Keyserling **(3 words)**
**13.** Genus of Goodeniaceae named after English buccaneer
**14.** Late 19th / early 20th century zoologist whom a spoon worm and frog are named in honour of
**16.** The common name of *Austroagrion watsoni* is Eastern ....
**18.** French surgeon and naturalist after whom a bettong and spider crab are named
**22.** Southern Brown Tree Frog *Litoria* ....
**23.** Surveyor General of NSW after whom a cockatoo and hopping mouse are named.
**25.** French botanist and ornithologist after whom a plant genus, a skink, a frog & conger are named
**28.** Swedish naturalist who accompanied Cook and Banks. A petrel and geranium are named in his honour.
**29.** Australian bird of paradise named after Queen Victoria.
**31.** Species name of Australian eucalypt, named after Italian monastery locality.
**33.** German medic turned zoologist whom the threatened Tussock Skink is named in honour.
**34.** Genus of mistletoe named after Victorian Government Botanist.
**35.** Suffix used in species’ name to denote origin or locality
**36.** Member of Estrildidae named after naturalist’s, and artist, wife.
37. Threatened cockatoo named after farmer, naturalist and ornithologist who first described this species in 1948.
**38.** Lignum genus, after Alsatian bryologist Heinrich Gustav Mühlenbeck.
**39.** Gippsland basin Palaeogene unit of sediments
**40.** Threatened sun-orchid once found on FNCV property, named after teacher and orchidologist who collected first specimen.

## Down

**1.** Entomologist after whom a species of Leaf-cutter cuckoo bee is named.
**3.** Omeo Grevillea is named after this Victorian Government Botanist **(initials and surname).**
**4.** Proteaceae genus named after Endeavour naturalist
**5.** Swallowtail butterfly named after early Australian entomologist.
**8.** Northern Free-tailed Bat named after DELWP scientist - *Ozimops* ....
**11.** Mouse Spider *Missulena* ....
**12.** Extant carnivorous marsupial named after naturalist who first described the species in 1807 **(2 words)**
**15.** Plant genus named after mythical goddess of hunting
**17.** Victoria's smallest carnivorous marsupial named after wife of Zoologist who described the species
**19.** Victorian legless lizard named after this Australian of the Year and noted naturalist
**20.** Beaked whale named after French anatomist who first described the species in 1823
**21.** Author of *Prodromus of the Zoology of Victoria* for whom a Victorian skink is named.
**24.** Common name of *Varanus gouldii,* Sand ....
**26.** Southern Grass Skink named in honour of this French naval officer and explorer.
**27.** Introduced marine worm named after Italian catholic priest, *Sabella* ....
**30.** Common name of Red-necked Wallaby in Tasmania.
**32.** Victorian faunal emblem *Gymnobelideus* ....
**36.** Botanist and politician, whom a bandicoot and many plants are named in honour of.

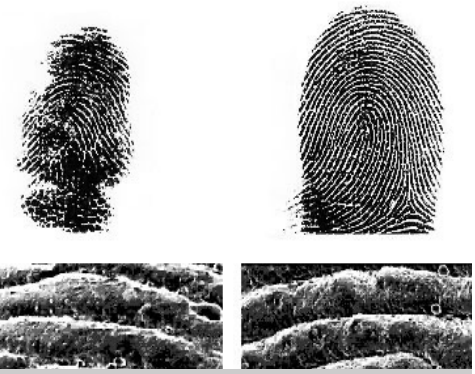
For those of you with a competitive spirit, Wildlife Experiences Pty Ltd. have generously donated a $50 book voucher from the FNCV bookshop for the first correct crossword solution to be received on the FNCV office email.

