



photo by Jennifer Hum

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Map of the Shoalhaven

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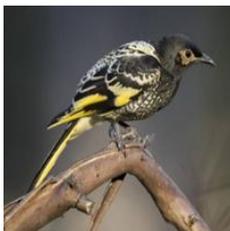
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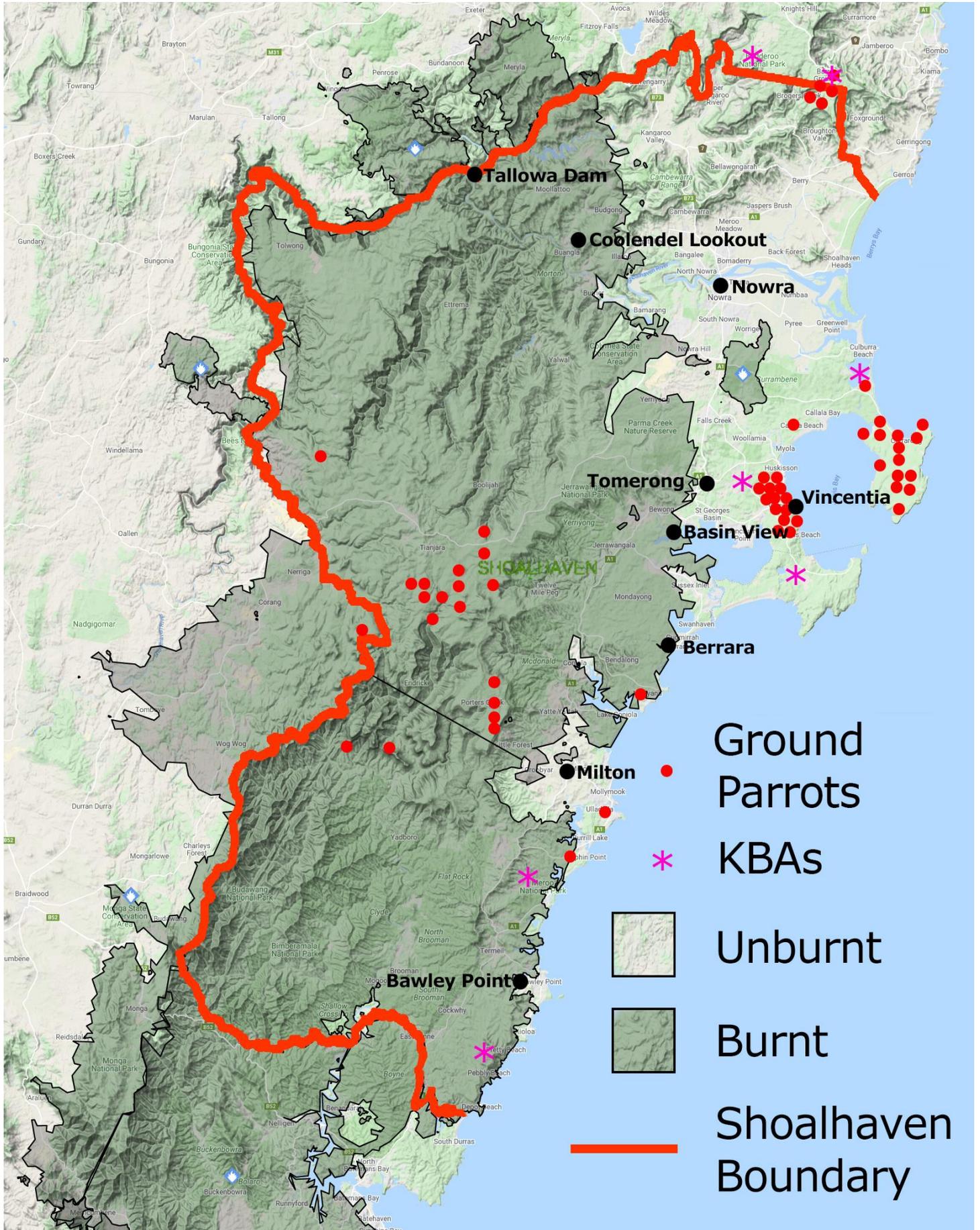
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Cover Photo:

Jennifer Hum captured this image of a Rainbow Lorikeet that died in the fires and washed up on Berrara Beach.

Map of the Shoalhaven Fires (2019/20)

Shows burnt areas, Ground Parrot distribution, KBAs and locations mentioned in "Reports from the Field" (page 11)



The race to save birds and other wildlife in the Shoalhaven and beyond

— by Rob Dunn, BirdLife Shoalhaven President

BirdLife Shoalhaven would like to send its sympathy and best wishes to all of those who have been impacted by the terrible bushfires. We have all been affected on a personal level, many much, much worse than others.

Beyond the human tragedy, our birds, other wildlife and the habitat on which they rely have been decimated.



Photo by Carla Jackett

In mid-January Prof. Chris Dickman estimated that since September 2019, 800 million mammals, birds and reptiles had been lost across NSW and one billion nationally. With the time needed for habitat to recover with depletion in food, loss of shelter and predation from introduced cats and red foxes, these estimates can only go up.

On NSW RFS's Fires Near Me app, we all saw the fires increase in size, change in intensity and join up with other fires further south, evolving day by day. By Australia Day 313,000 hectares of the Shoalhaven had been burnt. That is 68% of the entire Shoalhaven, and represents around 90% of its national parks, state forests and crown land.

With our birds increasingly losing their escape routes, those that could move were turning up where they had never been seen before, or in much larger numbers. The observations from BirdLife Shoalhaven members (page 11) provide anecdotal evidence of this.



Yellow-tufted honeyeaters, Wonga Pigeons, Glossy Black-Cockatoos and Rufous Fantails have been seen in people's backyards for the first time.

Rock Warblers and Superb Lyrebirds and been seen and heard near wildlife water and feeding stations set up after the fires.

All of these species have lost major parts of their habitats. BirdLife Australia has reported a habitat loss of 34% for the Superb Lyrebird, and potentially more for the other species.

Much larger groups of more common species came to backyards over the holiday period. Everyone was talking about what they had seen. The Birds in Backyards program never seemed more vital!

A large community led movement immediately responded to the evolving wildlife tragedy. While animals were being rescued in burnt areas and rehabilitated where possible, within days volunteers had set up water and food stations in backyards, rural properties and forests across the Shoalhaven.

These now number in the hundreds and are being refreshed with water and food for wildlife, including providing the different food types needed for birds.

Birders are carrying out surveys at some of these stations and an increasing number of remote cameras have recorded Red-necked Wallabies, Wonga Pigeons, Lewin's Honeyeaters, Satin Bowerbirds and many other birds, mammals and reptiles - see images below.



Satin Bowerbirds



BirdLife Australia has just commenced a long-term research project to assess the impact of the bushfires on Australia's birds, which BLS will be part of. Also environmental organisations are coming together to combine their experience, resources and science to take a co-ordinated message to governments.



We all know that we will need to rebuild habitat for our wildlife. But where, how, when and for what species are all complex and vital questions, that need to be answered first. Bringing together Greening Australia's nursery and mass planting experience, Conservation Volunteer's "environmental army", WWF's global promotion, Bush Heritage Australia's and the national Landcare network's land management experience, and others, along with BirdLife Australia's science and bird conservation planning, is our best chance for action, while also driving a change of heart and action by our leaders.

Shoalhaven Council has brought the key groups together to better coordinate this response. This includes the water and food station volunteers, animal rescue, Shoalhaven Landcare, BirdLife Shoalhaven, Southern Local Land Services, NPWS, DPI and University of Wollongong.

Working out the best way forward is not so simple at a national level and for the long-term. It will need to involve multiple organisations, be informed by science, and be adequately funded. That takes time, but, as covered in the message from Paul Sullivan, BirdLife Australia CEO on page 6, this has already started.

I am writing this during a lull between major bushfires in the Shoalhaven. We can only hope this continues as we work together to take action that will help habitat recover and birds and other wildlife survive into the future. The race is on!



Go to <https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/> for info on surveys, and to help us understand the impact of these fires.

If you want to contribute go to birdlife.org.au/current-appeal

BA's response to the bushfire crisis

– by Paul Sullivan, BirdLife CEO, 16 January 2019

BirdLife Australia has mobilised an emergency response to Australia's bushfire crisis within the last week, putting together a strategy to:

- map and assess the impacts of fires on vulnerable bird species and develop plans to assess burned and unburned sites, when it is safe to do so;
- engage the birding community to collect information (e.g. locating displaced birds) using our Birddata app;
- develop species action plans and review species listing status;
- talk to our supporters about how they can help;
- prioritise and mobilise resources to identify and deliver recovery actions (such as nest boxes, translocations, captive breeding, purchase of key habitat etc); and
- implement longer-term recovery projects, including those identified in our Woodland Birds and Mallee Birds Conservation Action Plans; for example to inform revegetation work to ensure it supports threatened birds and provide refuges for birds impacted by fire.

