



Male Chestnut Teal. Photo: Stephen Machet.



Male Red-rumped Parrots.
Top: Stephen Machet. Bottom: Sue Forster.



Magpie-lark tending its nest. Photo: Stephen Machet.

Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 12 November 2022

We had a mild, cloudy morning for our November bird survey, with an early 7.15 am start. When the groups finished around 9 am, the temperature was already 17 C.

Twelve keen birders arrived on time and were later joined by two more. Only our key photographers were missing! Luckily, Stephen arrived with a borrowed camera and stepped into the breach.

It was wonderful to see Bob and Alyson return after a 3-month absence and many adventures overseas. Perversely, their arrival seemed to coincide with the dispersal of some birds usually observed in the reserve, and the overall species diversity was notably lower than in October.

It was hard to account for this. Water levels in the original pond and creek remained high due to October's unusually heavy rainfall, and vegetation had grown rapidly everywhere. The newly planted beds in areas E and F looked magnificent, with many indigenous shrubs, grasses and groundcovers in flower, but it was hard to find both the path and creek in Area D, where the grass was high and water plants were closing over the creek surface.

We observed 24 species in total, which was 5 less than October (29) and our second lowest species count this year (the lowest was 23 in April). Many of the wetland birds often seen in Area A were absent, including Little Grassbird, Australian Reed-Warbler, cormorants, grebes, Eurasian Coot, White-faced Heron, Great Egret and Masked Lapwing. However, Chestnut Teal (29) were seen in every area except B.

Rainbow Lorikeets (82) were the most frequently observed bird. They were seen in all areas, mostly flying rapidly overhead. The greatest number (26) were counted over Area E. Pest Noisy Miners were also present in all areas, their numbers varying from 2 in D to 8/9 in B/C. Their total of 36 was at the lower end of 2022 counts. Welcome Swallows (34) were once again circling in every area, with the most (13) counted over the pond in Area A, and Little Ravens (16) were in every sector except D.

Musk Lorikeets had been absent since June, but one pair were recorded in B and F. Two male Red-rumped Parrots were seen grazing on grass seeds in A and F for the second consecutive month. Tania thought this may indicate that the females were



Adult Australian Magpie. Photo: Stephen Machet.



Immature Australian Magpie (left) being taught to find food by adult male. Photo: Stephen Machet.



Crested Pigeons (in mating dance on the left). Photo: Stephen Machet.



Tawny Frogmouth. Photo: Sue Forster.

in nest hollows, either on eggs or keeping babies warm.

Her other highlights were:

'Two adult Australian Magpies with 2 immatures and 4 recently fledged young; the immatures were keeping an eye on the babies (Area A, 7 of them seen in Area B). Two Musk Lorikeets seemed to be doing flights through Area B and eventually settled in a flowering eucalypt. There was an ephemeral pond in Area C with 7 Pacific Black Ducks, a Purple Swamphen and 2 immature Chestnut Teals that could have easily been mistaken for Grey Teal except that one had some colour on the front of its cheek and both looked slightly fluffy rather than sleek in appearance like normal adult birds. In Area G, a pair of adult Magpie-larks were collecting mud and building a new nest whilst their 3 recently fledged juveniles wandered through the grass looking for food. There was also a pair of Little Ravens with a juvenile, and a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike flew past but was outside the area boundary and so was excluded from the survey.'

Other examples of breeding activity included a pair of Chestnut Teal with 6 ducklings out of the nest and swimming on pond A, and a pair of Magpie-larks tending a mud nest (possibly cleaning it) in D.

Stephen's highlights also included an adult male Magpie 'teaching an immature magpie how to find food, whilst mum kept a watchful eye from a distance, and an unusually large number of Crested Pigeons (9), with one performing a (rather unsuccessful) mating dance.'

Thanks to Lynne's eagle eyes, we tracked down the well-camouflaged Tawny Frogmouth family of 4 roosting in 2 eucalypts near their nest site by New Street. The 2 chicks have now fledged, and it was hard to distinguish adult from juvenile.

As Honeyeater records have been sparse in 2022, it was pleasing to observe both Little Wattlebirds (one in both D and G) and Red Wattlebirds (5 in A). A pair of Long-billed Corellas were also sighted briefly in D (one was recorded there in October) and 2 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were found in G. Four Eastern Rosellas were recorded in F, including juveniles, but there was no nest box activity.

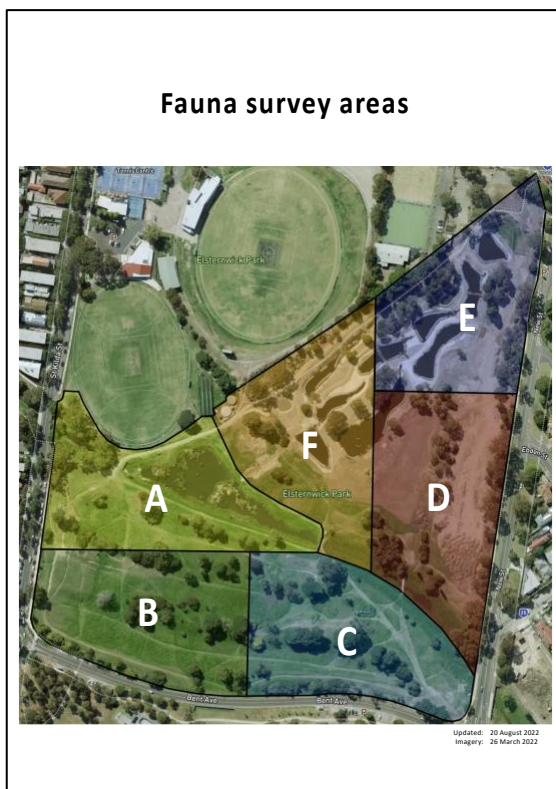
Given that newly hatched chicks were seen in October, the Purple Swamphen count was surprisingly low (7 spread across A, B, C and D). Until now, the 2022 average has been over 15.



Purple Swamphen. Photo: Stephen Machet.



Dusky Moorhens. Photo: Stephen Machet.



The species balance was: Australian Wood Duck (7 in D, 6 in E), Dusky Moorhen (5A), Grey Butcherbird (3D, 2F, 2G), Silver Gull (1C, 2G), and exotic ferals: Rock Dove (2C, 2F, 7G) and Common Starling (2A, 1D, 2F).

Happily, all dogs seen in the park were on leads.

Report: Sue Forster, Tania Ireton and Stephen Machet

Photos: Stephen Machet and 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 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 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>