Please take a photograph of your entry and email it to admin@fncv.org.au

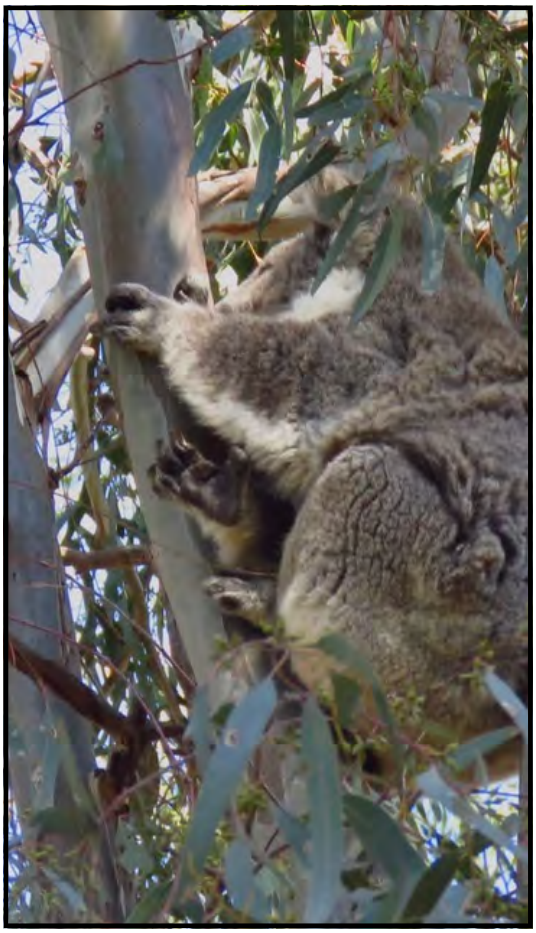
**The solution & winner will be published in FNN 314.**

# Wildlife in Westerfolds Park

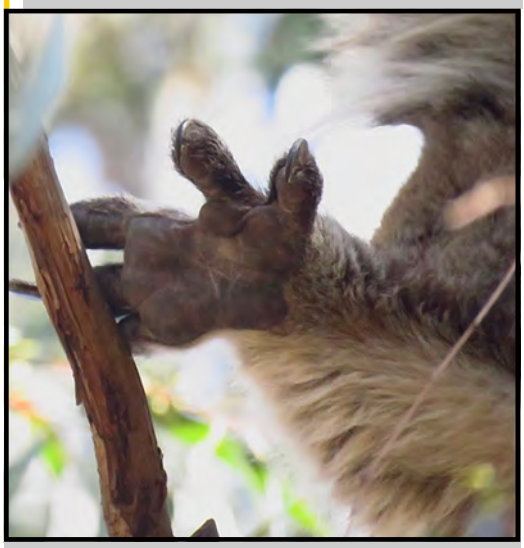
The question, 'which Australia animal has fingerprints almost indistinguishable from human fingerprints', has a very surprising answer—koalas. The reason is a bit of a mystery but a theory advanced by the team of anatomists at the University of Adelaide who discovered koala fingerprints in 1996, is that this arises from our shared way of grasping. Koalas feed by reaching out and seizing handfuls of leaves and then bringing them to their mouths. This grasping requires fine control of feeling, movement and pressure which is enhanced by an orderly organization of the skin surface. Nevertheless, it being very challenging to fingerprint a koala, this characteristic is of little use for identification in the field.



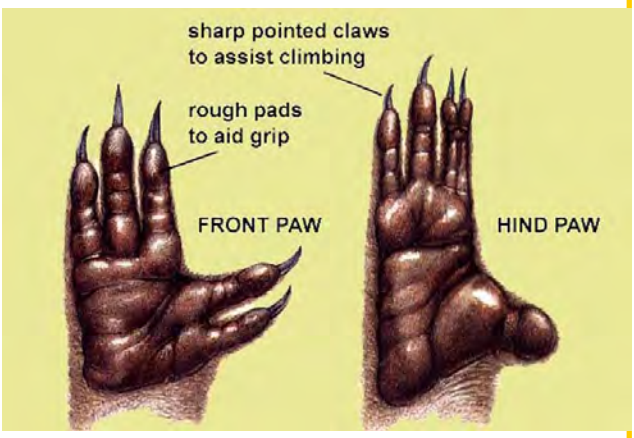
The loopy whirling ridges on koalas' fingers (left) are similar to our own.



You may well wonder where this quirky question about fingerprints came from. It arose because at the end of September 2020, rumours were circulating that a koala had been spotted in Westerfolds Park Templestowe. I set out to find it and when I did, it was sitting in a tree in a way that gave me the opportunity to zoom in on its paws. A little googling did the rest.



