



Birder (Jo Samuel-King) in the reeds. Photo: Danny Fog.



Buff-banded Rail in the mud. Photo: Jo Samuel-King.



Great Egret. Photo: Danny Fog.



White-faced Heron. Photo: Danny Fog.

## Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey report 18 March 2023

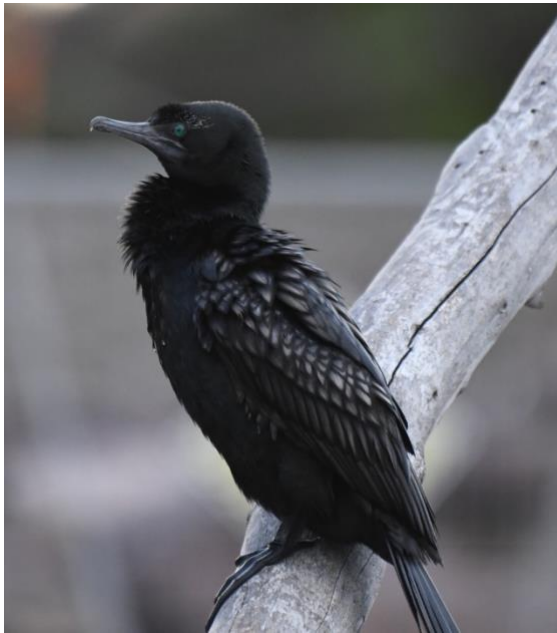
Our March survey began at 7.35 am (30 minutes after sunrise), accompanied by a northerly wind picking up strength. By 9.15 am the temperature had risen from 19 to 24 C with sun, cloud and a few spots of rain thrown into a typical Melbourne autumn mix.

Seventeen observers recorded 33 bird species, an increase of 7 since February and possibly our highest species count since the surveys began. However, there were fewer birds counted (384 compared to February's 422). As usual, Area A had the greatest species diversity (20, an increase of 4 species since February). Area F (southwest Chain of Ponds) recorded a high species diversity (17) for the second consecutive month, but Area G (Elster Canal, with 13 species) had the greatest number of birds (87). The lowest records were in Area B (grassy woodlands), which had 8 species and 22 birds. Species data was also recorded in 3 categories: wetland (16), terrestrial (13) and pest/feral (4).

Excitingly, dry weather over February and March had exposed mud and sand flats in ponds, soaks and billabongs, creating favourable conditions for wading birds. In the fortnight before our survey, Yalukit Willam's Facebook Page had been bursting with reports and photos of new and rare bird visitors: Magpie Geese, notoriously shy Australian Spotted Crake and Spotless Crake, Buff-banded Rail and White-necked Heron. On this morning, Jo Samuel-King not only found the Buff-banded Rail, but also scooped some great photos of it in a muddy soak. This was the first month that this strikingly patterned, medium-sized Rail has been recorded in the reserve.

Observers were also treated to wonderful views of a Great Egret flying gracefully around reserve, a bird not recorded by the survey group since April 2021. We were also lucky to see 4 White-faced Herons fly into Area A, possibly a family group as at least 2 were immature. A 5<sup>th</sup> Heron was seen after the survey was completed. Three (probably the same birds) were recorded in B and one in G.

Our waterhen count consisted of 4 Eurasian Coots (3 in A, including 2 immature birds; one in F); 9 Dusky Moorhens (a consistent number for the last 3 months, seen in A, E and F); and a total of 13 Purple Swamphens (2A, 2B, 3E, 6F).



Little Black Cormorant on perch in billabong. Photo: Jo Samuel-King.



Little Pied Cormorant. Photo: Jo Samuel-King.



Masked Lapwing (Plover). Photo: Danny Fog.

Among the ducks, Pacific Black Ducks were the most abundant (46, recorded as 14A, 2D, 20E, 10F, 2G), but Chestnut Teals had the greatest number locally in Area G, Elster Canal (35, with another 5 recorded in E and F). Some had dispersed since January when 73 were recorded on the Canal. Grey Teal numbers were still low (9, recorded as 3A, 1E, 5G), but had increased since January. Australian Wood Ducks were recorded only in F (14).

Other wetland/coastal birds included single Australasian Grebes in Areas A and F; a pair of Masked Lapwings in D and E; 7 Welcome Swallows, all but one circulating over the pond in A; 3 Little Black Cormorants (2 in A, including an immature bird, and one in F); 4 Little Pied Cormorants (2 in A and 2 in F); and 10 Silver Gulls throughout Areas A to D.