An urgent priority is to coordinate the bird conservation response to the bushfire crisis with all governments, land managers, zoos, experts, civil society groups, traditional owners and indigenous group representatives, and other key stakeholders. BirdLife will be seeking to recruit a new Bushfire Recovery Coordinator to focus on this key work. Our role will be to listen, support, guide and empower people to take action. And to identify where BirdLife will need to take a leadership role to prevent extinctions.

There is a huge outpouring of desire from our supporters to help with bushfire recovery for threatened birds, including donations to our emergency appeal.

The donation response has been terrific and will help co-fund recovery actions. If you would like to contribute go to <https://birdlife.org.au/current-appeal>.

This week the federal government has announced a \$50m Wildlife and Habitat Recovery Fund, and an expert advisory panel, as an initial response to the wildlife emergency. BirdLife has already requested \$2m in co-funding and proposals are also being shared with corporates and foundations.

Yesterday, Sam Vine, BirdLife's Head of Conservation, and I attended a summit of Environment Groups called by the federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley MP. The Minister and Threatened Species Commissioner committed to playing a leadership role which supports and leverages the resources and expertise of existing groups, like BirdLife, who are on the front line, and to measure impacts so we can learn and adapt innovative responses to the crisis.

Nature conservation groups also emphasised that billions of dollars will be needed to ensure the outcome is not to return to the pre-bushfire status quo, which is an extinction crisis, and that mechanisms in the Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act are used to protect remaining habitat which may be the last refuge for some threatened species.

Looking ahead, BirdLife will need to share rapid assessments and plans with the expert panel and work closely with NRMs in fire impacted areas to save species.

Greening Australia has been given \$5m to start revegetating the landscape. It will be important to align this initiative with the climate resilient bird-friendly habitat we need for threatened species. Conservation Volunteers Australia are also coordinating the recruitment and deployment of volunteers. And WWF is aiming to raise \$30 million through a global appeal with the power of its strong fundraising brand.

Let's hope this crisis brings new opportunities for governments and civil society to unite behind the science for a successful emergency response; and create the foundation to fund and deliver the landscape-scale collaborative programs Australia needs to recover species and restore nature.



Drought, threatened species decline and now bushfires

- by Chris Grounds, BLS Conservation Officer

Photographs - Chris Grounds & Jennifer Hum
There are some issues which have dominated over recent months in conservation thinking as it involves birds: the continuing Drought, Climate Change, Threatened Species status and the Bushfires. These are interrelated of course, multi-dimensional and multi-layered.

A quick check of a number of web-links in the Web Watch article will reflect the continuing serious concern and media coverage with the status of not only threatened species but also not-listed species, which remains a major feature of conservation considerations.



THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Most native bird species are losing their homes, even the ones you see every day

October 29, 2019 6:56am AEST

Across parts of Australia, vast areas of native vegetation have been cleared and replaced by our cities, farms and infrastructure. When native vegetation is removed, the habitat and resources that it provides for native wildlife are invariably lost.

Readers will recall that in the Conservation Officer Report in the BLS Autumn 2019 E-magazine attention was drawn to the Threatened Species Bird Index [TSBI] that is at the leading edge of the Threatened Species Index [TSI] and involves work between the TSI Hub and BirdLife Australia.

The initial report of the TSBI listed sixteen bird species but this was just the first stage of research.

Nine of these sixteen species occur in the Shoalhaven - more than 50% of the initial report list.

BLS is currently working on a definitive list of birds in the Shoalhaven. It is not as easy a task as some might think and has a bit of 'the length of a piece of string' about it. In its roughest dimension such a catalogue can involve up to 360 species, including subspecies on an historical timeline.

Consider now that BLS has a definitive list of Threatened Species for the Shoalhaven, further checked and revised just last year and available on our website. This shows 61 species.

In round terms then, **one in every six species of birds in the Shoalhaven has Threatened Species status.**

If the full catalogue of birds is further refined, the figure will be less than 360 and the ratio of threatened species will worsen not improve.



The Glossy Black Cockatoo is on both Commonwealth and state threatened species lists.

I would contend that this has multiple, considerable implications for the Shoalhaven. It does not support, for example, an "Unspoilt" tourism mantra.

It also casts a different light on how we might view, and on how Shoalhaven Council and its councillors might view, the native plants and vegetation and the habitats of the Shoalhaven in all their contexts.

It also brings into sharper focus some of the controversial vegetation and tree management attitudes and practices in the Shoalhaven, particularly in urban-residential areas.



A White-faced Heron nest in a yard tree in a residential yard adjoining a wetland

These considerations are all entrenched, longer term issues, which in ecological terms remain unresolved for bird biodiversity and sustainability.

The "Unthinkable" Bushfire

Now consider what has been described as the "unthinkable" and factor in the 2019-2020 summer bushfires to the biodiversity mix and ponder the implications for birdlife in the Shoalhaven.

The highest priority of care and concern is with the human impact: lives lost, children and partners saying goodbye, lives threatened, homes and property lost, family memories destroyed, trauma inflicted, basic services and access unavailable, firefighters, coordinators, various agency staff spent and worn and the almost incomprehensible task of recovery at every level.

The geographical extent of the fires across the country has been mind boggling, just as it has been in the Shoalhaven, where it is safe to say that the majority of the Shoalhaven, probably 80%, has been fire impacted though there was no respect for the boundary of our local government area.

Indeed, what started as the Currowan fire morphed to include the northern Eurobodalla and adjoining western and northern areas to Morton, Bungonia and Nerriga, resulting in the one huge amalgamated fire area of almost **a half a million hectares!**

This embraces the full suite of bird species and all the various habitats which feature in the Shoalhaven – coastal dunes, wetlands, coastal forests, hinterland forests, escarpment and plateau forest, rainforest pockets and heathlands.



St Georges Basin December 21, 2.30pm with worse to come

Fires have burnt 35% or 2.54 million ha of the National Parks and Reserves estate in NSW, with 50% of NSW heathlands fire impacted.

In the Shoalhaven the list includes Morton, Budderoo, Budawang, Murramarang, Meroo, Bimberamala, Conjola, and Jerrawangala National Parks and a collection of Nature Reserves.

On the plus side Jervis Bay, Seven Mile Beach, Comerong Island and Booderee National Parks and the KBA Nature Reserve site of Barren Grounds, all critical conservation areas, were not fire impacted though the Ulladulla Coastland KBA was impacted - see the map on page 3.

Significant portions of Shoalhaven Eastern Bristlebird and Eastern Ground Parrot heathland habitat in the northeast have survived. For example, the Eastern Ground Parrot - a Vulnerable threatened species and an iconic bird of the Shoalhaven - should have survived well in the untouched northeastern section but not so on the dissected plateau of the central Shoalhaven - see the map on page 3.



The implication of this is of course that areas not fire-affected have now taken on substantially enhanced importance as habitat and refugia. These are primarily in the east-northeast of the Shoalhaven. National Parks and Reserves and State Forests as well as the urban environments of these areas, e.g. St Georges Basin and Nowra, now take on an enhanced importance as habitat.

A constant refrain in recent conversations concerned anecdotal evidence of birds sheltering in backyards, in numbers much greater than is normal, and of previously unseen birds turning up in unusual areas.

The Nature Conservation Council has brought attention to the logging of koala habitat on the north coast and called for a moratorium to be imposed by the state government until there is a proper assessment of fire impact. The same fauna moratorium concept applies in the Shoalhaven to all surviving areas and for birds.

The overlay of seasonal timing on the bushfires is enormous given that it is the warm season, equinox to equinox, which features all of the many additional species and numbers of migratory birds, many of which are bush birds such as the Koel and the various Cuckoos. It is a prime time for birds in the Shoalhaven.



Koel, a migrant, sheltering in a backyard

We all have a specific interest and devotion to birds and I know from many personal contacts with me and as conservation officer, that we are worried and shocked by what must be a catastrophic impact of the bushfires on birds and their habitats.

One such impact would be the loss of trees with nesting hollows. Imagine how many of those trees will have been lost and the flow-on to species such as Glossy Black Cockatoos.

Another will be the loss of natural food from destruction of flowering in native plants. The Eucalypt Bangalays are flowering at the moment as are the Rough-barked Apples whilst the Scribbly Gums and Red Bloodwoods are due to flower soon. The Banksia serrata have been flowering. The suite of small banksias such as *B.ericifolia* would normally be due to flower in March and support the winter influx of honeyeaters.

