

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



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Objects of the Club

To facilitate and promote the knowledge of natural history, and to encourage the preservation and protection of the Australian natural environment, especially that of the Murrumbidgee River Valley



Brolgas at Fivebough Swamp - Dot Eurell

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CONTRIBUTIONS

**For the next issue by
Wednesday, 6 May 2009**

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com

Phone: 6953 2612

**Wanted
Films for our
Short Film Night**

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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Treasurer:	Phil Tenison	6953 4869			

MEETINGS ARE HELD EACH MONTH, EXCEPT JANUARY

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

LEETON MEETINGS SECOND THURSDAY - Seminar Room 1, Block 34 at Dept. Primary Industry at 7.30 PM

GRIFFITH MEETINGS FOURTH THURSDAY - Conference Room, Dept. of Primary Industry AT 7.30 PM

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

Membership enquiries:

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Annual Subscriptions:	Family	\$45.00	Adult/Single	\$35.00	Journal only/Concession	\$25.00

Opinions expressed by authors are their own and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

A Big Brown Hairy Spider

One of the interesting features of working with NPWS are the animals brought in to identify. After a while one can anticipate the likely arrivals – such as decapitated juvenile brown snakes in summer, disorientated male mouse spiders after autumn rain, or a banjo frog found floating in the backyard pool (is it a cane toad?). While most of what we see is fairly predictable, sometimes a creature raises the pulse a little.

This happened recently when a resident from Lake Wyangan was startled to find a big spider wandering on the patio. This proved to be a whistling spider – surely one of most spectacular spiders of inland NSW.

Whistling spiders are so-called because of the ability to make loud hissing sounds. They are some of Australia's biggest spiders – a leg span up to 16cm across. Living in silken burrows awaiting passing prey – insects, reptiles to small birds – it's a secretive life, and are rarely seen.

During my time at Griffith, I can only recall one other being brought into the office. A few years younger than I am now, I was curious to see if the lethargic creature at the bottom of the glass jar could be induced into making the whistling sound. So as I carefully prodding the slumbering spider, imagine my surprise when, rather than making any noises, it immediately made a clean leap out of the jar to scamper across the office. It was a coronary inducing experience I have not flirted with since - better to follow a twist on the old cliché, of letting sleeping spiders lie !



Freedom ! A whistling spider on release. Given the camouflaged colours and the normally burrow-dwelling habits, these formidable creatures are rarely encountered.

I think the latest spider was a male, judging the relatively small size and delicate build. Like mouse spiders, the male is required to do the legwork in autumn to seek a mate, and hence was captured as it wandered near houses. He was released back into likely-looking habitat near Lake Wyangan – away from any new housing developments.

David Egan

Further reading:

Walker, K.L, Yen, A.L. & Milledge, G.A. (2003). Spiders and scorpions commonly found in Victoria. Royal Society of Victoria, Melbourne.

Remember to submit any interesting observations you have

Sue, Enid, Colin and I agreed to join the bush walk in Cocoparra National Park, but instead of going on the 8 – 9 km. Duncans Hill Circuit we would spend our morning wandering around the flats near the Picnic Area, and so met up with Eric, Rowena, Narelle and Denise at Yenda Post Office as planned. After a very dusty drive to the picnic area, Colin then decided he was fit enough to do the walk.

On the drive in through the flats I was concerned at how desolate the area looked, with lots of dead acacias and pines. However we were greeted by Grey Butcherbirds, Australian Magpies and Striped Honeyeaters in full song, so I decided all was not lost!

After the other five had gone Sue, Enid and I had a morning tea break and a look at the map Sue had of the area. Sue suggested we walk along the track which leads to Ironbark Creek. We could see lots of little birds in the trees and I was delighted to get a really good sighting of a family of Varied Sittella hopping along the branches and pecking at the bark of a large Eucalypt tree not far from the track. There were Jacky Winters, Red-capped Robins. Southern Whiteface, Yellow-rumped Thornbills all feeding.



Ironbark – Melanie Brougham

We could see a dam bank in the distance so wandered in that direction. Sadly no water in the dam which had at some time been fenced off with star posts and wire. There were parrots in the trees Mallee Ringnecks, Red-rumped and we saw quite a few Mulgas. On the way back to the track we bypassed a rocky area (disturbed a couple of rabbits, which scuttled away with great speed). Enid pointed out some Acacia decora and Fern-leaf Hopbush growing nearby, which was pleasing to see.