Surprisingly, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos dominated the cockatoo and parrot count. A total of 17 were recorded (5A, 1C, 1D, 2F, 8G). Although Little Corellas had been seen in flocks of 16-17 birds in February, only 4 were recorded on this occasion (1 in A and 3 in B). We found one pair of Eastern Rosellas in sections E and F, and a single male Red-rumped Parrot flying over Area A (none were counted in January and February). There were unusually low numbers of Lorikeets (2 Musk Lorikeets in each of A and B, and a total of 13 Rainbow Lorikeets across A, B, E and G). Maybe this reflected a lack of flowering eucalypts in the reserve, although throughout the last year Rainbow Lorikeet counts have been consistently over 40.

Only 3 Little Ravens were recorded (one each in C, D and G; the lowest count in the last 12 months), but Australian Magpie abundance remained steady. Our total of 22 reflected Magpies counted in every section except F. Pied Currawongs, not recorded at all in January/February, were seen in 3 areas (one each in C and D, and 3 in G), and we had 6 records of Grey Butcherbirds (2A, 2B, 1D, 1E). Magpie-larks appeared to be more dispersed (3A, 3D, 2F, 5G); our total of 13 was 10 lower than the January record. However, Crested Pigeon sightings were steadily increasing, up from 2 in January to 17, and they were well-distributed around the reserve (4B, 3C, 4D, 1E, 5F). Our only non-pest honeyeaters, Red Wattlebirds, were just hanging on, with one seen in both Areas A and E.

In the pest/feral category, we counted fewer Noisy Miners. Our total of 31 was 23 lower than the February count and, most unusually, none were sighted in Areas A and C. A flock of Common Starlings (26) was present in Area F in similar





Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. Photo: Danny Fog.



Little Corella on nets. Photo: Jo Samuel-King.



Female Magpielark. Photo: Danny Fog.



Pacific Black Ducks in muddy water. Photo: Jo Samuel-King.

numbers to February while Rock Dove numbers (32) were also slightly lower than January/February. Two introduced Spotted Doves were also recorded in Area G.

Our leader, Tania Ireton, listed her highlights as:

- Area A – 20 species. A well-grown juvenile Australasian Grebe was seen but there was no sign of its parents. Two immature Eurasian Coots were likely to have hatched from a nest in the lake. No Noisy Miners were recorded.
- Area B – 11 species. Two juvenile Australian Magpies, 2 immature White-faced Herons and an immature Grey Butcherbird show that we had a successful breeding season. Three Tawny Frogmouths were tracked down after the survey and located in a eucalypt just inside Area B. Only 4 Noisy Miners were present.
- Area C – 8 species. Again, no Noisy Miners present, and 8 recorded Rock Doves were largely displaced by building activity on New Street: they kept flying into the park, circling and flying out again.
- Area G – 13 species. As we were only an hour and a half from high tide, there was plenty of water at the Glen Huntly Road bridge. There, we recorded 2 Pacific Black Ducks, 5 Grey Teal and 35 Chestnut Teal, as well as an adult White-faced Heron that successfully caught several small fish whilst we counted the ducks.

Jo Samuel-King's highlights were:

- The elusive Buff-banded Rail popping out for a photo-shoot in the area that has just dried out and has exposed mud;
- Pacific Black Ducks also having a lovely time in the mud;
- seeing all those White-faced Herons in the air at one time;
- seeing all the water birds enjoying the low water levels in the old wetlands.

**Report: Sue Forster, Tania Ireton and Jo Samuel-King**

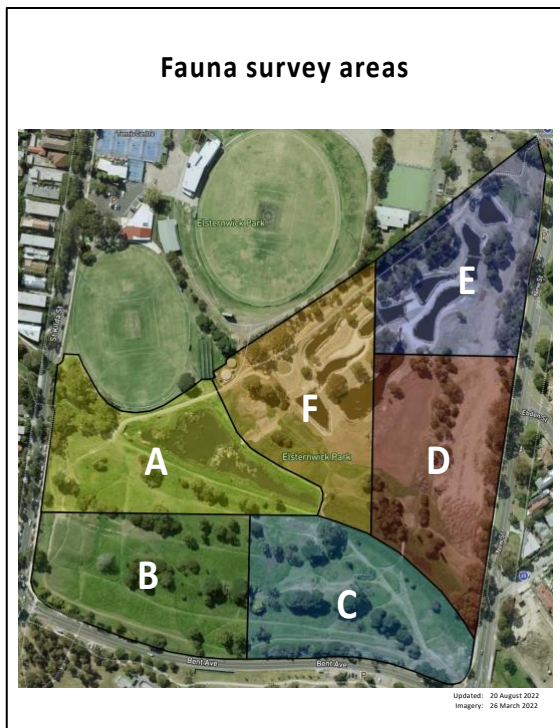
**Photos: Jo Samuel-King and Danny Fog**



Common Starling. Photo: Danny Fog.



Purple Swamphen. Photo: Jo Samuel-King.



**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](mailto: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>