Adapted for gripping the koala's front paw has a 'double thumb': two sidewards-facing digits.




Koalas are well adapted to their life in the treetops. Their front and hind feet have five digits and have evolved to grip branches and trunks. Both sets of paws are curved with thick pads and long, sharp claws. Their hind feet have one opposable digit, a bit like a thumb, without a claw; the fused second and third digits have a double claw used for grooming.

The koala's binomial name is *Phascolalrctos cinereus*. Phaskolos meaning pouched and arktos meaning bear (derived from Greek). The latter was not the wisest choice as it is not a bear. Its species name, cinereus means ashy-grey (derived from Latin). It is a unique animal. Despite the preponderance of Eucalypts in Australia, koalas are the one and only mammal species that have evolved to exist entirely on gum leaves. They are also the only animal, apart from monkeys, apes and humans to have developed fingerprints.

Finding a koala in my local park was a first for me. It was a female that has been in residence in a grove of Manna Gum for about a month. I can only surmise that she made her way from further upstream via the corridor of bush beside the Yarra. Twenty or more years ago the neighbouring suburb of Warrandyte had an established population of koalas. Several times on short walks starting at Pound Bend my neighbour and I counted thirteen animals. Through the disease of clamidia, and deteriorating habitat, breeding declined and koala numbers dropped away. I believe there have been very

*(Continued on page 10)*

*(Continued from page 9)*
few or no sighting in Warrandyte State Park for many years.

Templestowe is not an outer suburb. It is only 18 to 20 km from the city, depending on the point of measurement. Nevertheless, remarkably, it is still home to platypus, (see FNN 309 p6), a mob of 80 or more Eastern Grey Kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, sugar gliders and now a koala. Templestowe's northern boundary is the Yarra River. Its strengths in providing precious wildlife habitat are that it encompasses a portion of the Yarra Valley and the number of State Parks and conservation reserves that have been established. Recently I was interested to read that when I was growing up in Carlton there was viable koala habitat even closer to Melbourne. The last koala was reported at Royal Park near the Children's hospital in 1969.

I am reminded to take nothing, in the Yarra Valley, Templestowe or anywhere else, for granted. Koalas and most other native species are under constant threat from development. Koala numbers have plummeted in Queensland and New South Wales, with predictions that they could become extinct in those states in 30 years. It is a sobering fact that Victoria's koala population suffers from a lack of genetic diversity. Although a delightful experience for me, (to paraphrase Aristotle), the sighting of one koala, does not make a summer.

**Joan Broadberry**

## Birding in the Hills

Around the end of August, a pair of Masked Lapwings appeared regularly on the neighbour's flat metal roof, making lots of noise every time anyone approached and even if I ventured outside. I had never seen lapwings at The Patch previously, but have heard them on occasions at night. Things settled down after about two weeks and they took up residence. The female had clearly laid eggs and was sitting plum in the middle of the large expanse of roof, with the male hovering around the edges. Sometimes one flew off into the nearby paddock, presumably to feed and I also spotted one on my roof once. The Masked Lapwings weathered the recent storms and the rain. The only birds I saw pestering them were two Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Both adults defended their space noisily, chasing and swooping the cockatoos which kept returning, almost in fun. I wondered what would happen once the eggs hatched, as there is a resident dog and it is a long drop to the ground from the roof.

On Thursday 8th October, it rained all night. On Friday morning I checked the neighbour's roof as usual and spotted two chicks. By Friday afternoon one was on the ground and one stayed on the roof that night. On Saturday morning I again saw one on the ground with the parents naturally fussing noisily around it. However, there was no sign of the other chick. I went off for my walk and returned to silence less then two hours later. Presumably both chicks did not survive. On Saturday evening I heard the pair calling on and off around dusk from the paddock about 100 metres away and saw them flying about. They have not returned to the roof.

I also recently observed a Laughing Kookaburra *(Dacelo noveaguineae)* which had found a Black Rat *(Rattus rattus)* for a meal. A number of neighbours have chooks and I have seen a kookaburra eating a rat the same way once before. Each time the rat has been bashed against a limb for some time with a second kookaburra sitting quietly close by, without interfering. On the first occasion, the kookaburra took close to one hour before finally swallowing the rat. It then sat there rather stunned for close to half an hour before finally flying off. Who knows whether this latest rat had been poisoned, but the kookaburra has survived as I have seen the pair on their usual perches since.

