

TRIP REPORT
Victoria – The Mallee
17th – 24th March 2021



PARTICIPANTS: Juliet Ferguson & Jenny Hartman

TOUR LEADER: Scott Baker

This tour featured some of the major ‘mallee’ reserves of NW Victoria, Specifically Hattah-Kulkyne, Murray-Sunset and Wyperfeld National Parks. Report itself covers 20-23rd March [period in which I was involved].

Mallee ecosystem includes several vegetation communities extending through the arid zone of southern Australia. It is a rich and unique environment occupied by many specialised birds, mammals and reptiles.

We were fortunate to enjoy some good weather [warm, not oppressively hot]. Despite dry conditions, even by local standards, and having to navigate various park closures, this was a very enjoyable tour. We observed many of the mallee species and managed a few nice photos. We covered a lot of ground, much of it on foot but at a relaxed pace.

ITINERARY

[Mar 17] Arriving at Hattah –Kulkyne NP early morning we were immediately rewarded with large flock of **Regent Parrot** [c.60+ birds] roosting in trees and wheeling about. A nice start.

Spent morning working the *Triodia* [spinifex]/mallee woodland along the Nowingi and Konardin Tracks. This a well-known site for the endangered [and cryptic] **Mallee Emu-Wren**, which we heard but were unable to locate. They can be very difficult – never guaranteed. Some nice birding however, **Crested Bellbird**, **Blue-winged Parrot**, **Chestnut Quail-thrush** and **Gilbert's Whistler** recorded. Later, driving the nature circuit and Mournpall track added **White-browed & Chestnut-crowned Babblers**, **Hooded Robin**, **White-fronted Honeyeater**, **Apostlebird** and **Splendid Fairywren** [amongst others].

Both Lake Hattah and Mournpall were completely dry, and subsequently very few waterbirds were recorded. They can be productive when wet.

[Mar 18] Full day at the famous Pink Lakes [Murray-Sunset Nat Park]. These a series of [mostly dry] salt lakes, the pink colour a pigment produced by micro-algae. The impressive scenic value of lakes themselves and the high-quality surrounding mallee woodland provide some excellent photographic & birding opportunities. Soft, early morning light on many roosting parrots [**Eastern Bluebonnet**, **Aus. Ringneck** and **Mulga Parrot**] kept cameras busy. The highlight however was a nicely posed male **Chestnut Quail-thrush** we tracked down, allowing close approach and many photographs. There was also a fantastic close encounter with pair of low flying **Wedge-tailed Eagles**, directly overhead.

[Mar 19] From our accommodation at Patchewollock it was a short drive to the northern entrance of Wyperfeld Nat Park. Some excellent morning birding along Moonah track. This a native Cypress – Buloke woodland and site for the range restricted **White-browed Treecreeper**, of which we saw several. We also had nice views of the often shy **Southern Scrub-Robin** and a family of **Gilbert's Whistler**. Other birds recorded were various honeyeaters [**Striped**, **Singing**, **Spiny-cheeked** & **White-fronted**] and several **Regent Parrots**.

A small mob of 6 **Emu** on the Meridian Track was one of very few encounters we had with this species.

[Mar 20] Final day, exploring southern Wyperfeld Nat Park. Walking the Discovery Trail was slow [bird-wise] but a confiding pair of **Shy Heathwren**, yet another cryptic mallee specialist was a highlight. A distant **Redthroat** remained in the 'heard-only' category.

We concluded tour on the Malleefowl Walk. There were a surprising number of quality birds at this location included several Honeyeater species [**Brown-headed**, **White-eared**, **Yellow-plumed**, **Striped**, **Spiny-cheeked** & **White-fronted**] plus flock of **Varied Sittella** [black-capped form], both **Pardalotes** [**Striated** & '**Yellow-rumped**'], **Inland Thornbill**, **Hooded Robin** and the recently 'split' **Western Whistler**. All showing well and a great way to wrap things up.

Thank you, Juliet and Jenny, for being patient and adaptable and excellent company. It can be challenging birding in arid environments and facilities in remote areas are at times pretty basic. Jenny's contributions on the salad front [and the BBQ] were very much appreciated! Makes it easy with such great clients.



Australian Ringneck © SB



Rufous Whistler © SB



Yellow Thornbill © SB

BIRDLIST

Taxonomy follows IOC World Bird Names, version 11.1

Casuariidae

Emus, Cassowaries

Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae*

Surprisingly scarce. 6 birds observed Wyperfeld NP crossing Moonah track, another 2 on the Discovery Trail.

Anatidae

Ducks

Maned Duck *Chenonetta jubata*

Various farm dams.

Podargidae

Frogmouths

Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides*

3 birds roosting in garden of our motel in Rainbow.

