



New, ephemeral pond across B and C. Photo: Bob Tammick.



Chestnut Teal with young in the ephemeral pond. Photo: Bob Tammick.



Welcome Swallows roosting on reeds around the main pond. Photo: Danny Fog.



Grey Teal roosting in a tree. Photo: Danny Fog.

Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 10 December 2022

Ten keen observers turned up at 7.15am on Saturday 10 December for our last bird survey of the year. As our leader, Tania Ireton, was interstate, Bob Tammick appointed Stephen Machet and Laura Paterson to lead the two groups for this session.

It was a sunny, still morning with a temperature of 10 °C. Hot air balloons and skydivers drifted lazily down to earth in the northwest, while the rumble of building works was constant from a large New Street construction site to the southeast. Elster Creek looked murky near New Street, but it was impossible to tell whether this was due to run off from nearby building work or from upstream. In Area D, the grass was exceptionally high as there had been no mowing north of the creek.

The high rainfall had also created a surprise, another ephemeral pond across survey Areas B and C in a similar location to that of late January 2022. Bob observed: 'A large number of ducks and ducklings were found there... Once dry weather arrives (if indeed it does this summer) then the lake will dry up. It's probably the reason we are not seeing larger duck populations around the Chain of Ponds.'

One result was that Area C had the highest bird count of any area (73). This was largely made up of Chestnut Teals (18), Pacific Black Ducks (6), Welcome Swallows (10) and Musk Lorikeets (20). Chestnut Teal numbers were only eclipsed by the 20 recorded in Area G (Elster Canal) in February 2022.

Flocks of seasonally migratory Musk Lorikeets had once again returned to feed off summer-flowering eucalypts, their total numbers across all survey areas now equalling those of resident Rainbow Lorikeets (45:44). Musk Lorikeets were recorded in 5 out of 7 areas while Rainbow Lorikeets were only absent from E.

We also recorded our largest number (54) of Welcome Swallows for 2022. The majority (30) were found around Area A pond, mostly resting on reeds that were probably their overnight roost. Considered a wetland bird in our survey data, they were present in every area except D. Their numbers have been steadily increasing after a low of 5 in July, suggesting that many have wintered north and subsequently returned.



Tawny Frogmouth adult with 2 juveniles. Photo: Danny Fog.



Tawny Frogmouth back on the nest with a new brood. Photo: Danny Fog.



Male Red-rumped Parrot. Photo: Danny Fog.



Eastern Rosella. Photo: Danny Fog.

Our total species count was 26, comprising 9 wetland birds, 13 terrestrials, and 4 pest species. This was 2 higher than in November, but still considerably lower than our high of 32 species in September 2022.

Species counts were low in most areas except for F (Chain of Ponds), with a few common and many less common wetland birds missing from the scene. Only 2 Dusky Moorhens and 4 Purple Swampheens were recorded, all in A. Purple Swampheens have been widely distributed throughout the park in previous surveys; 18 was the maximum recorded (in April 2022). Similarly, only 2 Australian Wood Ducks were observed, both in Area G (Elster Canal). No Little Grassbirds, Australian Reed-warblers, Hardheads, Eurasian Coots, grebes, cormorants, egrets or herons were seen. A single Masked Lapwing was observed in D and single Silver Gull in A.

In Area F, duck numbers and species had been stable over the last month, comprising 4 Black Pacific Ducks, 4 Chestnut Teals and 2 Grey Teals, seen roosting in a tree by a nesting box. Unfortunately, a Common Starling and a juvenile Black Pacific Duck were both trapped in netting in 2 different locations, testing Laura's ingenuity as an experienced bird handler. Both eventually found their way out when the nets were opened at either end.

Young and juvenile ducks were recorded in Areas A, C and E. In A and C, these were mostly Chestnut Teal; in E, they were all Pacific Black Ducks, comprising family groups of one adult with 2 or 3 young and a solitary juvenile.

Also in Area E, we were delighted to find an adult Tawny Frogmouth roosting with 2 fully grown juveniles in one tree plus a second adult back on the original nest in a nearby tree. A second brood appears to be on its way, possibly stimulated by rain and abundant insect feed. (Sadly, a Tawny Frogmouth, potentially one of the juveniles, was photographed dead on the ground later in the day after our survey.)

Other regularly observed species included small populations of Red-rumped Parrots (maximum of 3 in A), Eastern Rosellas (maximum of 3 in D), and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos (maximum of 5 in G), all seen in lower numbers in other areas. No Galahs or Corellas were recorded on this occasion.

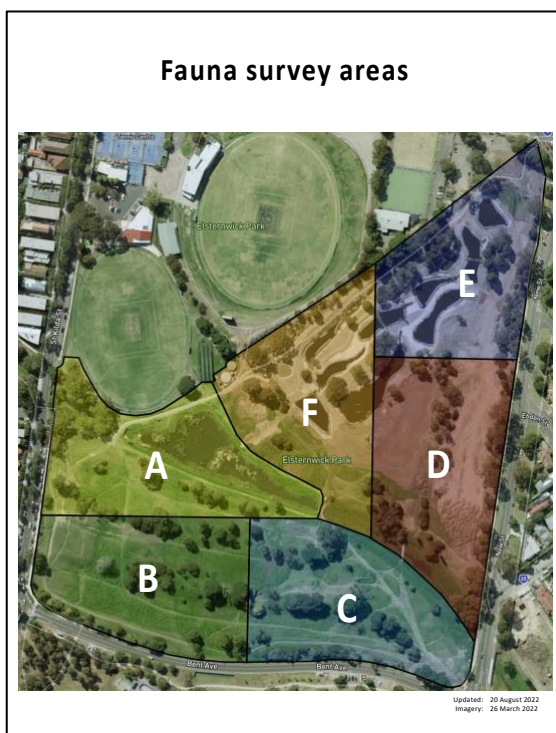
There was a low abundance of Little Ravens (total of 13 in C, D, E, F, G), Crested Pigeons (total of 7 in



Crested Pigeon. Photo: Danny Fog.



Common Starling. Photo: Danny Fog.



B, D, E, F), but the Magpie-lark count remained high (total of 16 in A,B, D, F, G), with a maximum of 8 recorded in G (Elster Canal), where they are known to nest. Other terrestrial bird observations included single Grey Butcherbirds in C and G, a Red Wattlebird in D and a Pied Currawong in E.

Four pest (feral) species were recorded. Clad in their iridescent summer plumage, seasonally migratory Common Starlings had returned (to B, C, D and F) after a three-month absence. A total of 15 were observed, the highest number this year. Although Noisy Miners were still found in every area, their numbers were relatively low (27). (The highest 2022 count was 47 in May.) Demonstrating the species' adaptability, a Noisy Miner was observed in Area E drinking from a water fountain! Remaining ferals were single Rock Doves in each of B and F, and a Common Myna in G.

Report: Sue Forster

Photos: Danny Fog and Bob Tammick

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>