



Australian Wood Ducks with newly hatched young.
Photo: Danny Fog.



Female Australian Wood Duck with newly hatched young.
Photo: Danny Fog.



Australian Wood Duck checking out nesting box.
Photo: Jo Samuel-King.



Chestnut Teal on branch. Photo: Jo Samuel-King.

Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 10 September 2022

With our usual leaders and organisers—Tania, Bob and Alyson—travelling overseas and interstate, it fell to the intrepid Stephen Machet to take over Tania's role and Sue Forster to fill in for Bob and Alyson. Thank you, Stephen, for stepping into the breach and doing a great job.

We lucked out with the weather. Heavy overnight and early morning rain threatened to jeopardise the survey, but the rain stopped promptly at 7.30 am as 10 optimistic observers signed in. Another joined us late after the first survey. The temperature was mild (11 C) and by 8.30 am the sun was out. However, the reserve remained boggy underfoot and some paths were flooded.

The water-level in the pond and creek was as high as in early February, following on from the late January flooding event. Ground saturation might explain why Area C (between Elster Creek and Bent Avenue) had more birds than usual (a total of 56) as well as the highest count by area and a much higher species diversity than average (15 species compared to an average of around 9-10). By comparison, Area A (the original pond) had less abundance than usual (54 birds—its average is around 70) but, as usual, it maintained the highest species diversity (18).

The group recorded 32 species in total, which so far represents the highest diversity in a single survey in 2022. This included 3 exotic bird species (3 Common Starlings, 1 Common Myna and 9 Rock Doves) and one feral native (Noisy Miner). There was good species diversity in most areas (A = 18, C = 15, F = 14, E = 13, D = 12). The only areas where it was lower than average were B (8) and G (10). (See the Fauna Survey Map to locate areas A-F; G is a section along Elster Canal from St Kilda Street to Glen Huntly Road).

Areas A, C, F and G all had a total bird count in the 52–56 range; B and E totalled 44 and 41 respectively, and D had the lowest count (27). Area D is still being landscaped and will be substantially replanted.

There were signs of breeding activity. We came across one pair of Australian Wood (Maned) Ducks with 6 very young ducklings at the southern end of Area F and later saw the same family again on the western side of adjoining Area E (we had surveyed



Tawny Frogmouth on nest. Photo: Danny Fog.



Great Egret. Photo: Danny Fog.



White-faced Heron with fish. Photo: Danny Fog.



Australasian Grebe. Photo: Danny Fog.

Area D in the interim). Single Chestnut Teals were seen near nest boxes in Area A (in a large eucalypt) and Area F. Also in F, Purple Swamphens were chasing each other, and a Tawny Frogmouth was stoically 'manning' the nest noted in August near New and Huntley Streets. And, yes, the bird probably was a male. His partner was observed nearby on the following day.

Another highlight was a brief sighting of a stunning Great Egret on Elster Creek while the group was surveying A. Unfortunately, we were unable to record it on Birdata because it was outside the official survey area. There has been no official survey record of a Great Egret since April 2021. Just after the survey of Area A ended, a White-faced Heron was chased into the main pond by a Noisy Miner and then into Area C, this time during the team's recording period. Stephen noted that 'it seemed quite happy foraging for worms in that section, as the grass was inundated with water'. Australian Magpies were also showing signs of aggression: in Area E one swooped a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.

We heard Little Grassbirds in both areas A and F but were unable to spot them. Little Grassbirds have not been recorded since mid-May and only previously in Area A. In this survey Australasian Grebes (2), a Hardhead duck, Eurasian Coots (3), Dusky Moorhens (4) and Red-rumped Parrots (2) were seen or heard only in Area A, and a single Little Pied Cormorant was recorded in C. Chestnut Teal (19) were found in every area except D, Black Pacific Ducks (16) were in all areas except D and G, and a pair of Grey Teal were found only in F. Purple Swamphens were distributed across A, B, C, and F, with half of them (7) in Area A. A Masked Lapwing was heard in E and seen in F, and Welcome Swallows were recorded in every area except G, with the most (7) in F.

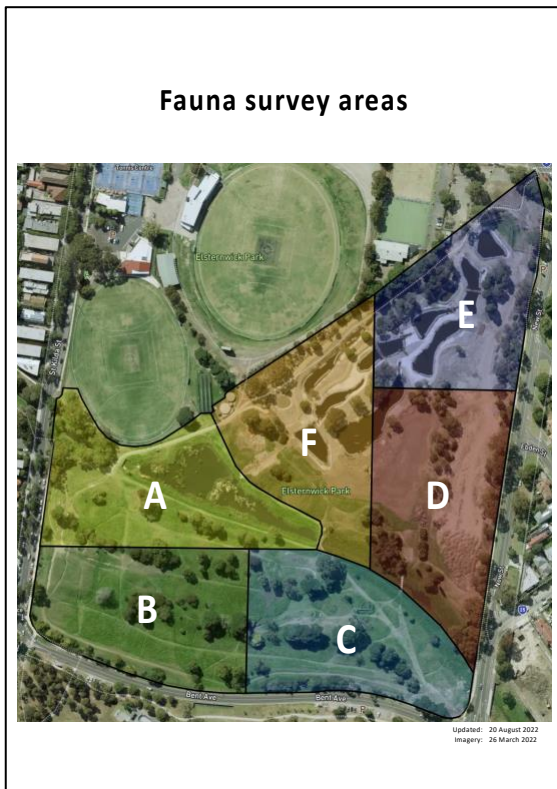
As usual, among the parrots, cockatoos and lorikeets, Rainbow Lorikeets (49) were the most abundant species, distributed across every area. Flowering eucalypts attract many to Area B (14). A pair of Eastern Rosellas were spotted in C and D, and 3 Galahs in D and E.

Little Ravens (57) were the most abundant species overall; a large flock has sometimes been seen on the adjoining football ground when matches are not in play. They were observed in flight across all areas.

Among the other larger passerines, Australian Magpie and Grey Butcherbird observations seem to



Eastern Rosella. Photo: Danny Fog.



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vary widely between surveys; on this occasion Magpies were most in evidence in E (4, from a total count of 9) and Grey Butcherbirds were in B (2) and G (3). A single Pied Currawong was observed in D and E, and a single Crested Pigeon was recorded in C and D, although another 2 were observed just beyond the boundary during Area C survey. Magpie-lark observations were lower overall (total count of 9, distributed across C, D, F, G).

Noisy Miner numbers were around average (a total of 42) with distribution across all areas, ranging from one in Area A to 19 in Area G. The only other honeyeater, a single Red Wattlebird, was seen in Area F. We have observed few Red Wattlebirds throughout 2022 and, unlike the previous two summers, did not record an influx during the summer of 2021/2022.

The groups also made a note of dogs on and off leads during the surveys. From a total of 14 dogs, only 4 were off lead; 3 of these were beside the Elster Canal (G) and one was in Area B.

Report: Sue Forster

Photos: Danny Fog and 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 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>