Columbidae

Pigeons, Doves

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Mostly suburban birds

Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera*

Various sites.

Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*

Reasonably common throughout.

Charadriidae

Plovers

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*

Twice recorded.

Ardeidae**Hérons, Egrets****White-faced Heron** *Egretta novaehollandiae*

Single bird Wymlet Tank.

Accipitridae**Eagles, Hawks****Black-shouldered Kite** *Elanus axillaris*

Couple of birds in transit, roadsides.

Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*

Several birds, various sites with a memorable encounter with a roosting bird at Pink Lakes, early morning & later a pair circling low overhead.

Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrocephalus*

Single bird on Meridian track.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

2-3 birds on roadside west of Ouyen

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*

Single bird on the Hattah-Kulkyne entrance road.

Tytonidae**Barn Owls****Eastern Barn Owl** *Tyto javanica* (H)

Heard several times from accom at Patchewollock.

Alcedinidae**Kingfishers****Laughing Kookaburra** *Dacelo novaeguineae*

Rainbow township.

Falconidae**Falcons****Nankeen Kestrel** *Falco cenchroides*

Single birds, mostly roadsides.

Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis*

Twice observed with a roosting bird on Wyperfeld entrance road, which allowed for reasonable views.

Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*.

Several in transit.

Cacatuidae**Cockatoos****Galah** *Eolophus roseicapilla*

Common throughout

Long-billed Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris*

2-3 birds amongst very large flock of Little Corella in Rainbow township.

Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea*

Several sites with a flock c.500+ arriving late afternoon in the township of Rainbow.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*

Small number birds, various sites.

Psittaculidae**Parrots****Regent Parrot** *Polytelis anthopeplus*

Great to see in good number [c. 60 birds] in vicinity of Old Calder, Hattah NP. Some birds roosting allowed for nice views but kept distance. Also observed near Moonah track, Wyperfeld NP.

Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus*

Seen mostly at roadsides

Eastern Bluebonnet *Northiella haematogaster*

Quite common at Pink Lakes [Murray-Sunset NP], also Meridian track/Wymlet Tank.

Mulga Parrot *Psephotellus varius*

Several small flocks, both Pink Lakes and Moonah track [Wyperfeld NP]

Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans* ssp. *flaveolus*

'Yellow Rosella' observed near Lake Hattah, fairly reliable in this area.

Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius*

Common at Lake Albacutya.

Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius*

Recorded daily, most of the Mallee sites.

Blue-winged Parrot *Neophema chrysostoma*

Single bird overhead and calling at Nowingi track. Uncommon here.

Climacteridae**Treecreepers****White-browed Treecreeper** *Climacteris affinis*

5+ birds observed near Moonah track [Wyperfeld NP]. Restricted range species in Vic.

Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus* R

recorded Lake Albacutya and Wyperfeld Entrance rd.

Maluridae**Fairywrens****Splendid Fairywren** *Malurus splendens*

Observed at mallee sites – Hattah/Pink Lakes & Wyperfeld.

Mallee Emuwren *Stipiturus mallee* (H)

Heard only at Nowingi Track. Rare mallee endemic, proving elusive on day.

Meliphagidae**Honeyeaters****White-fronted Chat** *Epthianura albifrons*

Small flock [7 birds] on the Pink Lakes entrance rd.

Striped Honeyeater *Plectorhyncha lanceolata*

Various sites. Reasonably common at Nowingi [Hattah] & Moonah track [Wyperfeld]

New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*

Birds recorded in township of Rainbow.

White-eared Honeyeater *Nesoptilotis leucotis*

Several birds on the Discovery trail [Wyperfeld].

Brown-headed Honeyeater *Melithreptus brevirostris*

Small groups encountered, various sites.

White-fronted Honeyeater *Purnella albifrons*

We encountered birds on Lake Mournpall track [Hattah], also heard Moonah Track & Malleefowl walk [Wyperfeld]

Singing Honeyeater *Gavicalis virescens*

Various sites, daily.

Yellow-plumed Honeyeater *Ptilotula ornate*

Common mallee species

White-plumed Honeyeater *Ptilotula penicillata*

Birds recorded in township of Rainbow

Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*

Recorded in township of Rainbow.

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater *Acanthagenys rufogularis*

Fairly common throughout.

Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala*

Restricted to Red Gum sites – Lake Hattah and Lake Albacutya.

Yellow-throated Miner *Manorina flavigula*

Several birds in roadside mallee, Wymlet tank.

Pardalotidae**Pardalotes**

Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus* ssp. *xanthopygus* 'Yellow-rumped Pardalote' Recorded several mallee sites.

Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*

Daily, various sites. Those observed all ssp. *substriatus*.