Finally, during my walks in various local places I have come across three Satin Bowerbird *(Ptilonorhynchus violaceus)* bowers, each plentifully decorated with blue objects.

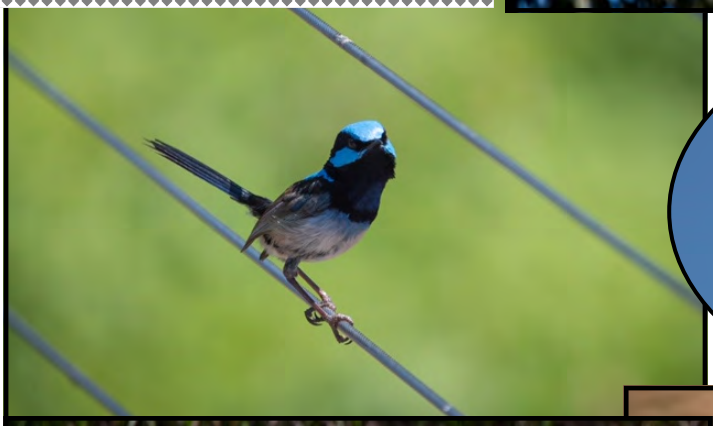
**Sally Bewsher**

## *A record of birdlife in the Dandenong Valley Wetlands*

A selection from a series of 65 wonderful photographs taken by FNCV Juniors' members, Chaquen and Gleb. Their work documents native bird species found in the Dandenong Valley Wetlands between December 2016 and April 2018.

***Clockwise:*** White-faced Herons, Spotted Harrier, Pink-eared Ducks, Shining Bronze Cuckoo, Golden-headed Cisticola, Royal Spoonbills and Superb Fairy-wren.

**Photos**: *Chaquen & Glelb Beliakov*



# Life Cycles and Behaviours Revealed, Part 3

## Observations at Blackburn Creeklands over an Extended Time

*Wendy Clark*
*All photos: W. Clark*

Birds were something I love to watch but I am not good at identification. When hunting for invertebrates, one tends to look down and hunt for small things. Consequently, I missed many sightings of birds. With the colder months and fewer insects & spiders around, my eyes gravitated to watching and photographing birds.

**Bird Surveys to Evaluate Addition of a New Pond/Swamp**

Earlier this year, I started helping with a bird survey in the Blackburn Creeklands. The council was doing some major changes to the drainage in one section of the park and part of that was to put a new pond in to catch the drainage after it went through a natural filtration system. This was in an area that had a swamp/pond and was rich in birdlife. (Blackburn Creeklands is a bird hotspot as it is a stopping off point for many birds and a handy corridor between other bushlands).

**Shafts of sunlight on walking track through Blackburn Creeklands**

**Creek seen from Laurel Grove Bridge**

**Rocky Creek at Kalang Park**

The aim was to do surveys and bird counts in the area to be changed, a reference area in another part of the park and the area connecting the two. This was to be done once a week, early morning before work commenced on the area and ongoing monitoring after the work was finished.

This enabled me to improve my identification of birds by sight and calls, as I was walking with some knowledgeable people. Fortunately, I learnt rapidly as we soon had to limit our numbers due to lockdown restrictions. Currently we have just progressed to two people per survey after many weeks of solo surveys.

The new pond is operational now and the ducks and magpies are starting to use it. The surrounding planting has a lot of growing to do, but I am sure will look good and be great habitat. Fortunately the rain and warm weather is aiding quick growth. The Bulbine Lilies are currently flowering. Preliminary results suggest the major works did not reduce the birdlife in the surrounding areas.

**From Solo to Groups of Birds**

The change in behaviour of the birds over the seasons was fascinating. Many birds seem to be solo for parts of the year and then during winter, start forming gangs or groups. This happened with Noisy Miners, Pied Currawongs and the Little Ravens. (*continued p 13)*

**Noisy Miner feeding chicks**

**Currawong picking sticks for nest**

**Little Raven**

*(Continued from page 12)*
Prior to nesting, the Grey Butcher Birds pairs have become far more vocal. It is wonderful to hear their beautiful carolling calls sometimes involving two or three males.