As we wandered along, Sue and I noticed some ant holes, occupied by medium sized brown ants . These holes were surrounded by what appeared to be the seeds from the very prickly Buckbush plants which were growing everywhere. Some of the surrounds were almost as big as dinner plates and quite flat! A little further along the track we were thrilled to see a male Hooded Robin sitting on a stump and nearby, a female. So that was a great addition to the bird list. Even better, a little further on, an immature male. So that was exciting!

By this time we had reached a crossing over a creek so we decided it was time to turn back. Here we noticed regrowth on some Deane's Wattle. On our way back Enid pointed out several Quandong Trees with their light green foliage, a few very healthy Kurrajongs, and some Rosewood. Looking back across the flats we could see some Wilgas, all trimmed around the bottom branches. Maybe goats had been feeding?



The walking group had not yet returned so we ate our lunch and Sue and I decided to walk up to the Pines Picnic area – Enid preferred to relax and read the Sunday paper . As we were starting out the shadow of a large bird crossed the track and on looking up we saw two beautiful Wedgetail Eagles soaring above.

The difference in the foliage on the pines and eucalypts at the bottom of the next hill was noticeable. I presumed there must have been more moisture there. By this time it was after two o'clock, so we started back and met up with the walking group who were returning along the track to Ironbark Creek. A most enjoyable few hours, and we did get quite a good bird list.

Bird List

Common Bronzewing	Grey Butcherbird	Pied Butcherbird	White-winged Chough
Peaceful Dove	Little Eagle	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Emu (lots of scats)
Restless Flycatcher	Galah	Jacky Winter	Striped Honeyeater
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Kookaburra	Australian Magpie	Magpie-lark
White-eared Honeyeater	Mistletoebird	Crested Pigeon	Yellow-throated Miner
White-plumed Honeyeater	Australian Raven	Little Raven	Red-capped Robin
Eastern Yellow Robin	Hooded Robin	Varied Sittella	Grey Shrike-thrush
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Yellow Thornbill	Weebill	Brown Treecreeper
Chestnut -rumped Thornbill	Willy Wagtail	Dusky Woodswallow	Southern Whiteface
Mallee Ringneck	Blue Bonnet	Mulga Parrot	Red-rumped Parrot.

June Sell

Woolshed Flat – Duncans Hill Circuit

Sunday April 19

We congregated at Yenda Post Office at 8.30 a.m., eight of us, and headed out. The drive out was dusty (good clean dust), arrived at Woolshed Flat Picnic Area about 9.30 a.m., shook the dust off, had a yap about this and that, and got ready for the walk. The original plan was for Sue, Enid, June and myself to stay here and birdwatch. However that left Eric, Rowena, Narelle and Denise to do the walk – I couldn't see Eric left with three girls – so I decided to go along! (Silly me, with a rusty knee).

We did the circuit – estimated end time 12.30 p.m. We actually finished at 2.00 p.m.

We walked the ridges, bashed through tea-tree scrub and dead trees, got a few scratches, saw no wildlife or birds, and had a very enjoyable walk. Not much in the way of vegetation – some Micromyrtis, Calytrix, Urn Heath, Cranberry Heath, Geebung and a small patch of native grass (possibly Bottle Washers). Some

Dwyers Gum, the odd Ironbark, some Stringybark, an odd Currawang, the usual Cypress Pines and the ever present Tea – tree scrub.

As we neared the end of walk, Denise and Narelle were slowing down a bit, Eric and Rowena were still travelling well, and guess who was looking for somewhere to sit! Next time I go I will be sure to wear long sleeves – never too old to learn.

Col Sell



Walking through the bush Rowena Whiting



A tuft of grass Rowena Whiting

BIRD OF THE MONTH - AUSTRALIAN HOBBY



Photo from National Photograph Index of Australian Wildlife

Falco longipennis

This wonderful little raptor is a brilliant killing-machine and a joy to watch when it is displaying it's amazing ability to turn and dive with it's streamline body, sharp wings and swiftness. The movability somehow resembles the swift which can become dinner for the hungry Hobby.