A post-fire Birddata survey by BLS committee members Kim Touzel and Yolade Cozijn in the Wollamia Nature Reserve, which was saved from fire, found higher species numbers than previously surveyed and two species new to the site.



Bushfire respite under the backyard sprinkler

The nature and extent of the fires tells us that the impact must be huge. We have started to imagine what this impact is like though it is still too early to specify an exact overall picture, which we may never be able to fully assess, but it is possible to build reasonable impressions.

The bushfire debris on Berrara Beach, which was directly impacted by bushfire to the beach itself, bears testimony to the impact on birds and habitat. Berrara Beach is a known and established breeding habitat for both Pied Oystercatchers and Hooded Plovers.

Berrara ecologist Dr Jennifer Hum was stunned and distressed at the evidence she photographed on the beach after the fire burned through the adjacent Conjola National Park.

Here are some of her photographs but please be warned these are distressing images. One of these photos features on the cover of this edition.





Signs of a new circumstance for a new year

The extension of these thoughts is that a 'business as usual' approach is entirely unsatisfactory for planning and management. It will not serve conservation and sustainability criteria. The game was changing dramatically but has now changed even further and there must be an appropriate response and a plan developed.

The amplified risk to birdlife at this time, on top of the already established risk, begs this change.

Things just got a lot worse than they already were and the responsibility rests on all government levels and agencies. The non-government bodies such as our own BLA are off and running with a proactive response.

It is possible to say that there has been an enormous impact on and loss of habitat and corridors such is the contiguous extent of the bushfire.

The review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999, the inadequate and controversial staffing and structure imposed on the NPWS, and planning and management decisions in local government will all need to be rethought.

Shoalhaven Council has new challenges as well. These are initially being met with an evolving Bushfire Recovery program, which includes a specific project for fauna feeding and watering station committee.



Photo by Colin Talbot

I recently gave a presentation on Shoalhaven Bird Biodiversity for BLS to staff across a range of departments and I feel assured they are up to the task and sensitive to bird biodiversity.

Of course some key debates have been pushed around on the stove, and the Drought - Climate Change link, and the Murray Darling and urban-rural water supply, like so many major environmental-conservation issues, currently remain unresolved and will return for renewed attention.

We have just lived through the hottest and driest year on record - but it is really a case of join the dots!

Reports from the field

- from BirdLife Shoalhaven members

Carla Jackett, Bellawongara

Since mid-January, Colin Talbot and I have been maintaining 3 water and feed stations in areas impacted by the fires or nearby within Kangaroo Valley. At most of our stations along Tallowa Dam Road, including the dam picnic area, we wedged fruit and vegetable skewers through branches of living trees. Within 20 minutes we spotted two adult Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters foraging on the fruit. Butterflies and ants were also drawn to the food and possum scats appeared after a week. At one of the other stations we heard a Superb Lyrebird nearby in an area still intact but surrounded by burnt forest and little understory. When we head out to our stations, we always stop next to badly burnt areas to see what birds or other wildlife we might detect. At one burnt area it was a wonderful surprise to hear a Sacred Kingfisher in a patch of larger trees not killed, but with all the leaves scorched brown.



Photo of Carla by Colin Talbot

Kim Touzel, Tapitallee

In mid-January, I did a Birddata survey at the Coolendel lookout with views across the Shoalhaven River to the Budawang National Park. This area bore the full force of the Currowan fires with about 320,000 hectares lost so far. They are still burning weeks after they began.

To my surprise, near some water pools - the result of relieving rain over a few days - I found two Rock Warblers, three Scarlet Honeyeaters, Brown Thornbills, a Grey Fantail and a White-browed Scrubwren all amongst total devastation.

I was delighted to find the warblers and scarlets, but only through regular surveys across their range can we assess how these birds are really faring.



Photo by Kim Touzel

Rose & Mike Clear, Cudmirrah

While the major impact of the bushfires has obviously been on our forest birds, the birds on our beaches have also been affected with foreshore vegetation destroyed along hundreds of kilometres of our coastline. This picture on 19 December shows smoke from the Tianjara fires in Morton NP, looming in the distance over the dunes at Berrara Beach. Rose is looking for the Hooded Plover pair that we, along with other volunteers, had recorded over several weeks. Our pair, and no other Hoodies were seen after 18 December. By 4 January the Currowan fire had burned through Conjola NP and up to a fenced nesting area set up for Pied Oystercatchers at Berrara Creek. We had seen a Pied fledging the day before with the adults caring for their chick using the now incinerated vegetation as a refuge. It was a relief to see them again a week later now with the offspring in flight.



Photo of Rose by Mike Clear



Stan Brown, Basin View

On New Year's Eve gusting winds sent the Currowan fire across the Princes Highway into the tall eucalypt forests in the Corramy Regional State Park, stopping just a kilometre from my back fence. The RFS came back a couple of days later to back-burn.

After this a number of different birds came to the six water bowls in my garden, many panting and clearly in distress. Of these 11 were honeyeaters.

In the 20 years I have lived here, I had never seen the yellow-tufted and black-chinned honeyeaters in either the state park or my garden, and the scarlet and white-naped honeyeaters never in the garden.



Photo by Colin Talbot

Joe Nethery, Bayswood Estate, Vincentia

Every day during the week before Christmas I saw a large group of up to 18 Glossy Black-Cockatoo roosting in a couple of large dead gums on the edge of our housing estate. This occurred as the fires grew at Comberton, about 14 km away, with 2,500 hectares now destroyed.

The Glossies have only returned a couple of times in the last month. We used to see smaller groups of up to six roosting here, but this stopped over a year ago when their habitat was clear-felled to build 120 homes.

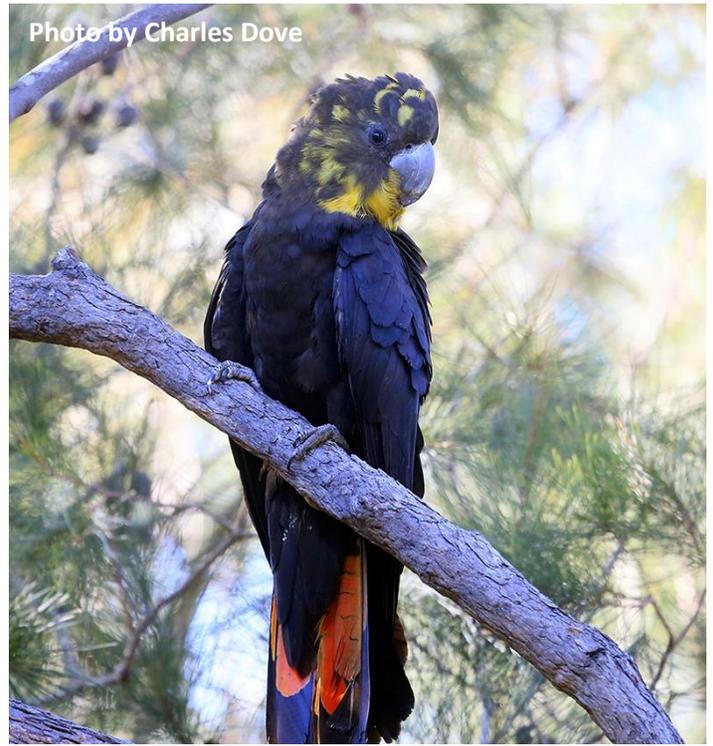


Photo by Charles Dove

Phil Craven, Tomerong

Last weekend near Tomerong I noticed at least 80 White-throated Needletails soaring above unburnt mixed eucalypt forest at treetop level for about 20 minutes before moving on. Since they are aerial feeders I expect the expansive severely burnt areas would not currently offer much in sustenance for this species.

The Bay and Basin's currently unburnt forest and heath areas may be preferred at this time by wide-ranging and nomadic birds, such as needletails and the rare parrots, like gang gangs and little lorikeets. Resources are still available here albeit drought-stressed ones.



Two Rainbow Lorikeets and a Little Lorikeet



Photo by Sue Tolley

Geoffrey Andrews, Milton

Over two months while the fires were raging, we had a constant stream of birds coming to our three bird baths, especially in the morning and evening.

I made a list of 41 birds, including Black-faced Monarchs, Wonga Pigeons and Rufous Fantails. Then on 15 and 16 January we had one inch of rain and over the following two days only eight birds from my list appeared again.

Slowly the others started returning but by no means all, and it will be interesting to see what occurs if we get the expected downpours in the next few days.



Photo by Charles Dove

Mike Jefferis, Ulladulla

Five weeks after the Bawley Point fire I went out with Marg Hamon and Maggie Mance from Milton-Ulladulla to survey one of their regular sites near Nuggan Point in Meroo National Park. The whole site had burned. There are more than a dozen large Spotted Gums, stumps burnt out but the rest of the tree intact, flat on the ground.