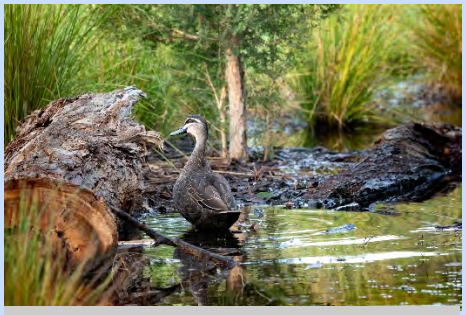


**Grey Butcher Birds**

## Conflagration of Ducks

One morning, on my way to a survey, I came across an incredible sight. There was a gathering of ducks happening on the oval, right near the track where I was walking. There were at least a dozen, with more flying in while I watched. There were three species all mingled together – Black Duck, Wood Duck and Chestnut Teal. They weren't eating and were only a few duck lengths apart. Unfortunately, I had the wrong lens on my camera, so I couldn't photograph them, and I was in a hurry to meet for the bird survey.

**Wood Duck pair**

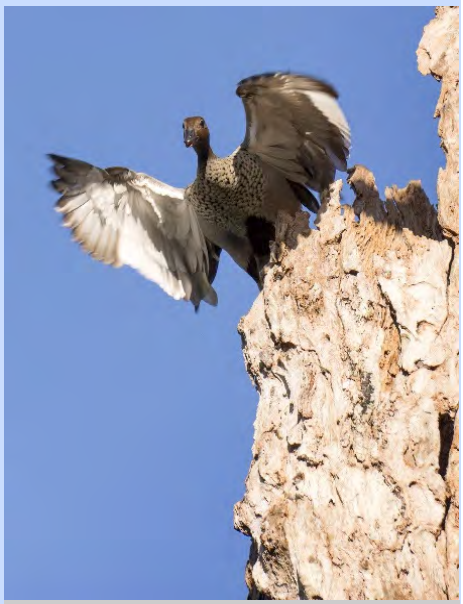


**Black Duck being alert**

**Wood Duck quacking**

**Chestnut Teal, female, checking hollow**

**Chestnut Teal, male, watching**



**Wood Duck launching**

*(Continued p 14)*

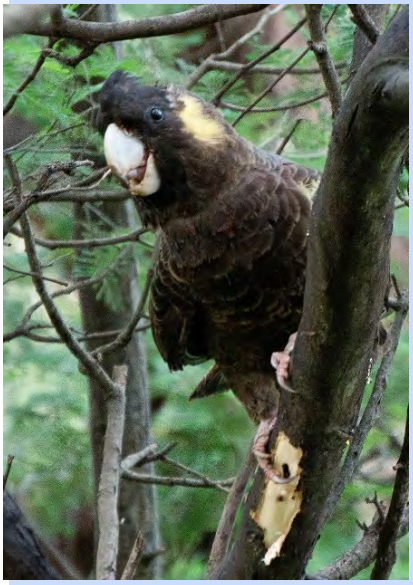
*(Continued from p 13)*

**Cormorant drying wings, having disrupted the seating arrangements of the Wood Ducks.**

## Parrots

The array of parrots in this area is amazing. There are: Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas, Red Rumped Parrots on the open areas (occasionally), Australian King Parrots, Little and Long Billed Corellas, Gang Gang Cockatoos, Galahs and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.

Some years I had observed a pair of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos teaching a juvenile how to fly. This was done along the creekline. This year groups of them came in to rip the wattles apart to get the grubs out of the trunks and branches. A magnificent sight and their call has a very evocative sound.



**Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos having fun feeding.**

**However someone has to be on sentry duty.**

***To be continued in FNN 314***

## Bird Humour

**Wendy Clark**

For a laugh, take a look at the delightful antics of these Rainbow Lorikeets.

Will you look at that!

Interesting!

They should learn to fly

Hey, they are looking at us!

Just pretend we don't see them

Looks much better from this angle!