The birds are throughout Australia and mostly prefer the open woodland but can adapt to the urban life easily if there are tall trees. They catch small birds, bats and large flying insects and have been observed taking a mouse from a kestrel in flight but are rarely seen of the ground.

The nest is high and often rented from a Raven, Magpie or other raptor, with a few personal modifications of grass and bark. 2-4 buff eggs with red spots and blotches are laid but mainly 3. Breeding is between October and November usually. The male feeds the nesting female in flight and the hatchlings stay close to home for 3-4 months then depart for nether regions with one tagged bird being found 900km from home. There is a degree of migration to New Guinea in Winter.

For the information of the uninformed, the Hobby's Latin name means "Long feathers" where it's wing feathers are longer than it's tail !!

Identification.. Male 300mm, female 340-350mm.

Sexes: similar..back and wings slate grey with black centre wing feathers.

Underparts: pale rufous-brown with dark stripes.

Head and sides of the face to below the eye: black.

Forehead, neck and chest: pale rufous.

Eyes: brown. Bill: grey, Legs: yellow.

Voice: shrill and repeated twitter, harsh and shrill alarm calls.

Other names: Little falcon, Black-faced hawk, Duck hawk

Sue Chittick-Dalton

A look into the past

The long gap in the geological record from the late Devonian 350 million years ago (mya) to the Tertiary period that began 66 mya does not mean nothing happened. Far from it. Over this period dramatic changes occurred in the nature of continents and in the development of flora and fauna.

The late Devonian saw us at the edge of a supercontinent Pangaea receiving the erosional deposits from mountains to our west – or to be correct, at the time they were northwards and close to the equator. Life on land was restricted to the margins of freshwater bodies and swamps, and the flora consisted mostly of algae and mosses. Club-mosses were gaining ascendancy but had not developed much stature – it is estimated that the tallest plants were less than a metre high.

In the next geological epoch, the Carboniferous, the supercontinent began to break up, to eventually form Laurasia (America, Europe and Asia) and Gondwana (South America, Africa, India, Madagascar, Antarctica and Australia). With the upheaval of the split, our region was uplifted and folded. In geology whatever gets lifted up begins to be eroded down again.

The climate in the first part of the Carboniferous for us was warm and humid, but we were moving southwards. Club-mosses came to prominence and they were over taken by the Horsetail flora. Both had developed secondary thickening enabling continuous growth for many years. However as the Australian part of Gondwana drifted down to 60- 70 ° South, the cooler conditions prevented the extreme growth of the tree-sized flora that grew densely in the swamps of the Northern Hemisphere and that gave rise to their coal reserves. Some of those ‘trees’ attained 40 metres in height.

By the end of the Carboniferous about 285 mya the climate deteriorated into an Ice Age. It is believed that at least half of Australia was covered by an icesheet much as Antarctica is today.

The Ice Age continued into the Permian era. Evidence of this is found in the Sydney Basin and around Lake Eppalock in Victoria. Our folded mountains were slowly being eroded away.

As the Permian progressed the climate improved. The ice melted and the sea level rose. Primitive Seed-ferns endured the cold period better than the Club-mosses and Horsetails and replaced them. Today there are only a few types of Club-mosses in Australia, all small herbaceous plants. No Horsetails are known naturally here and only a few species exist in the Northern Hemisphere.

The Permian era saw the appearance of the early forms of Gymnosperms. By the end of the era (245 mya) Gingkos and Conifers had broken the ties with fresh water bodies and began colonising the drier hillsides. Tree ferns took over the dominance of the swamps. (Ferns are still dependent on free water, at least as a surface film, for their male gametes have to swim to the females for fertilisation. This occurs in the gametophyte stage of the life cycle, where the gametophytes are small liverwort-like thalli, with the other stage, the sporophyte stage, being the fern plant as we usually recognise them.)

The next geological period, the Triassic (245-205 mya) was a period of steady warming starting as warm and wet and finishing as hot and dry. This is the period when insects had their hey-day. Dragonflies reached wingspans of over 60 cm! The following period, the Jurassic (208-144 mya) was also warm to hot but wet world wide. Conifers, Cycads, Ferns, Seed-ferns, Gingkos all flourished with the surviving Club-mosses and Horsetails continuing as herbaceous under storey in and near swamps. Land fauna took advantage of the stable luxuriant conditions – the Jurassic is the great age of the Dinosaurs.

