



Gang-gang Cockatoo. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Newly fledged Little Raven being fed by an adult. Photo: Danny Fog.



Hoary-headed Grebe. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Rainbow Lorikeets. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.

Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 14 October 2023

15 bird observers, spanning 7 decades in age, met up at 7.15 am. The sky was grey and overcast, producing a moderate wind and a temperature of 14° C. After heavy mid-week rain, water level was at capacity with slight flooding in Area D near the New Street bridge.

As in September, we recorded 29 species in total: 14 wetland, 12 'terrestrial' and 3 feral/pest. The total number of birds was 393, 38 lower than in September.

By far the greatest activity was in Area A, which was both the most abundant in species (18) and birds (85). Bird numbers were remarkably consistent in other sections (B:45, C:45, D:50, E:57, F:56, G:55). Fifteen species were recorded in Area F, 14 in both D and G, 11 in E, and 9 in both B and C.

Our highlights were 3 Gang-gang Cockatoos foraging for gum nuts in Areas D and F, and 3 Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes that flew through Area B. Although once common in Bayside, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes were first recorded in a YWNR survey last month. Five Gang-gang Cockatoos were previously recorded in our May and June 2023 surveys, and some have persisted in the area since. Characteristically, their distinctive creaking call alerted us to their presence before they were seen.

The wide range of species in Area A included a newly fledged Little Raven that still had the pink at the back of the gape and was being fed by an adult. A single male Red-rumped Parrot flew through, probably indicating that the female was on the nest. (Benjamin Carson's 11 October Facebook entry shows a pair of Red-rumped Parrots at a log-hollow nest box next to the football oval.) This was the first 'Red-rump' recorded in our surveys since March. After our survey, an Australian Reed-warbler was later heard briefly calling in A. We also spotted 2 Hoary-headed Grebes on Area A pond. A single Hoary-headed Grebe was first recorded in September 2023 and has perhaps now found a mate.

There was very little flowering in Areas B and C, so the Rainbow Lorikeets were mostly zooming overhead, although one pair was trying to find a nest hollow in the very large eucalypt near the small bridge that marks the end of Area A. Rainbow Lorikeets were by far the most abundant species (90 in this survey, up 10 from September), and they were circulating loudly and widely. The only other



Female Chestnut Teal with duckling. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Chestnut Teal duckling. Photo: Danny Fog.



Young Australian Wood Ducks. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Magpie-lark on mud nest. Photo: Danny Fog.

recorded parrots were 3 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, 4 Galahs and the single Red-rumped Parrot. Two Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were seen in Area A and one in G (Elster Canal), napping above a nest hollow, perhaps with its partner inside the nest. Galahs tend to appear only intermittently in our survey data and, surprisingly, the 4 Galahs in G were our first 2023 record (also recorded on Facebook on 10 October). An Eastern Rosella, photographed by Danny Fog, was not recorded in the surveys. We were also too late for the 3 transient Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos that passed through the reserve on Thursday (see Danny Fog and Robin De Havilland's Facebook entries of 12 October).

Another surprise was the absence of Australian Magpies. Only 2 were recorded, both in Area B. Our past data shows 22 in September, a 2023 low of 8, and consistent distribution across most areas. Among the other 'terrestrial' birds, a single Red Wattlebird was again recorded in E, and 4 Crested Pigeons were all in A. A total of 29 Little Ravens was recorded for all areas of the reserve, but none were seen in Area G. Grey Butcherbirds were heard and seen in Areas D (1), E (2) and G (1).

Among the wetland birds, Chestnut Teal (total 39) were found in every area except B; one adult pair with 2 tiny, fluffy ducklings were seen scooting through pond 7 in F (Chain of Ponds). There were a large number of Eurasian Coots (33), many feeding on the grassy bank between A and F, but only 2 Pacific Black Ducks and 4 Grey Teals, all in Area A. More abundant species included Dusky Moorhens (total of 15 in A, D, E, F) and Purple Swampheens (total of 15 in A, C, D, F). A pair of Masked Lapwings had returned to D, and single Little Pied Cormorants were perched in F and G. Some wetland birds were only seen in flight, including: 16 Welcome Swallows (between 1 and 5 observed in every area); 9 Silver Gulls circulating between A, B, D, F and G; and a single Australian White Ibis over E. Two White-faced Herons flew low through D, and one was chased through Area C by 3 Noisy Miners.

Although it was almost low tide, there was just enough water at the Glen Huntly Road bridge to provide foraging space for a White-faced Heron in full breeding plumage, along with 2 Grey Teal, 6 Chestnut Teal and 2 Silver Gulls. The 9 Rock Doves kept to the bluestone and grassy edges.

Aside from the Chestnut Teal ducklings and Little Raven fledgling, breeding activity was observed in an Australian Wood Duck family with 3 fluffy young (total of 4 in E), a Magpie-lark pair nesting in a



Grey Butcherbird with nesting material. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Bird survey areas excluding Area G, Elster Canal.



Pondage in Areas E and F (by Gio Fitzpatrick).

eucalypt in D, probably reusing a mud nest from 2022, and a Grey Butcherbird carrying nesting material in E.

In the pest/feral category, a total of 47 Noisy Miners were recorded. Area B, with taller trees and grassy slopes, contributed the maximum of 16. In 2023, Noisy Miner survey numbers have oscillated between 31 and 54, with no obvious increase overall. Nine Common Starlings were scattered across Areas A, B, E, F and G, with 1-3 birds in each, and 22 Rock Doves were mostly seen flying over Areas A and in G.

Report: Sue Forster and Tania Ireton

Photos: Danny Fog and Tania Splawa-Neyman

Description of current vegetation and habitat by survey areas:

A: a large pond with well-established reeds around the edge and on small central islands.

B: grassy slopes with stands of mature eucalypts, including winter-flowering ironbarks.

C: grassy areas with stands of mixed native trees with Elster Creek on its northern side.

D: partly fenced area still undergoing landscaping; scattered mixed native trees with a line of mature eucalypts inside the New Street fence; bounded by Elster Creek to its south.

E: newly opened Chain of Ponds with scattered native trees, widescale planting around ponds (currently still under netting) and mature eucalypts inside the New Street fence.

F: grassy slope with scattered eucalypts fringing area A pond, leading to the Chain of Ponds and new beds of ground cover and shrubs adjoining the northern sports field fence.

G: Elster Canal flanked by grassy slopes, mixed plantings and a few mature eucalypts fronting urban housing and a school.

To join a monthly bird survey, please contact Bob Tammick: bob_alyson@aapt.net.au The surveys are led by BirdLife Bayside president Tania Ireton. Start times are between 7.15 and 8.00 am, depending on sunrise. Seven sections (including Elster Canal) are surveyed in two groups, for 20 minutes each; both groups complete Area A together around the main pond. The process generally takes one hour and thirty minutes per group.

To view the survey records for all seven sites, go to Birddata website, select the Shared Sites tab and type Elsternwick Park in the filter: <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au>