At the start of the survey two White-headed Pigeons flew over us, a bird not recorded before at this site. As we walked up the ridge, 19 minutes, no sightings, no sounds, nothing else. Welcome to 2020.

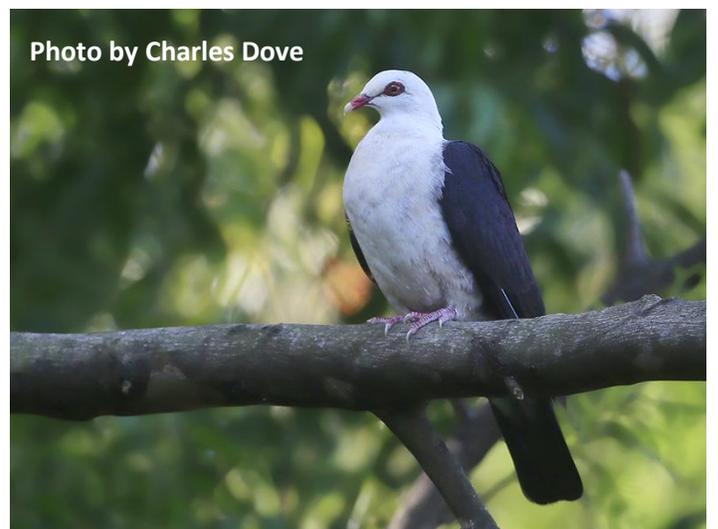


Photo by Charles Dove

How you can help birds in your own backyards after the fires

- by Dr Holly Parsons

We have all seen the utter devastation of the fires across huge areas of Australia and we all want to do something. The Birds in Backyards team has compiled a few ways to help birds in our own backyards in the immediate aftermath of these fires and also looking into the future.

1. Water

Providing water in your yard is an easy but important way to help out. You don't need to go out and buy a fancy bird bath. Instead, look at what you have around your home. Pot saucers, tubs, buckets, hanging pots, upside down bin lids, ceramic dishes, kids clam shell pools – all make great options - but not metal as it can heat up too much. Different depths and types of baths provide lots of options for different birds. Be sure to:

- Place bird baths in the shade around the garden at various heights - on the ground, on a pedestal, hanging from a tree
- Keep them close to shrubs and trees so birds can have an escape route
- Put rocks, a brick or a branch in the water, so anything that falls in can climb out
- Change the water daily or whenever it gets hot
- Keep cats indoors and if you have a dog, place the baths in an area where it cannot access



2. Supplementary food

If you live near where these fires have occurred, you can help by putting out some supplementary food for fleeing birds to help them in the immediate aftermath.

There can be issues with feeding birds that you should be aware of:

- Keep feeding stations impeccably clean. These birds will already have stressed immune systems and so will likely be particularly susceptible to disease. Clean the stations regularly by removing excess food, washing the station and scrubbing it with a wire brush
- Remove food after about an hour (less for nectar mixes as they spoil quickly)
- Provide a range of foods for different types of birds and on different feeding stations. Don't forget about the little insectivores, honeyeaters and finches. Try: mealworms or other invertebrates, fruit, nectar mixes, seed or chopped up dog food rolls.
- Avoid bread (it's just a filler that provides minimal nutrition), honey/water mixes, straight sunflower seeds (which are very fatty) and mince. Mince is nutritionally incomplete and sticks to beaks, sometimes causing bacterial infections.
- Ensure stations are out of reach of cats, dogs and other potential threats
- Place stations in a quiet space for shyer birds to use



Feeding shouldn't be a long-term solution. As habitat recovers and new plants establish, birds will be able to find food naturally and you can taper off on your feeding efforts.

3. Shade

Don't worry if birds are seeking shelter in your yard but not drinking, despite there being water available. Birds will open their beaks, drop and open their wings in order to cool down. Give them some space and allow them to rest.

If you can, observe them from a distance to make sure they are OK. Use a spray bottle to mist some vegetation to help create a cool patch. Most of us are under water restrictions so avoid sprinklers. Put up garden umbrellas to help create some extra shady spots.

4. Helping sick / injured birds

While most birds in the path of a fire perish, others can be injured by the flames, radiant heat or smoke inhalation, or they may be disoriented.



If you do find a bird that appears to be sick or injured:

- Handle the bird gently but firmly and wear gloves where ever possible or use a towel.
- Put the bird into a well-ventilated box and keep it dark and quiet while you get treatment. This reduces the stress and shock for the bird and is the best treatment you can give.
- Don't feed the bird or give it water. This could cause the bird to aspirate or delay any treatment it might need.
- Contact your local wildlife rescue group or vet - like [Wildlife Rescue South Coast](#). According to legislation, you must be a licensed wildlife carer in order to rehabilitate wildlife. This means, if you find a sick or injured bird, you must hand it over to a licensed wildlife rescue group or take it to a vet.



5. Monitor

In order to best understand the impacts of these fires on bird populations, we need people out there monitoring and recording what they see. **Never has it been more important to submit surveys.** Birds in Backyards has seasonal surveys that record what birds you have in your garden in a simple 20 minute count alongside some information about what your garden is like.

This summer we are specifically looking at whether gardens with bird baths have more birds visiting them than those without, but we expect to also see birds in areas that they usually don't visit due to the fires.

6. Plant

While we never want to discourage anyone from getting out in the garden, summer is not a great time for planting. With water restrictions and the extreme temperatures, it will be challenging to keep new plants alive in the short term.

Instead, use the next couple of months to research some suitable plants for your garden and map out the best locations for them.



See our Creating Space section for more planting advice: [How to make your garden a safe haven](#)

The Birds in Backyards Program sends it's love and sympathy to all of those impacted by these horrific fires. We thank you all for working to help getting communities and wildlife back on their feet again.

You can find more about the BirdLife Australia's Birds in Backyards program at <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/>

Editor's Note: Holly Parsons is BirdLife Australia's Urban Birds Program Manager

Presidential Musings

- by Rob Dunn

A review of another active year for BirdLife Shoalhaven, and its relevance in our future response to the fires.

Ahead of our AGM on February 10 it is timely to look back at another active year for BirdLife Shoalhaven, and to consider how it will be relevant for our response to the fires in 2020 and beyond.

Chris Grounds' Conservation Officer reports have detailed our wins and losses through the year. Much of this work has focussed on fighting to keep vital bird habitat in place with the continuing demands of urban and tourism expansion.

And this was before the fires! Inevitably we can now expect to see the fire crisis used as added justification for destruction of vegetation for developments, clearing in people's backyards, and 'improvements' to public spaces. This can only mean we can expect an increase in our advocacy and campaigning work.

In May we brought 130 people together in Culburra Beach to celebrate the presentation to Frances Bray of BirdLife Australia's Distinguished Services Award for her work with the Lake Wollumboola Protection Association Inc. over more than 25 years.



Rob Dunn and Frances Bray

Frances outlined the Association's success in fighting against the proposed development of a golf course and a major development at West Culburra. This decision against the West Culburra development was challenged by the developers last year, which meant yet more work to support the NSW Government's legal case.

At the hearing in Sydney on a day of catastrophic fire conditions, the developers chose to withdraw their application, deciding to submit an amended proposal, so the fight will continue into this year. Can we expect fire threat from the affected site to receive even greater prominence this time around?

The Shorebirds Recovery Program and its beach nesting birds program continues to be a major focus of a growing and committed group of volunteers under the direction of NPWS. An early breeding success this year was the fledging of two Pied Oystercatchers at Collingwood Beach, Vincentia just as the tourist season was starting. With the subsequent exodus of tourists due to the fires, it will be interesting to see if this has a positive impact on these threatened birds. Could this be a perverse positive outcome from the fires?



MUD Birders, Shoalhaven Birders and BLS have continued to organise bird walks with surveys taken of the birds seen. An increasing number of people have entered 20-minute 2-hectare surveys into BirdLife Australia's Birdata system from these walks, at sites in Jervis Bay KBA, rural properties and some of the Shoalhaven's best birding sites, like the Bangalee Reserve.

This will now need to be built upon and include the most fire affected areas, as soon as they are considered safe to visit. We need to capture this data through standardized, structured monitoring now and in the long-term to ensure that any actions impacting birds are underpinned by science. Members of MUD Birders are already doing this and I will be meeting with them soon to see how we can expand and co-ordinate this across the Shoalhaven.

We continue to promote the work of Shoalhaven's birding groups and projects, mentioned above. Last year we started promoting Shoalhaven Landcare group planting

days and their projects through our magazine. Providing support to these groups as they assess what has been lost will allow us to make a real contribution to restoring habitat on private land.