All good things come to an end and the next period, the



Era millions of years ago	Period	Epoch
Cenozoic 65-present	Quaternary 1.8-present	Holocene 0.01-present
		Pleistocene 1.8-0.01
	Tertiary 65-1.8	Pliocene 5.3-1.8
		Miocene 23.8-5.3
		Oligocene 34-23.8
		Eocene 55-34
Palaeocene 65-55		
Mesozoic 248-65	Cretaceous 144-65	
	Jurassic 206-144	
	Triassic 248-206	
Palaeozoic 543-248	Permian 290-248	
	Carboniferous 354-290 <small>Mississippian and Pennsylvanian periods in N. America</small>	
	Devonian 417-354	
	Silurian 443-417	
	Ordovician 490-443	
	Cambrian 543-490	
Precambrian time before 543		



Horsetail



Fork-fern

Cretaceous, saw a general cooling with sea levels rising. Glaciation probably occurred on the higher mountains.

The trigger was probably the starting of the breakup of Gondwana. New Zealand had already departed from the edge of Antarctica. Most of Australia was covered by shallow seas until they retreated by Late Cretaceous. This retreat left large tracts of land bare and ready for recolonisation. The previous long period of stability had left the older flora in a genetically static condition. The newly evolved early flowering plants were genetically adaptable and quickly exploited the new niches. In like manner, mammals began to replace the dinosaurs in dominance, and birds took to the air.

So by the end of the Cretaceous (66 mya) everything began to change. The great coniferous forests of mainly Podocarps and Araucarias were destined to become isolated relicts. A purely Australian flora was about to take over.

Eric Whiting

AT THE LEETON MEETING

BILL DRAPER PRESENTED PHOTOS OF THE HIGH COUNTRY INCLUDING OUR CABRAMURRA TRIP IN JANUARY AND SOME OF HIS EARLIER TIMES UP THERE. HE ALSO SHOWED US SOME LOCAL ONES OF WEDGIES, GLOSSIES AND BROLGAS. WE ALL APPRECIATED AND ENJOYED LOOKING AT THEM -

DOT EURELL PARTICIPATED IN A BIODIVERSITY FIELD DAY AT TUCKERBIL. MATT HERRING WAS ONE OF THE PRESENTERS AND THIS PHOTO FROM DOT IS OF ONE OF THE BATS CAUGHT IN A HARP TRAP HE HAD SET UP THE PREVIOUS EVENING.



SHOW AND TELL CONTINUES TO BE WELL SUPPORTED AND PROMPTED SOME INTERESTING DISCUSSIONS ROY HAD BROUGHT ALONG - 'HIS FIRST COMPUTER, A LAPTOP!' SEE BLOW. WHILE HE WASN'T SURE ABOUT IT BEING RELEVANT TO NATURAL HISTORY, I THINK IT WOULD HAVE BEEN WELL USED FOR RECORDING OBSERVATIONS AND TO PRODUCE A NEWSLETTER!



DOT ALSO PRESENTED A LITTLE HISTORY OF THE EARLY DAYS OF ENTOMOLOGY

PHOTOS OF OUR MEJUM FOREST OUTING WERE ALSO ON DISPLAY.

Easter 2009 at Peery Lake – Paroo-Darling National Park

A suggestion by Neil and Johanna to visit Peery Lake in the Paroo-Darling National Park at Easter was originally met with a little hesitation until we were assured that the lake had been full in 2008 when Neil and Johanna visited it on their trip up the Kidman Way to Karumba. The rains in the Paroo catchment earlier last year had filled the lake and Neil assured us that there would be still plenty of water in it even after our long hot summer this year.

So despite the 600+km journey we decided that it was well worth checking out as everywhere else closer to home would have been dry and relatively birdless.

Nella and I set out on Good Friday morning early and Neil and Johanna, because of other commitments, could not leave until after lunch that day. We decided to go via Hillston and then across to Mossgiel on the Cobb Highway. In the dirt stretch after Hillston we got close views of a Black Falcon sitting on a fence post close to the road and further along, we came across a flock of woodswallows - White-browed, Masked and Black-faced. In the same spot and on the other side of the road were 40+ Banded Plover and further along we encountered another group of 20+.

