



White-faced Heron. Photo: Stephen Machet.



Male Chestnut Teal. Photo: Danny Fog.



Australian Wood Duck. Photo: Danny Fog.

Elsternwick Nature Park bird survey 9 July 2022

Sue Forster

Given the conditions and weather forecast, a surprising number of bird observers flocked to Elsternwick Nature Park on 9 July. There had been heavy rain overnight and on the previous day. More was expected and the temperature was 9 C. Undeterred, twelve of us set off around Area A at 8 am, picking up a thirteenth observer in Area F.

Our leader, Tania Ireton, described the survey as very quiet overall. The alarm calls of Noisy Miners did, however, alert her to her highlight of the day: an unusual sighting of a small raptor, the distinctive Australian Hobby that 'shot through in pursuit of another bird.' Unfortunately, 'it was outside Area A during our survey, so it didn't make it into the data except as a note on the Area A survey in Birdata'. She also commented that: 'three White-faced Herons were seen by my group when we were walking back past Area A towards Area G; two were adults in full-breeding plumage and the other was one of last year's young birds.' In our second group, Stephen Machet snatched a photo of a White-faced Heron that 'joined two Masked Lapwings on the grass beside the main body of water... and was seen foraging in the grass.' Stephen's sighting also happened outside the official survey, and none of these species made it into the official record. Several observers noted that they had recently seen aggressive Noisy Miners trying to chase off White-faced Herons coming into the park.

Our official survey data recorded 23 species in total, down by 3 from June and by 6 from our 2022 peak of 29 in February. In fact, every section except D had a lower species count than in previous months: most recorded 8 or 9 species but B and F only had 5 and 6 respectively. As usual, Area A, with its large permanent pond, had the strongest species diversity (15 species, 2 less than in June).

Among the wetland birds, Chestnut Teal was the most recorded duck (11). Although 10 were recorded on Elster Canal (Area G) in June, none were seen there on this occasion, so it's possible they were now all in the park. Another 7 were found scattered around Areas B, C, D and E.

Pacific Black Ducks had also moved on, with only 4 recorded in D and F (Chain of Ponds). (During the



Australasian Grebe. Photo: Danny Fog.



Dusky Moorhen. Photo: Danny Fog.



Purple Swamphen. Photo: Danny Fog.



Tawny Frogmouths. Photo: Danny Fog.

June survey, 59 were scattered across the entire survey area). Australian Wood Ducks, seen in large numbers in February and May, were also in short supply (again a total of 4, in A and E). As in June, a single Eurasian Coot was recorded in Area A and a pair of Australasian Grebes had possibly returned there (a pair was last recorded in April).

Surprisingly, given the high tide, a single Dusky Moorhen was the only waterbird recorded along the canal, but another 10 were seen in Area A, 2 in C and 3 in D. Purple Swamphen numbers have remained comparatively constant with 18 recorded across A, C, D and F (half of these were in Area A), but just 5 Welcome Swallows were recorded, again in Area A, circling the pond.

Since our last survey, the fences around the Chain of Ponds have been removed and many of us were excited to gain a better view of the ponds spanning survey Areas D, E and F. At present, there are relatively few (16) wetland birds here, possibly because its magnificent plantings are still maturing under netting and afford no shelter or foraging at present.

The most abundant species sighted were Little Ravens. A large flock has been foraging on the adjoining sports field since our June survey and Little Ravens were recorded frequently flying over Elsternwick Nature Park and the canal during this survey (67 in total). Colourful Rainbow Lorikeets (43) were recorded in every section except C. They were still feeding in the flowering ironbarks and other eucalypts in Area B, where 20 were observed. As usual, Noisy Miners were in every section, with a slightly lower total of 37 (the 2022 peak was 47 in May), and feral Rock Doves had rebounded (a total of 35 with 8 in C, 10 in D, and 16 in G).

Eastern Rosellas (3) were only seen in Area C during the survey but were noted elsewhere before and afterwards. Two Galahs were found in B, and our resident pair of Tawny Frogmouths were quickly spotted, still snuggled together in the same eucalypt opposite the New and Huntley Street corner (Area E).

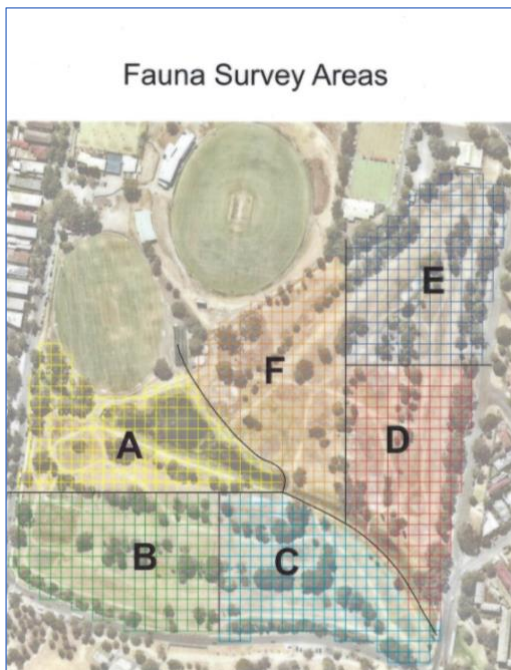
A total of 12 Magpie-larks were recorded across A, C, E, F and G, with half found in G, along the canal. Australian Magpies were also abundant along the canal (7) and around Area A pond (6) and another 5 were sighted in B and E. Its taxonomic family relative, Grey Butcherbird, was not recorded in June but was heard and seen in this survey in A (1), E (1) and G (2).



Galaha. Photo: Danny Fog.



Grey Butcherbird. Photo: Danny Fog.



The species count was strengthened by single sightings of a Little Black Cormorant (A), Pied Currawong (G), Crested Pigeon (B), Silver Gull (D) and Common Starling (C).

Commonly seen visitors and seasonal residents not recorded on this occasion included: Red Wattlebird, Little Grassbird, Little Pied Cormorant, Masked Lapwing, Red-rumped Parrot, Musk Lorikeet and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. However, a single Sulphur-crested Cockatoo was noted above a nesting box in Area A after the survey ended.

Sue Forster

Description of current vegetation and habitat by section:

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 and introduced trees with Elster creek to its north.

D: partly fenced area still undergoing landscaping, with large piles of mulch awaiting distribution; 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, who also contributed comments for this narrative. 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 surveys 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>