October saw the second Bird Haven Festival held in Shoalhaven Heads. The organisers, Perrie Croshaw and Cathy Law, did another amazing job arranging a wide range of events which attracted some 1,500 people.

They are currently developing ideas for the next Festival, when it will be timely to take stock on how far our birds have recovered and what still needs to be done.

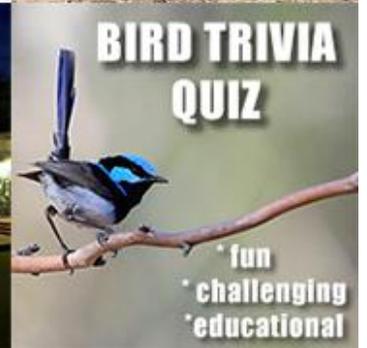


Our members and supporters have risen to over 700 in the year through events like the Festival and our Birds in Backyards talks to local community groups. Continuing this growth will be vital to getting more people playing their part in the recovery of birds after the fires.

So much has been done over the past year, but after the recent events, we need to reassess our priorities and develop BirdLife Shoalhaven's bird fire recovery program.

I look forward to hearing your ideas at our AGM on 10 February at the Nowra Bowling Club - details are in the next column.

The BirdLife Shoalhaven AGM



This year's AGM will be held at the Nowra Bowling Club (40 Junction St, Nowra) at 7pm on Monday 10th February.

Prior to the AGM there will be a birdwatching walk from 4pm until 6pm. We will meet at the start of Ben's Walk at the Nowra Showground at 4pm (sharp).



After the birdwatching we can have dinner at the Rinks Restaurant in the Nowra Bowling Club from 6pm until 7pm. The menu can be viewed at [Rinks Restaurant menu](#).

The AGM will begin at 7pm in a room next to the Rinks Restaurant in the Bowling Club. The meeting should only take about half an hour and will be followed by our famous and now traditional Bird Trivia Quiz. Like last year, this year's questions will be multiple choice, so the correct answers will be right there in front of you - so easy!

The trivia quiz should be run and won by 9pm which should give everyone plenty of time to get home at a reasonable hour.

Please let us know if you plan to attend the AGM by emailing our secretary prior to the AGM. It will be fine if you can only attend for the dinner, AGM and trivia, or just the AGM and trivia if you prefer.

Partners, friends and family are also most welcome to attend all activities!

Farewell Charles Dove

- by Brett Davis

Just in case you are thinking the worst, let me reassure you that **Charles is alive and well**, but he has said goodbye to the Shoalhaven and is now living closer to his family in Queensland.

Charles (pictured) was the subject for our interview in the Spring 2017 edition of our magazine, and over the years has supplied many of the images that grace these pages.

His images were used for our Walks Brochure and for our Birds of the Shoalhaven posters as well, and he posted weekly batches of bird photos (and other wildlife) to our Facebook page. These were also distributed via email, and I am sure that Charles will continue to send us his photos from his new home.

We wish him well with his new adventure, and although we will stay in touch, he will be missed by his friends in BirdLife Shoalhaven, the MUD Birders, and IBOC!

Here are some of his images!



Beautiful Firetail



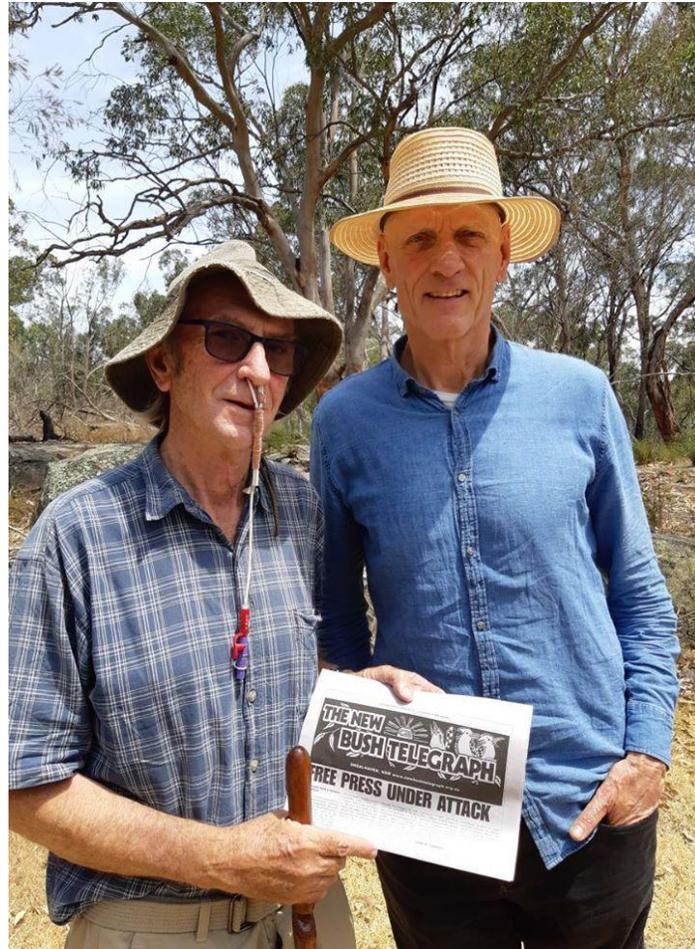
Black-shouldered Kite



2020 Australia Day Award for the Environment

- by Chris Grounds

Pat Thompson, the editor of the New Bush Telegraph, was awarded the 2020 Australia Day Award for Environment at a Shoalhaven Council function on January 23.



Pat, pictured above left with Peter Garrett (former politician and front man for Midnight Oil), and above right addressing the Shoalhaven City Council last year, as his many friends are aware, is critically ill in the cancer unit at R.P.A. hospital.

The award was accepted on his behalf and presented by Shoalhaven City Council Mayor, Amanda Findley.

Pat has made a life-long, unique contribution over five decades to the environment and to conservation, bringing his ethos for commitment, work and community engagement to the Shoalhaven, his chosen home over the last two decades.

His work as editor of the New Bush Telegraph quarterly newspaper has provided opportunities for a wide range of contributors, and for the broader community within the Shoalhaven to access information, views, alternative perspectives, discussions and debate related to environment.



Pat is always sensitive to readily accommodated material related to bird conservation issues such as Bherwerre Wetland and Mike Clear's recent article related to federal legislation.

It is likely that we have seen the last print edition of the New Bush Telegraph (see the image below) but plans are afoot to publish in a digital version. Recent editions are available on the web - at newbushtelegraph.org.au



Summer 2019 | Edition #126 | Circulation 4,000 copies

THE NEW BUSH TELEGRAPH

SHOALHAVEN, NSW www.newbushtelegraph.org.au

FREE PRESS UNDER ATTACK

BY STUART REES & PATRICK THOMPSON

At yet another extraordinary display of boorish, bullying and misogynistic behaviour by some Shoalhaven councillors, Council voted to no longer advertise in the New Bush Telegraph. The vote was taken in spite of Council being advised by the CEO, Mr Stephen Dunshea, that Council's advertising in the Bush Tele was "very much an operational thing". In other words, what Council chooses to advertise with is an administrative matter and not one that Council should decide.

The motion was moved by councillor Pales and seconded by Councillor Gullie. Councillor Pales made several false claims about the contents of the newspaper. He also stated that there were "many councillors in the room who have written to try to pressure their side of the story to the Bush Tele". Where as, the facts are that none of the councillors who supported the motion have ever written to the newspaper. Another charge, Councillor Pales leveled was: "I know there is one councillor in the room that spoke to the editor and asked the editor to remove the information that was put and the response was: 'You don't like it, sue me'". This alleged conversation simply never occurred. Adherence to such by some councillors are apparently overstated.

The Shoalhaven Independents have been when it comes to harassing the Bush Tele. In 2008 Councillor Watson threatened to sue us and demanded that the newspaper be withdrawn from publication. It was shortly before that years Council elections and in spite of the threat by Councillor Watson, we went ahead and distributed 42,000 copies of the newspaper. In the election that followed Councillor Watson lost the Mayoralty, which he had previously held.

What Councillor Pales says is that he will "not tolerate a paper that intimidates or bullies", although he fails to cite a single example of us doing so. He took particular exception to the last issue of the Bush Tele, where he accuses of launching personal attacks against Councillors Gullie, Proulx, Pales & Gosh. Interestingly, the only place where these councillors names occurred in this issue was in how they voted on the Bushy church issue. Perhaps, the offended councillors need to march into the column written by our regular satirist Captain. Although Councillor Gullie claims that the motion was "not about stifling debate", he went on to describe the newspaper as a "left-wing political rag". Indeed the substance of the arguments advanced by those supporting the ban on advertising was that newspaper is too one-sided and bias.