The trip through Ivanhoe and Wilcannia didn't produce much except for a pair of Red-tailed Black Cockatoo on the southern side of Wilcannia – the only ones we encountered for the weekend.

We travelled north on the Wanaaring Road but all we saw apart from dust and a rough road were large numbers of Emu – some in groups of 20 or more.

Our campsite was at Mirriapa Tank on the White Cliffs Road. It is not possible to camp at Peery Lake itself so we made prior arrangements with the National Parks people at White Cliffs to camp at the tank.

It was an excellent spot close to the dam where lots of birds came in to drink. Around the dam were numbers of Chirruping Wedgebill and a group of Chestnut-crowned Babbler. Three wren species were also resident – White-winged, Splendid and Variegated. Neil and Johanna didn't arrive until mid-day Saturday having decided to make camp before dark near Ivanhoe – night driving is not recommended as there were many 'roos both dead and alive along the roads everywhere.

On Saturday after lunch, we went to Peery Lake 36km from our campsite and we were delighted to see the vast expanse of water with many birds on and around it. The lake is enormous and we could only appreciate about one quarter of it – the southern section is impossible to get to by vehicle and the only way is by boat or on foot.

Just below the car park where the water had receded – Neil thought it had dropped about 2 metres since last year – there were dozens of Orange Chats feeding at the water's edge.

Some of the water birds present were of interest as there were several Sharp-tailed Sandpipers in breeding plumage

as well as many Black-fronted Dotterel and big numbers of Red-capped Plovers. Caspian and Gull-billed Terns were roosting on the mudflats along with the usual ducks, swans and cormorants. A walk up the northern end of the lake was well worthwhile as it produced the largest gathering of Wood Duck I had ever seen in one place – there must have been hundreds of them on the lakeshore. As well, we also spotted White-winged Black Tern flying about – they were in full breeding plumage and looked spectacular flying over the water with a huge storm building up in the background. The storm would later haunt us on our trip home but on Saturday afternoon it moved east and missed us, save for the cooling winds it produced, on our walk back to the car park.

On Sunday, on a pre-breakfast bird walk to another waterhole close to the road we found 4 Blue-winged



Galahs at Mirriapa Tank



Nella, Max and Johanna would have been under water this time last year

Parrot coming in to drink and on the second trip to the lake Neil located 2 pairs of Bourke's Parrot feeding beside the road – a great find as they are pretty inconspicuous in that sort of country especially when the predominant parrot seen in the drier areas was the Blue Bonnet.

Monday, we packed up and planned to return across the northern section of the lake to Cobar. That's where Saturday's storm proved a bit of a challenge, as there were several road hazards, three to be precise, with water across the road. Neil succeeded where we lesser mortals would have chickened out and thanks to him we managed to navigate our way through – 3 of us on foot and he driving the vehicles – chivalry is not dead yet! – thanks Neil.

East of Tilpa we came across more wet roads where a storm had recently dropped its load, however, we had no further need to call on Neil to do a rescue drive! The shock to us was the huge numbers of feral goats all along the road and particularly as we got closer to Cobar on the Barrier Highway.

As it was getting late (4.30-ish) Nella and I decided the drive back home was well beyond common sense so we booked into a cabin in the Cobar Caravan Park – Neil and Johanna kept on and managed to get into Nericon around 8.30pm. They had to work on Tuesday and we didn't!

On Tuesday Nella and I had a leisurely trip back with several stops to check out the birds. About 40km south of Cobar, we stopped when we found yet another flock of woodswallows and this time we saw Grey-fronted Honeyeater and a male Chestnut Quail-Thrush in the bush beside the road – not to mention a newly born and abandoned goat under a bush! We had a pre-lunch trip through Round Hill Nature Reserve and managed to find a Shy Heathwren and Southern Scrub-Robin. If we had had more time we may have located some malleefowl that were seen on the road out of the reserve on the previous day by a group of birdos from Sydney.

In all we managed over 120 birds some of which were birds that most of us hadn't seen for a number of years – I added 20 birds to my year list. So despite the distance travelled, the trip was very rewarding and it was good to be back in country that had experienced some good rains this year.

