



Male Hardhead. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Male Chestnut Teal. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



White-faced Heron. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.

Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 12 August 2023

At 7.30 am the weather was cool (12 °C), with an overcast sky, a slight breeze and occasional spots of rain. Surprisingly, many new observers turned up, swelling the group to 23.

Bird activity was generally quiet, with numbers down 12% from July, but a good spread of species. We had our lowest total count for 2023 (337); the high was 460 in April. Areas E and F (covering the Chain of Ponds) had equal highest birds counts (61).

Our total species count for all 7 surveyed areas has been 26 over the last 3 months but observed species have varied. This month we recorded 14 wetland species (up from 12 in July), 9 'terrestrial' species (down from 11 in July) and 3 feral/pest species (equal to July). As in May and June, Area F once again had the highest species count (18) followed by the original pond in Area A (16). Between 10-13 species were recorded in each of the other 5 areas.

Our highlights of the morning were a glimpse of a quail running out of tall grass on the southern boundary of the Chain of Ponds in Area F and a Hardhead duck foraging in Billabong 2, Area F. The quail was likely a Brown Quail, recorded previously in our May survey in Area E, at the northern end of the Chain of Ponds. The male Hardhead was easily identified by its bright white eye (females have brown eyes), pale-blue-tipped bill and chocolate-coloured plumage. Hardheads are classified as Vulnerable in Victoria.

The water level was at capacity and Elster Creek had opened up where volunteers had recently cleared densely growing water plants. Among the wetland birds, Chestnut Teal (25) and Eurasian Coots (23) were scattered but numerous. However, only a few Pacific Black Ducks (6) and Australian Wood Ducks (5) were recorded. A pair of White-faced Herons flew into the Creek during the survey and were recorded in C, D and F. Purple Swamphen numbers (11) had dipped by one-third since July, but Welcome Swallows had increased (to a maximum of 5 in F) and were circulating in every area. Single records were made of a Grey Teal in A and F, a Masked Lapwing in D (later seen being harassed by Noisy Miners) and a Little Pied Cormorant in B, but all grebes had disappeared, and no Little Grassbirds were recorded. Up to 10 Silver Gulls were seen flying over A, B, C and F.



Welcome Swallow. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Grey Teal. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Little Raven. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.

There were few trees in flower, so lorikeet numbers were down, and all were Rainbow Lorikeets. These were recorded in every area, reaching a similar total to that of July (55). Most were seen over D and E as they crossed from New Street (presumably, from food sources outside the reserve). Musk Lorikeets seem to have disappeared from Melbourne as they appear to do every second year to follow the eucalypt flowering in central Victoria. A pair of Eastern Rosellas made a late appearance in Area E, just before we finished our last 20-minute survey. One was photographed foraging in the grass for fallen gum nuts.

Little Ravens (total 50) were recorded in all survey areas. Most were observed in F (17) and A (13), areas adjoining sporting fields where they congregate in flocks. Single Grey Butcherbirds were heard or seen in every area except F, with 2 being recorded in G, along Elster Canal. Their relative, the Australian Magpie, was present in every area except G, with a maximum of 4 in A and D. Another common, but smaller, black-and-white-bird, the Magpie-lark, was found in A, D, E, F and G, also with a maximum of 4, recorded in G. Both species seem to be locally mobile; in 2023 survey numbers have oscillated between 8-22 (Australian Magpies) and 12-23 (Magpie-larks). Other 'terrestrial' birds comprised a pair of Crested Pigeons in F and a single Red Wattlebird in D. Tawny Frogmouths have not been recorded since February.

Our 3 feral/pest species were the usual Noisy Miners (present in every area, with a total of 49, up from 43 in July), Rock Doves (in B and G, down to 10 from 28 in July), and Common Starlings (in E and F, with a similar total to July of 7).

There were some signs of breeding activity. A pair of Chestnut Teals in Area A were later seen in a tree with the male on a branch and the female perched on a nest box. A pair of Australian Wood Ducks were seen in a tree at a nest box in Area G and there was a pair of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos at the nest tree, also in Area G. An Eastern Great Egret was spotted roosting in the canal on some tree branches sticking out from the water. It had fluffy breeding plumes on its neck and back but was unfortunately on the far side of the Glen Huntly Road bridge and so out of the survey area.

Report: Sue Forster and Tania Ireton
Photos: Tania Splawa-Neyman



Eastern Rosella. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman.



Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. Photo: Tania Splawa-Neyman



Bird survey areas. Not shown is Area G, Elster Canal, to the west of St Kilda Street.

Description of current vegetation and habitat by survey areas:

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 survey records 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>