As far as the New Bush Telegraph is concerned, we view the Council ban, as an indication that we are doing our job in the democratic tradition. It is also a mistake for councillors to refer to newspapers helping to "lose" the newspaper. Council has never "funded" the Bush Tele. What Council does purchase approximately \$1500 per year of advertising from us, which is a minuscule amount by comparison with other council governance designed to curb such behaviour. The Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW is prescribed by the Local Government Act 1993. It provides that Council's must not engage in conduct that disrupts meetings, nor engage in conduct that would otherwise be inconsistent with the orderly conduct of meetings.

The Model Code also outlines specific obligations for councillors in regard to bullying behaviour towards the chair or any members of the public present during council meetings. However, it is apparent that the rules of governance can easily be ignored but according to the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Shelley Hancock, it is the Council, including those whose behaviour is under question, who are primarily responsible for deciding whether the actions of its members constitute a breach of the standards of behaviour set out in its code of conduct - as well as deciding what should happen if these standards are breached.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Speaking in defence of the Bush Tele, Professor Stuart Rees, referred to how abuses of power, suppression of free speech and indifference to democratic principles may be a world-wide trend but it boggles belief what Council was doing in debating this motion.

The answer to that question is a simple one. First since Amanda Findley was elected Mayor in 2016 it is a widely held view that she has faced hostility from certain councillors in exercising her duties. In this same boorishness, rudeness and bullying that characterised the behaviour of some councillors at this recent meeting. In spite of intimidation and official harassment, Amanda Findley continues to act with dignity and an impressive professionalism.

Some councillors, apparently inflamed by a sense of self-importance, attempt to disguise their bullying by using their supposed knowledge of

BUSH TELE TO GO EXCLUSIVELY ON-LINE

Due to the editor's health, for the foreseeable The Bush Tele will no longer come out as a printed edition, we will however continue our on-line presence. While the printed version does carry fairly high costs for typesetting and printing, it is the logistics of our wide distribution throughout the Shoalhaven that are the main reason for making the change to an online presence only. These manual deliveries are very time consuming. Please remember that our editors, contributors and distributors are all giving their time for free.

It should be noted that this decision has nothing to do with the accompanying story on council's advertising policies.

It is a disappointment that after 30 plus years the printed newspaper will no longer appear throughout the Shoalhaven. However, there are some advantages to an on-line presence in being able to get the stories out in real time rather than having to wait for the printed edition. In the past, important stories have sometimes been delayed too long in reaching our audience; often submission deadlines have been missed. In the future we hope that you on-line viewing at www.newbushtelegraph.org.au will keep you more up to date about what's happening in the Shoalhaven, as well as giving greater opportunity for interactive community involvement for all.

We would like to keep our offer of becoming a friend of the Bush Tele for an annual fee of \$20.00 also as well. Instead of posting the printed paper to our friends, we will email a link to new articles to you as soon as they go on-line, a great way of knowing when something new has been uploaded and a great way to support your local newspaper. You can become a friend of The Bush Tele on our website and pay with Paypal/Credit card or you can send a cheque made out to: Telegraph P/L, 102 a River Road, Sussex Inlet, NSW 2540.

STOP PRESS

Council voted to ban advertising in the New Bush Telegraph again at a meeting held on November 26, following the defeat of a resolution motion moved by Councillor Lewis and seconded by Councillor Duglio.

In front of a packed gallery of BushTele supporters, the two Greens councillors drew attention to the foolhardy nature of the ban. This followed a deputation to Council by editor Pat Thompson, in which he said, that the fact some councillors held such a strong dislike for the Bush Telegraph served only as proof that it must be doing its job.

In pursuing his vendetta against the newspaper, Councillor Pales did not answer criticism that he had misled council regarding the newspaper but instead focused on his belief that council should not advertise in newspapers that he did not like. In the mean time, Councillor Gosh seemed to be searching for a new meaning of the word 'democracy', which at that same time she voted again in favour of the ban.

Web Watch

- by Chris Grounds

In the three months preceding this edition the media has had a discernible focus on threatened species, extinction and declining habitats and it is a clear warning of the environmental threshold we inhabit. Could I recommend a read of the web sources dealing with this situation. This has been a precursor to the impact of the warm season bushfire catastrophe in the Shoalhaven and beyond. Just copy and then paste the web address into your browser.

Australia failing to protect birds from extinction

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/05/how-australia-is-failing-its-birds-headed-for-extinction>

If ever there were a country in a position to invest in protecting its precious wildlife, it was Australia. Yet the survival of dozens of species is at stake.



The last time Australia experienced a quarter of national negative economic growth, the Soviet Union still existed, Nirvana were on the cusp of releasing Nevermind, and the first serious attempt to analyse and catalogue our threatened birds – The Action Plan for Australian Birds – was about to be published.

Every decade in the 28 years since, lead author Prof Stephen Garnett has produced a further action plan for Australian birds. By the time of the 2010 action plan, the conservation status of 49 species of Australian bird had deteriorated since 1990.

That is, they had been recognised as taking the next step towards extinction.

In fact, a 2018 report by the National Threatened Species Hub, with which Garnett collaborates, indicated that some of the birds in this year's Bird of the Year poll, such as the Regent Honeyeater and the Orange-bellied Parrot, may not exist in the wild if the vote were to be run in 20 years' time.

A quarter of all Eucalypts facing extinction

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/dec/11/almost-a-quarter-of-eucalypt-trees-found-to-be-threatened-with-extinction>



The International Union for Conservation of Nature's "red list" found almost a quarter of eucalypt trees were threatened with extinction. A global assessment of all 826 known species of eucalypt trees – of which some 812 grow only in Australia – has found almost a quarter are threatened with extinction. The figures are revealed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's update of its "red list" of threatened species.

Eucalypts in their native range of Australia faced threats from human land use, especially agriculture and urbanization, the IUCN said. "As keystone species, eucalypts define the landscape of the entire Australian continent, and are culturally significant to its First Nations people," the IUCN said. Some 134 species of eucalypts had drops in numbers of at least 30% and the endangered Rose Mallee had declined by more than half.

100 species gone since colonization

<https://theconversation.com/scientists-re-counted-australias-extinct-species-and-the-result-is-devastating-127611>



It's important that the loss of Australian nature be quantified accurately. To date, putting an exact figure on the number of extinct species has been challenging.

But in the most comprehensive assessment of its kind, our research has confirmed that 100 endemic Australian species living in 1788 are now validly listed as extinct.

Alarmingly, this tally confirms that the number of extinct Australian species is much higher than previously thought.

Counts of extinct Australian species vary. The federal government's list of extinct plants and animals totals 92. However 20 of these are subspecies, five are now known to still exist in Australia and seven survive overseas – reducing the figure to 60.

We concluded that exactly 100 plant and animal species are validly listed as having become extinct in the 230 years since Europeans colonized Australia including 9 birds, such as the Paradise Parrot.

Native birds losing their homes

<https://theconversation.com/most-native-bird-species-are-losing-their-homes-even-the-ones-you-see-every-day-123007>



Most native bird species are losing their homes, even the ones you see every day. Across parts of Australia, vast areas of native vegetation have been cleared and replaced by our cities, farms and infrastructure. When native vegetation is removed, the habitat and resources that it provides for native wildlife are invariably lost.

Our environmental laws and most conservation efforts tend to focus on what this loss means for species that are threatened with extinction.

But what about the numerous other species also affected by habitat loss, that have not yet become rare enough to be listed as endangered?

These animals and plants - variously described as "common" or of "least concern" — are having their

habitat chipped away. This loss usually escapes our attention. These common species have intrinsic ecological value. But they also provide important opportunities for people to connect with nature - experiences that are under threat.

Urban sprawl killing native birds

<https://www.domain.com.au/news/australian-cities-urban-sprawl-is-killing-native-bird-species-homes-912289/>



A new measure called the "loss index" found more than 60 per cent of 262 native birds across NSW, Victoria and South Australia have each lost more than half of their original natural habitat and the vast majority of these species are not formally recognised as being threatened with extinction.

Urban sprawl is wiping out Australia's backyard-dwelling birds, say researchers, who have called for better protection for native vegetation as fires and natural disasters become more frequent.

Small amounts of native vegetation removal in cities for housing and infrastructure can have devastating impacts on a large number of Australia's most common bird populations including the rainbow bee-eater, double-barred finch and the pale-headed rosella.

University of Queensland professor of environmental management Dr Martine Maron, and a researcher of the new measure, said bigger thinking was needed on how the country was connected.

"Are there corridors through our cities that we can maintain as habitat, especially in response to extreme events?" Dr Maron said, adding that birds that did survive bushfires and drought would migrate to the cities out of necessity.

Waterbird numbers down 90%

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-19/drought-and-water-policy-to-blame-for-water-bird-decline/11715412?>

Waterbird population has fallen as much as 90 per cent in Australia's east, shows 37-year study.