Max O'Sullivan

Photos: Neil Palframan

View Across the Lakes – Nella & Johanna



Plenty of Red-capped Plovers



The 2009 Short Film Night is on Saturday June 20. That's less than 8 weeks away.

If you plan to have a film to show, please let Johanna know in advance. A quick email will do so she can plan.

If you need a little help with the film, get in touch with Johanna with plenty of time to allow her to do her own film as well as get organised.

You need to get your films to Johanna by Wednesday June 17. This allows time to get a decent program together without it being a rush on Saturday.

Johanna

Phone: 6963 4855 Email Johanna@griffithgateway.com

Macro Photography Course at Gluepot Reserve 24 -27 April 2009

Nella, Phillip and Penny from our club attended a Macro Photography workshop presented by Craig Ingram at the Birds Australia's Gluepot Reserve.

Gluepot is 64 km north of Waikerie, and boasts a low rainfall of 215mm per year. Furthermore very little rain had fallen on Gluepot in the past 12 months. The Reserve has no mains electricity and its water supply is from rain water collected and stored on site.

The shearing shed with authentic sheep aroma is used as the education centre. Craig covered the technical aspects of camera use such as aperture, ISO, shutter speed, lens selection, use of tripods and lighting. He then gave us the opportunity to practise our new knowledge using some of his equipment where applicable. Not only was Craig able to clearly explain the technical aspects of photography but was happy to demonstrate and help with practical aspects and answer questions clearly and precisely. This made for an enjoyable and informative workshop.

While we were there it rained!! This totalled 15mm and was welcome after such a long dry spell. The wet and windy conditions did limit the practical side of the course but it was an experience to see the Reserve in the wet. Even more importantly our tents remained upright and dry inside. However there was some anxious moments about whether rain would stop us getting out of the reserve as it is understood that Gluepot got its name because as the soils become wet they then become very gluey and slippery.

Gluepot Reserve is owned and administered by Birds Australia and run by volunteers. Our volunteer hosts, Richard and Frances Everett made us feel welcome and provided morning and afternoon teas as well as information about the area. Two French students were visiting to carry out research as well as other campers and volunteers.

Some of you might remember Kath Matthews, a former member of the MFN and now a resident of Adelaide. Kath also participated in the course and has asked to be remembered to those who know her.

In between the rain and the course we managed to find a few birds and to inspect the flora. Birds observed are listed below

Chestnut-crowned Babblers
Chestnut-rumped Thornbills
Crested Bellbird
Galah
Grey Butcherbird

White-browed Treecreepers
Mallee Ringnecks
Pallid Cuckoos
Red-capped Robins
Weebills

Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
Yellow-throated Miners

Nella Smith, Penny and Phillip Williams

Rain puddles at Gluepot - Penny



Saltbush macro photography by Phil



Gluepot Education Centre - Penny



Finch head colour affects sex of chicks

From the ABC's website contributed by Max O'Sullivan

By Science Online's Dani Cooper

Gouldian finches: the head colour of the males indirectly affects the sex of the offspring. (Dr Sarah Pryke)

Female finches from northern Australia are controlling the sex of their offspring, according to the head colour of their male counterpart.

The finding, published today in the journal *Science*, is one of the first to clearly show that birds are capable of biasing the sex of their offspring to overcome genetic weaknesses.



Lead author Dr Sarah Pryke, from the department of brain behaviour and evolution at Macquarie University in Sydney, admits the mechanism by which the birds do this is not yet known.

The endangered Gouldian finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*), which is found in the northern savannahs of Australia, can have either black or red heads.

Dr Pryke says some genetic incompatibility between the black and red-headed birds results in high mortality in the offspring when birds of different head colours mate.

With female offspring this mortality rate can be as much as 80 per cent higher than in a same-head colour pairing. Sons in a mixed pairing have a 40 per cent mortality rate.

Dr Pryke found that if the female mates with a finch of different head colour, she attempts to overcome this genetic incompatibility by over-producing sons - as much as four males to one female.

"This is the first time such a large effect has been shown," says Dr Pryke. "It is actually the female that is controlling the gender."

