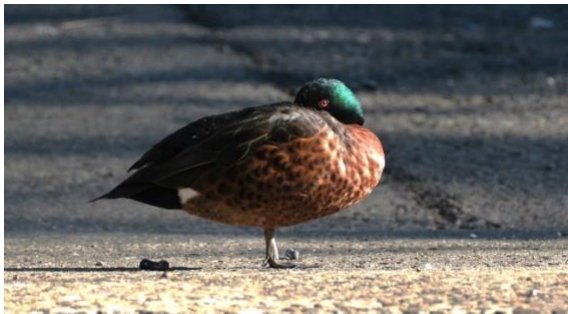




Female Chestnut Teal and Pacific Black Ducks. Photo: Susan Carden.



Male Chestnut Teal. Photo: Susan Carden.



Australian Wood Duck makes a landing. Photo: Danny Fog.



Great Egret. Photo: Danny Fog.



Willie Wagtail. Photo: Sue Forster.

Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 16 March 2024

This month's survey was delayed one week due to a long weekend holiday on the scheduled date. The morning was mild and still, with mist rising from the ponds at 7.45 am and a low, almost blinding sun at the start. The temperature rose rapidly from 15 to 20 C during our 80 minutes of surveys, producing a glorious morning for our 12 observers.

In the Chain of Ponds, billabongs, ponds and soaks were rapidly drying out, leaving large areas of cracked mud. Unfortunately, there was an oily slick on the creek near the New Street bridge and an unpleasant smell of sewerage. Unsurprisingly, we found just one water bird at this end, a juvenile Chestnut Teal. Area D was particularly empty, possibly due to ongoing building activities and the loss of vegetation.

Our total count was 422 birds, reflecting a large increase in wetland birds over January and February, particularly Chestnut Teal on Elster Canal, and a decrease in 'terrestrial' birds, particularly Rainbow Lorikeets and Noisy Miners.

We had good species diversity in most sections, but the overall total of 29 was 3 less than in February. On this occasion we were missing some iconic birds such as the Baillon's Crake and Nankeen Night Heron.

Area F (Chain of Ponds) had the highest diversity (22 species), the highest number of wetland species (10) and the greatest abundance (98 birds), mainly due to a flock of 25 Australian Wood Ducks landing with a magnificent splash on Billabong 2 during the survey and a flock of 18 Musk Lorikeets passing overhead. Area A (original pond) yielded 20 species, including the highest number of 'terrestrial' species (11), and a total of 70 birds. Surprisingly, 16 species were observed around the wooded grassy slopes of Area B while 15 were counted in D and E, and 13 in C and G (Elster Canal).

Despite the diversity, there was an impression of quiet, probably due to low numbers of lorikeets in the reserve (at least in the southern end). A Great Egret and Willie Wagtail in Area A were a bonus, as were the unusually large number of 17 Magpie-larks that flocked to the high wire fence. Three Little Grassbirds were calling from the reeds but were hard to see. A pair of Eastern Rosellas were accompanied by a well-grown juvenile; they also



Pair of Magpie-larks (female on left). Photo: Sue Forster.



Eastern Rosella. Photo: Danny Fog.



Little Black Cormorant. Photo: Danny Fog.



White-faced Heron. Photo: Susan Carden.

appeared singly or in twos in 4 other sections. A single Little Wattlebird flew high through Area A and was later seen in Area B, as was the egret as it left the reserve, apparently heading for the lake on the other side of Bent Avenue.

The species in Area C were boosted by a Little Black Cormorant and a Little Pied Cormorant, both heading for Elster Creek. A couple of Little Black Cormorants were also seen in Area E, and single birds in D and F, along with the Little Pied Cormorant in F.

On the way to Area G, we passed back through Area A as 24 Australian Wood Ducks flew in, and 2 White-faced Herons were seen perched on the logs. The herons also showed up singly in Areas D and F.

With a high tide at 7.39 am there were plenty of ducks at the Glen Huntly Road bridge: 5 Pacific Black Ducks, 6 Grey Teals and 42 Chestnut Teals. A single Pacific Black Duck and Chestnut Teal were also seen feeding in the canal just down from the St Kilda Street bridge, and a single Purple Swamphen was flushed by an off-leash dog. We counted 10 off-leash dogs, all along the canal. Dogs inside the reserve were all on leash.

With a total count of 64, Chestnut Teal were by far the most numerous species recorded in March. Purple Swamphen numbers had also noticeably increased from 25 in February to 33 in March, and Pacific Black Ducks had increased from 14 to 24. Grey Teal (7) and Welcome Swallow (16) numbers had remained stable, whereas Dusky Moorhens (8) and Eurasian Coots (5) had slightly declined.

Among the 'terrestrial' birds, Rainbow Lorikeets numbers had dipped from 39 to 22 over the last month, whereas the Musk Lorikeet total (20) was stable. Little Raven (17) and Magpie-lark (24) numbers had increased, and Australian Magpies (16) were stable. We also observed Grey Butcherbirds, singly and in pairs, in 5 areas; Crested Pigeons, again singly and in pairs in every area except G; a Pied Currawong in Areas A and C; up to 3 Little Corellas in each of Areas A, B, F and G; and up to 4 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos in every area, with a flock of 7 arriving in A after the survey ended.

Noisy Miner observations (25) were substantially reduced after a high of 45 in February, and Common Starlings (18) had also dropped off slightly; as usual, they were mostly seen in one flock in Area E. The only other feral/pest birds were Rock Doves; a flock of 10 was observed moving between Areas C and D, and a few stragglers were spotted in F and G.



Crested Pigeon. Photo: Susan Carden.



Australian Magpie with broken beak. Photo: Susan Carden.



Bird survey areas excluding Area G, Elster Canal

Report: Sue Forster and Tania Ireton
Photos: Susan Carden, Danny Fog and Sue Forster

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>



Right: Pair of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Photo: Danny Fog.