The drought has decimated the population of waterbirds across eastern Australia, with researchers saying numbers have fallen by as much as 90 per cent in the last four decades. Aerial surveys have revealed a drastic decline in waterbird numbers since 1982 and the decline is linked to drought conditions. Poor water policy management is also partly to blame, according to one scientist.

When Sydney scientist Richard Kingsford and his team from the University of NSW began their research in the early 1980s, they clocked up to a million waterbirds in aerial surveys. "Now it's crashed to less than 100,000," Professor Kingsford said.

Rare conservation success

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/dec/10/previously-extinct-guam-rail-saved-in-rare-conservation-success-aoe>



The Guam Rail, a flightless bird typically about 30cm long, usually dull brown in colour and adorned with black and white stripes, has become a rare success story in the recent history of conservation.

Previously extinct in the wild, the bird has been saved by captive breeding programs and on Tuesday its status was updated on the IUCN red list of threatened species to critically endangered, along with nine others whose numbers have recently improved.

Lord Howe Island Woodhens

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/state-s-largest-conservation-act-rescues-endangered-island-bird-20200110-p53qiv.html?btis>



Conservation workers have released the last of captured Lord Howe Island Woodhens back to lowlands where they once roamed freely in what the Berejiklian government calls "the largest single conservation act" in NSW history. The final batch of 159 of the endangered flightless birds are being released on the island, following the successful eradication of rats and other invasive predators.

Lyrebirds and bushfires

<https://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2014/11/24/4111718.htm>



Australia's superb lyrebird clears litter and seedlings from the forest floor, reducing the likelihood and intensity of bushfires.

The birds' activity also preserves their preferred habitat of an open forest floor, says fire ecologist, Dr Steve Leonard of La Trobe University. "They're reducing fuel by their foraging," he says. "Our hypothesis is that they are protecting their favoured habitat - not necessarily consciously, but there's a feedback going on."

Weather radar tracks Magpie Geese

<https://theconversation.com/how-weather-radar-can-keep-tabs-on-the-elusive-magpie-geese-126278>



You're probably familiar with weather radar that shows bands of rain blowing in to ruin your plans for the day, or the ominous swirling pattern of a cyclone. But rain isn't the only thing that shows up on the radar screen. Anything moving through the sky will show up – like a large group of birds in flight.

Ecologists have begun to realise that weather radar data have huge potential to reveal the movements of flying animals all over the country. At the forefront of this research is the magpie goose, a waterbird prized by some - and detested by others.

Bird mummies

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/nov/13/experts-crack-mystery-ancient-egypt-sacred-bird-mummies>



An ancient Egyptian mystery has been solved, according to researchers, who say they have cracked the conundrum of where millions of mummified birds came from.

Pharaohs and members of the nobility were often mummified, but the practice was not reserved for humans. While some have been discovered alongside human burials, others - most notably the sacred ibis - were mummified as part of rituals designed to curry favour with the gods.

More than 4 million sacred ibis mummies have been found in the catacombs of Tuna el-Gebel and 1.75 million have been discovered in the ancient burial ground of Saqqara. The vast majority were votive offerings to the god Thoth, a practice that had its heyday between 450BC and 250BC. Bats, crocodiles, mice and mongooses are among the mummified animals that have been found.

Regent Honeyeater research

<https://www.southcoastregister.com.au/story/6481419/keys-to-survival-of-rarely-sighted-songbird-found-inside-its-dna/?cs=7>



Research into the genetic makeup of the critically endangered regent honeyeater has shown the animal's best chance at survival is through the protection of its rapidly disappearing habitat, a new study has found.

Ross Crates and George Olah from the Difficult Bird Research Group said while the species were common less than 60 years ago, they are now considered critically endangered with as few as 250 left in the wild.

Dr Crates said the rapid decline in numbers has been due to widespread loss of breeding habitat caused by land clearing. Despite the small number of the birds left in the wild, the research discovered little of the species' genetic diversity has been lost.

A man kills 420 Wedge-tailed Eagles

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/22/calls-for-man-who-killed-420-wedge-tailed-eagles-to-face-charges-under-wildlife-act#img-1>

John Auer admitted to killing 420 wedge-tailed eagles and pleaded guilty to the misuse of agricultural chemicals but there are calls for him to be charged under the wildlife act.



Conservation groups have called for a Victorian landowner to face charges under the Wildlife Act, after he admitted to his part in killing 420 wedge-tailed eagles over an 18-month period in the Bairnsdale magistrates court last week.

John Auer pleaded guilty to charges brought by the state Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions of misusing agricultural chemicals. He was fined \$25,000 and received a 12-month good behaviour bond. He was also given a 12-month community corrections order.

Auer and former farmhand Murray Silvester, a New Zealand national, used the insecticide Lannate and other chemicals to poison the eagles at Tubbut in the Snowy Mountains between October 2016 and April 2018.

Cat laws to save Fairy Terns?

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-12-15/new-cat-laws-could-save-mandurahs-fairy-terns/11799492>



Fairy terns are flocking to Western Australia's south-west coast as breeding season gets underway, but the sandy shores of Mandurah remain quiet after last year's disastrous summer. Nearly 50 fairy terns were killed by a cat during breeding season in Mandurah last year. A new local cat law will be finalised by council this week but other fairy tern colonies, including Bunbury, are now in the sights of predators

Almost 50 birds were killed by a cat in the city's tern sanctuary, with the animal returning over several nights to hunt adults and chicks. Murdoch University researcher and WA Fairy Tern Network convenor Claire Greenwell said locals had been devastated by the failure of the colony last year.

"I think people just didn't realise the impact a single cat could have on a population of nesting birds," she said. "Once we heard about the cat, people were coming down and spending all night vigils looking out for the terns." The council and contractors deployed multiple traps to try to capture the predator, but the feline proved too difficult to catch until it was too late.

Ms Greenwell said because the cat was de-sexed, it was either a pet or had been at some stage.

Turtle Doves plummet towards extinction

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/07/turtle-dove-flies-towards-extinction-numbers-halve-uk>



Barely 1,000 breeding pairs of turtle doves remain in the UK, a 98% decline since 1970. The turtle dove, Britain's most endangered bird, continues to plummet towards extinction, its numbers having halved over five years, according to the latest data.

The turtle dove 51% decline from 2013 to 2017 is the most drastic of a continuing slump for a quarter of farmland bird species. However, there are signs of recovery for some birds, which experts attribute to the success of wildlife-friendly agriculture funded by the government. (They can have ours back! - Ed).

Conservation Curiosities

- by Chris Grounds

Pied Oystercatcher Breeding

The Pied Oystercatcher is one of four shorebird species that are the focus of the NSW Saving Our Species Shorebird Recovery Program. The species has "Endangered" threatened species status in NSW and is a very well known species on the Shoalhaven coast.

The BLS Spring magazine reported that the 2019-2020 breeding inside Jervis Bay has been really interesting with nesting at two new sites, one at Moona Moona Creek at Huskisson and the other in Booderee National Park at Hole In The Wall.

The progress report is that both sites produced two chicks with each pair successfully fledging.



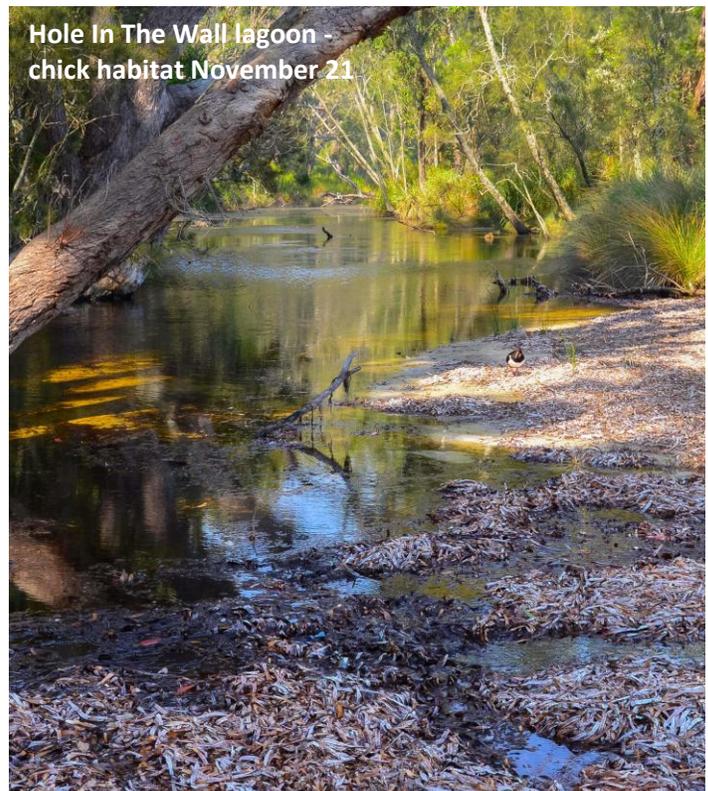
There was a lot of shared volunteer skepticism for the success of the Moona nest, eggs and chicks at a site crowded with people and dogs – it is "dog prohibited" - but it did succeed. Hole In The Wall is a site with high visitation rates and nesting was on a very small beach area that ironically had ADF supervision for hatching but it also succeeded.