Changing colour

To reach this conclusion Pryke and colleague Simon Griffith took 100 red-headed and 100 black-headed female birds and mated them with a male of the same head colour and a male with the different head colour.

They found females in mixed pairs produced broods that were 82.1 per cent male, whereas females in matched pairs produced an unbiased sex ratio with 45.9 per cent males.

They then tested whether the females in mixed pairs were deliberately over-producing sons.

Female birds were tricked into thinking they were mating with an incompatible male.

The researchers did this by temporarily blackening the head colour of red males and mating them with red and black-headed females.

The black females paired to red males with blackened heads produced a sex ratio that was roughly equal.

By contrast red females paired with red males that had blackened heads over-produced sons at a ratio similar to a mixed pairing.

Wearing their genes

Dr Pryke says there is no chemical or genetic interaction between the parents at work.

"Gouldian finches wear their genes on their head so it is easy for a female to assess the genetic suitability of the male," she says.

"Change the colour of the male's head with dye and the sex ratio changes."

Through the study the researchers also found that females from mixed pairs produced fewer and smaller eggs.

Dr Pryke says the finding is important because up to 30 per cent of breeding pairs in the wild are mixed "perhaps because of constraints on preferred mate availability".

Professor Ben Sheldon, director of the University of Oxford's Edward Grey institute of field ornithology, says the results demonstrate "hitherto unsuspected degrees of control over reproductive investment by female birds".

"This work opens new possibilities in unravelling the mechanisms behind these striking behaviours, something which has up to now remained an unsolved mystery," he says.

S I G H T I N G S

Brolga [~45]	“Willow Park”, Koonadan	27/03/09	Peter Draper
Australian Bittern [pair]	“Willow Park”, Koonadan	31/03/09	Peter Draper
Alexandrine Parakeet (1f)	Griffith	04/04/09	Nella, Max
Neil had seen this bird the week before on the mini-twitch – definite escapee (not Neil - the bird!)			
Crested Bellbird [1]	Cocaparra National Park	04/04/09	Nella, Max
Hooded Robin [6]	Cocaparra National Park	04/04/09	Nella, Max
Eastern Rosella [pair]	Narrandera (in the town)	09/04/09	Betty Bradney
White-winged Swallow [3]	Koonadan	18/04/09	Max O’Sullivan
Birds flying into the bank at the sand quarry			
Brown Quail [10+]	Tuckerbil	18/04/09	Max O’Sullivan
White-fronted Chat [40+]	Tuckerbil	18/04/09	Max O’Sullivan
Dusky Woodswallow [10]	Barry Hehir’s property	18/04/09	Nella, Max
Brolga [60]	Fivebough Swamp	19/04/09	Max, Keith Hutton
Australian Shelduck [40+]	Fivebough Swamp	19/04/09	Max, Keith
Black Falcon [1]	Fivebough Swamp	19/04/09	Max, Keith
Black Kite [10+]	Yanco	19/04/09	Max O’Sullivan
Pied Currawong [1]	Five Mile Narrandera	19/04/09	Nella, Max
First sighting for this winter.			
Ground Cuckoo-Shrike [8]	Tuckerbil	30/04/09	Max O’Sullivan
Horsfield’s Bushlark [2]	Cantril Rd, Tuckerbil	30/04/09	Max O’Sullivan
Previously known as Singing Bushlark			
Brolga [20]	Fivebough Swamp	01/05/09	Max O’Sullivan
Glossy Black Cockatoo [6]	Bogalong Hills, Narrandera	01/05/09	Nella Smith
Major Mitchell Cockatoo [~50]	Scienic Hill, Griffith	02/05/09	Johanna Botman
Seen flying towards the golf course whilst Johanna was on a cross-country run.			
Golden Whistler [1 m]	Galore Hill	02/05/09	Nella, Penny & Max
Diamond Firetail [14]	Galore Hill feeding on the ground	02/05/09	Nella, Penny & Max
White-winged Chough [50+]	Galore Hill together in one huge flock	02/05/09	Nella, Penny & Max
Black-faced Woodswallow [6]	On the road to Boree Creek	02/05/09	Nella, Penny & Max
Glossy Black Cockatoo [2]	Bogalong Hills	02/05/09	Nella, Penny & Max
Brolga [35]	East of Fivebough in a paddock	03/05/09	Max O’Sullivan
Speckled Warbler [8]	Moss Dam, Binya SF	04/05/09	Max O’Sullivan
Superb Parrot [5]	Wattle Hill – flying over my house	05/05/09	Max O’Sullivan
First local sighting since February			
Glossy Black Cockatoo [pair]	Yarrabimbi, Colinroobie	13/04/09	Andrew Thompson
Glossy Black Cockatoo [pair]	Yarrabimbi, Colinroobie	28/04/09	Andrew Thompson
Hooded Robin	Woolshed Flat, Cocoparra NP	19/04/09	Enid, June & Sue
Speckled Warbler	Woolshed Flat, Cocoparra NP	19/04/09	Enid, June & Sue
Varied Sitella	Woolshed Flat, Cocoparra NP	19/04/09	Enid, June & Sue
Brown Treecreeper	Woolshed Flat, Cocoparra NP	19/04/09	Enid, June & Sue
Little Eagle	DPI, Murray Rd, Hanwood	02/04/09	Bill Moller
Grey-crowned Babbler	Griffith	14/04/09	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Bush Stone Curlew	Griffith	23/04/09	Johanna Botman
Banded Plover [14]	West Merribee	12/04/09	Sue Chittick-Dalton