Acanthizidae**Thornbills & Allies****Weebill** *Smicrornis brevirostris*

Common mallee species. Most days, various sites.

Shy Heathwren *Hylacola cauta*

Memorable encounter with pair of birds on the Discovery trail [Wyperfeld] Birds approached closely, and many photographs taken. Also recorded single bird at the Patchewollock State Forest.

Redthroat *Pyrrholaemus brunneus* (H)

Heard only on Discovery trail [Wyperfeld]

Inland Thornbill *Acanthiza apicalis*

Seen most days, various mallee sites.

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza uropygialis*

Fairly common throughout, various sites.

Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*

Seen in mixed flock on Mournpall track, Hattah NP.

Yellow Thornbill *Acanthiza nana*

Small groups, several mallee woodland sites.

Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis*

Daily. Reasonably common Hattah/Murray-Sunset & Wyperfeld.

Pomatostomidae**Babblers****White-browed Babbler** *Pomatostomus superciliosus*

Recorded daily, various sites.

Chestnut-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus ruficeps*

Small flock on Mournpall track, near Lake Hattah.

Cinclosomatidae**Quailthrush****Chestnut Quail-thrush** *Cinclosoma castanotum*

Briefly observed at Nowingi[Hattah] however we had excellent views of male perched & calling, near Pink Lakes.

Artamidae**Butcherbirds & Allies****White-breasted Woodswallow** *Artamus leucorhynchus*

7+ birds in township of Rainbow incl. fresh juvs. so perhaps breeding locally

White-browed Woodswallow *Artamus superciliosus*

Small flock at Wymlet tank only record.

Black-faced Woodswallow *Artamus cinereus*

Group of 5 birds on Pink Lakes entrance rd.

Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*

Common throughout

Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus*

Daily, various sites.

Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*

Several on roadside. Bird observed Lake Albacutya

Grey Currawong *Strepera versicolor* ssp. *melanoptera* 'Black-winged' ssp., Single birds recorded Hattah & Wyperfeld NP.

Campephagidae**Cuckooshrikes****Black-faced Cuckooshrike** *Coracina novaehollandiae*

Single bird Lake Albacutya.

Neosittidae**Sittellas****Varied Sittella** *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*

6-7 birds ssp. *pileata* 'Black-capped Sittella' observed on Malleefowl track, south Wyperfeld.

Oreoicidae**Bellbirds****Crested Bellbird** *Oreoica gutturalis*

1 bird observed on Konardin track [Hattah], others 'heard only'.

Pachycephalidae**Whistlers & Shrikethrushes****Gilbert's Whistler** *Pachycephala inornata*

2 birds on Konardin track[Hattah] and family group [adult m & f plus juv. m] on Moonah track [Wyperfeld].

Western Whistler *Pachycephala fuliginosa*

Recent taxonomic revision of this taxa, previously considered a subspecies of Aus. Golden Whistler. 2 distinctive buff-bellied female-types on Malleefowl walk [Wyperfeld].

Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*

Nice adult male photographed near Moonah track[Wyperfeld].

Grey Shrikethrush *Colluricincla harmonica*

Daily, various sites.

Rhipiduridae**Fantails****Willie Wagtail** *Rhipidura leucophrys*

Most sites.

Monarchidae**Monarchs****Magpie-lark** *Grallina cyanoleuca*

Recorded in township of Rainbow.

Corvidae**Crows, Ravens****Little Raven** *Corvus mellori*

2 birds at Pink Lakes [Murray-Sunset].

Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*

Daily, the common corvid up this way.

Corcoracidae**Mudnesters**

White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphos*

Several groups [40+ birds] at Lake Albacutya, also recorded Hattah NP.

Apostlebird *Stuthidae cinerea*

Group of birds near ranger station, Hattah NP.

Petroicidae**Robins**

Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*.

Nice views, both m & f, also juv. birds at both Hattah and Malleefowl walk, Wyperfeld.

Southern Scrub Robin *Drymodes brunneopygia*.

Pair of birds showing well at Moonah track, also Discovery Trail [Wyperfeld NP]

Jacky Winter *Microeca fascinans*.

Several sites, both Pink Lakes & Wyperfeld NP.

Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*.

Juv. bird on Mournpall track [Hattah] appeared to be this species.

Hirundinidae**Swallows, Martins**

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*.

Several birds recorded in township of Rainbow.

Tree Martin *Petrochelidon nigricans*.

Recorded both Pink Lakes and Wyperfeld NP.

Sturnidae**Starlings**

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*.

Various sites in transit, also recorded Pink Lakes [Murray-Sunset]

Passeridae**Sparrows**

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*.

Recorded at service station in Ouyen.

Motacillidae**Pipits**

Australian Pipit *Anthus australis*.

Several birds flushed from grassland, northern Wyperfeld.