A group of young defence force lads actually saw the hatching in Booderee and nicknamed the chicks Pingu and Pongu, which apparently, in the sheltered life I lead, are child cartoon characters. The colours are pretty close but the species a little wayward, though they are both birds.



Observation of both sites suggests that once the actual nest succeeded and hatching occurred it was the availability of fallen natural vegetation on the shoreline, which provided excellent cover for the young chicks and thus made a major contribution to their progress, particularly over the critical first three weeks.

The origin of the Moona pair is not known but the Booderee pair is known there from breeding at Greenpatch and Creswell, and traced back to Victoria.





Parental supervision at Moona Moona - October 12



December 4 - 17 days

Solum306

One of the most interesting aspects of the months long monitoring of the birds is the change in plumage of the chicks.

The photos below illustrate the change from days old chicks to fledglings and the emphasis on camouflage in the early weeks is apparent.

The photographic profile of the Booderee chicks will provide an indication of the interesting change in chicks, especially their plumage, as they progress through the six weeks to fledging.



December 11 - 24 days



November 21 - 4 day old chicks

Solum306



December 18 - 31 days



November 29 - 12 days

Solum306



Fledged juveniles - December 31

Solum306

Climate Change, Ocean Heatwaves, Birds & "The Blob"

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2020-01-16/blob-seabird-murre-die-off-climate-change-marine-heatwave/11867264?>

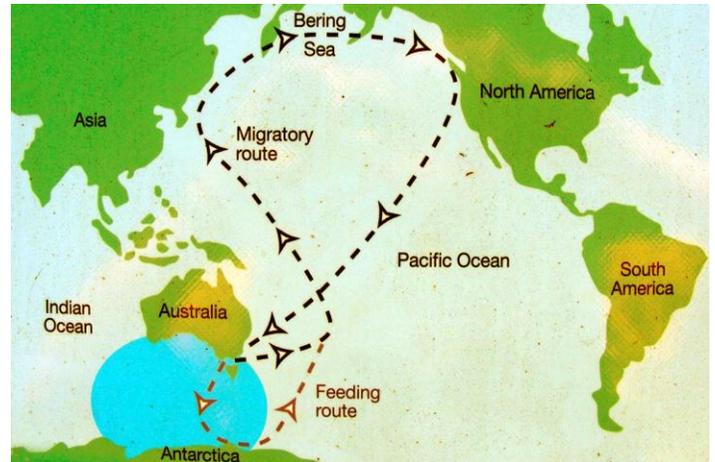


Shearwaters (or Mutton Birds) are remarkable migratory seabirds that are a feature of our Australian warm season and have featured in Aboriginal bush tucker harvesting for millennia.

We are familiar with them in the Shoalhaven, especially the Short-tailed Shearwater [*Ardena tenuirostris*] as numbers of birds, fatigued and unable to continue their migration southward for breeding, wash up on the shores of our beaches at the start of the warm season. This is a virtual seasonal clock.

The numbers of this seabird that wash up in a particular season does vary from a few to very many but numbers seem to have been quite low late 2019 but this does not necessarily tell of a successful season.

The species numbers in the millions and migrates each year from breeding grounds to the Antarctic to feed, then across the Pacific to areas near the Bering Sea.



These are usually the Short-tailed Shearwater but others such as the Fluttering Shearwater can be seen in particular years.

There has been a continuing story in October-November 2019 of considerable numbers, in the tens of thousands, not arriving at sites know for the Shearwaters, e.g. Griffiths Island near Warnambool in Victoria and this has begged the question of what would be the reason for this. These birds normally occur in hundreds of thousands. A lack of food sources in the Alaskan ocean habitat have been suspected.

It seems now that the answer is at hand and typically, it is more complex and frightening than might have been imagined and the science of ecology points to the reasons.

The ABC Science reporter, Nick Kalvert, [Jan.16] posted an article on this issue, which I believe is significant enough to warrant some special space in this magazine.



As Kalvery notes "Back in 2015–16, about 62,000 dead or dying common murrelets — a North Pacific seabird — washed ashore between Alaska and California. Food for the birds disappeared in the warmer conditions while competition increased, warm conditions have returned to waters off Alaska and the Bering Sea but it's too early to know whether Australia's mutton bird populations have crashed.

Only a fraction of the dead birds made it to shore, and the total number of deaths was estimated to be close to a million birds. Researchers think it was the largest seabird die-off in recorded history.

Compounding the deaths, at least 22 colonies completely failed to produce offspring over several breeding seasons.

Now a major study has concluded that the die-off was the result of a huge disruption to energy flow through food webs, precipitated by "the blob" — an unprecedented mass of warm, nutrient-poor water that emerged off the Pacific coast of the US from 2013.

As well as the huge seabird die-off, the researchers believe the marine heatwave caused the mass mortality of a suite of other fish, mammal and bird species during 2014–17.

Did Australia's mutton birds suffer the same fate?

Late last year, as only trickles of mutton birds showed up at their regular southern Australian roosting sites, ecologists feared the worst. For some reason, many had failed to make the annual migration from Alaska.

Birdwatcher Peter Barrand told the ABC at the time that we could be "looking at an extinction event".

Because seabirds have large natural population fluctuations year on year, it's too early to say the drop in mutton bird numbers last year was anything more than a blip, said John Arnould of Deakin University, who wasn't involved in this study.

"We'll have a better idea in March when we do the annual monitoring," Professor Arnould said.



Shearwaters nest in burrows, which feature on Lord Howe Island

BirdLife Shoalhaven Calendar for 2019 / 2020

Date	Event / Location / Group*	Details - meeting time and place, leaders etc.
Jan 31 (Fri)	Millards Creek	8am: corner of St Vincent St and Geoffrey St, Ulladulla. Leader: Chris Shinton 0423 352 718
Feb 10 (Mon)	BLS AGM	4pm - 6pm - birdwatching walk, meeting at the start of Ben's Walk at the Nowra Showground at 4pm (sharp). 6pm - 7pm - dinner at the Rinks Restaurant in the Nowra Bowling Club. 7pm - 8pm - AGM at the meeting room in the Nowra Bowling Club. 8pm - 9pm - Bird Trivia Quiz.
Feb 14t (Fri)	Fisherman's Paradise	9:00am at the Fisherman's Paradise Boat Ramp. Bob Rusk 4480-7012
Feb 16th (Sun)	Shoalhaven Heads	8:30am at carpark at end of River Rd. Stan Brown 0438 952 136.
Mar 13 (Fri)	Comerong Island	9:00am at the Comerong Island ferry wharf. Mike Jefferis 0412 480 371
Mar 27 (Fri)	Narawallee	8:15 at the end of Leo Drive, Narawallee. Geoff Andrews 4454 3580
Apr 10 (Fri)	Ulladulla Sports Ground	8 am: South end of Camden Street. Chris Shinton 0423 352 718
Apr 24 (Fri)	Burrill Lake and Bada Dam	8am: Lion's Park Burrill, by the toilet block. Bob Rusk 4480-7012

* BirdLife Shoalhaven (BLS) activities are shown in black

* Milton Ulladulla Birders (MUD) activities are shown in blue

* Shoalhaven Birders (SB) activities are shown in green

* Unless otherwise stated, most activities go for 2 to 3 hours.

* We recommend you bring morning tea to all morning outings!

BLS members can attend all activities. SB contact is Stan Brown 4443-4828 and 0438 952 136. MUD contacts are Marg Hamon 4457-1129 and Chris Shinton 4454-5584 or you can email mubirdclub@gmail.com.

Contributions - any bird photographs, articles, conservation issues, birding experiences, anecdotes or sightings that you would like to share with fellow members, please send to the editor (Brett Davis) at communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

General Disclaimer - the information in articles in this magazine is accepted in good faith and although the editor has endeavoured to verify the accuracy of all information, BirdLife Shoalhaven and BirdLife Australia accept no responsibility for any errors, inaccuracies or exaggerations in this magazine.

Errors - if you find any errors in this magazine, please inform the editor by emailing communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org

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Apologies to contributors and sources who have inadvertently not been acknowledged. Please let us know of our oversight and we will issue a formal apology in the next magazine.

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