An Inland Dotterel’s nest at Willandra National Park

On the 9 April I was lucky to discover an inland dotterel nest. This nesting would have been initiated by a fall of around 30mls of rain in mid-March (although this is not particularly evident in the photo!).

The dotterel behaviour went to script – well, the script as written in bird literature. As I approached, the little bird stood above the nest, made some hasty scratches to partially cover the eggs with soil, and skulked away in silence.

David Egan



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COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

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- 14 May Thursday** **Leeton Meeting** at 7:30pm in the Seminar Room 1, Block 34 at Department of Primary Industry. Yanco Ag Institute
Guest Speaker: Lee Baumgartner from Narrandera Fisheries will talk about native fish.
Enquiries: Jan Cameron 6953 2202
- 16 May Saturday** **Leeton Outing – Geology excursion around the Narrandera Hills**
Our leader will be Barry di Salvia
Meet at the Narrandera Tourist Centre at 9.00 am.
Bring morning tea and lunch.
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or Mobile 0428 890 537
- 24 May Sunday** **Bushwalk – Woolshed Bluff** (Cocoparras National Park),
Tough walk, steep climb - approx 8 km - some close scrub so cover arms and legs. Bring morning tea and lunch to carry. .
Meet at the Yenda Post Office at 8:30am.
Enquiries: Bill Moller 6960 1341
- 31 May Sunday** **Griffith Outing – Seed collection training –**
Meet at Willbriggie Rice Sheds at 9.00am,
Bring gloves and secateurs if you have them.
Don't forget morning tea and lunch.
Contact Bill Moller 02 69601311 or Mobile 0427102673
- 3 June Wednesday** **Copy for June newsletter is due**
- 11 June Thursday** **Leeton Meeting** at 7:30pm in the Seminar Room 1, Block 34 at Department of Primary Industry. Yanco Ag Institute
Guest Speaker: from Leeton Shire
- 14 June Sunday** **Outing – to be decided.**
Could be a fungi foray (if there is more heavy rain).
Bring any suggestions to the meeting.
- 17 June Wednesday** **Deadline for Short Films – Johanna needs to have it today**
Contact Johanna to arrange collection/delivery on 0418 625 503 or johanna@griffithgateway.com
- 20 June Saturday** **Short Film and Pasta (or maybe Curry) Night – at the Conference Room, DPI, Griffith.**
Don't forget to get your Short films organised, liaise with Johanna email Johanna@griffithgateway.com or phone 69 634855.
General contact, Bill Moller on 0427 102673,
bill.moller@dpi.nsw.gov.au
- 21 June Sunday** **Bushwalk – location to be decided.**
- 25 June Thursday** **Griffith Meeting - Meet at DPI Conference Room 7.30pm**
Guest Speaker TBA

Rankin Springs Birds of the Bush Festival to be held on 2-4 October (long w/e).
Comprising a Spring Fair and Market day. Art and Photography Exhibitions and Activities. Guided Bird Tours.