

## BELMONT WETLANDS STATE PARK BIRD REPORT

### AROUND THE PARK IN JANUARY 2023

**MID-SUMMER REVIEW.** Cicadas and their piercing chorus have gone for now. The vacuum must be a relief to walkers and bike-riders on the Fernleigh Track, but for several weeks this assault on our senses may also be linked to lower detection rates of smaller, sedentary woodland species (finches, fairy-wrens, scrub-wrens, whipbirds) in the vicinity. Cicadas are easy prey for some woodland birds (butcherbird, kookaburra, dollarbird, raven, currawong). I've seen them pick away at big insects they've caught: reminds me of 4-year-olds pulling icing off a birthday cake.

A google search on cicadas<sup>1</sup> is interesting. They are grouped scientifically as a Superfamily, and there are more than 200 species in Australia. Here they live underground for 6-7 years and survive for only a few weeks after emerging. Their song is strongly dependent on air temperature (above 28°C<sup>2</sup>), and they can raise their body temperature by 10 degrees C simply by exposure to sunlight. Although some birds and animals eat them this not advisable for humans because cicada nymphs absorb mercury in the ground.

As David Attenborough delights in showing us on TV, animal interactions make interesting stories - in this case, native birds v. cicadas. Some scientists believe primitive birds evolved (220 million years ago) from small reptiles<sup>3</sup> living in Asian rainforests; they climbed trees and launched themselves at insects swarming well above ground. Flaps of skin developed between fore and hind limbs, enabling them to glide (as seen of the Flying Dragon *Draco volans* lizard<sup>4</sup> today). Fossil records show that some millions of years later they had developed primitive feathers<sup>5</sup>.

**OTHER NEWS:** the number and abundance of bird species observed around Belmont Wetlands State Park this summer are returning to levels recorded from 2015-2020. Numbers of woodland species (nectar-eaters such as wattlebirds, lorikeets, honeyeaters) are typically low by mid-summer because predominant native trees are yet to blossom.

This will soon change along the east coast of Australia<sup>6</sup>, setting in motion a sequence of events better known as the annual (south-eastern) honeyeater migration. Over the next few months several native flora (trees and shrubs) will bloom in this 549 ha Park, including: Broad-leaved Paperbark *Melaleuca quinquenervia*, Red Bloodwood *Corymbia gummifera*, Old Man Banksia *Banksia serrata*, Swamp Banksia *Banksia robur*, and Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia*.

Previous sightings of woodland birds in January/February (2015-2022) include: Eastern Whipbird, Grey Butcherbird, Bar-shouldered Dove, Grey Fantail, Laughing Kookaburra, Dollarbird, Silvereye, Red-browed Finch, Little Wattlebird, White-cheeked Honeyeater and Lewin's Honeyeater.

Numbers of the latter three common species, plus Rainbow Lorikeet will rise dramatically as flowering begins. Similarly, seed-eating species (Bar-shouldered Dove, Crested Pigeon,

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.australianenvironmentaleducation.com.au> Cicadas Chorus. The sound of summer in Australia. 7nov 2022.

<sup>2</sup> <https://farmhouseguide.com> facts-about-cicada-noise.

<sup>3</sup> Attenborough, D. David Attenborough's Flying Monsters. <https://iview.abc.net.au>. 2022

<sup>4</sup> Common flying lizard: *Draco volans*. <https://www.theanimalfacts.com/reptiles/>

<sup>5</sup> Attenborough, D. David Attenborough's Rise of Animals. Episode 1. <https://iview.abc.net.au> 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Low, T. Where song began. Penguin, 2014. Chapter 8: The Forest Makers.

Brush Bronzewing, Red-browed Finch, Brown Quail) will also increase – coinciding with abundant seed from new grasses, weeds and native shrubs along dirt tracks in autumn.

Ongoing survey counts of waterbirds at Belmont Lagoon show Black Swans are returning to pre-2020 tallies (80-120). This species was notably absent for many months this year. Perhaps conditions were less suitable for new growth of lake weed in early summer.

Other waterbirds previously seen on Belmont Lagoon or Cold Tea Creek at this time are yet to return in numbers (eg. egrets, pelicans, herons, cormorants, native ducks). This may be due to climatic factors affecting growth of fish-fry, crustaceans and molluscs, or major inland flooding opening up new areas for their breeding.

### PREVIOUS SHOREBIRD SIGHTINGS AT 9-MILE BEACH IN JANUARY

BWSP Rangers' and other recent sightings of the following species in mid-summer include:

- Black-winged Stilts (4; 10/1/20), (3; 20/1/20)
- Black-shouldered Kite (1; 20/1/20), (2; 20/1/20)
- Pied Oystercatcher (4, 6/2/22)
- Red-necked Avocet (6, 26/1/21)
- White-bellied Sea Eagle (2; 4/1/21), (1; 6/2/22)





Park management staff encourage visitors and locals to use the beach area in a conservation-minded manner (protective of vulnerable native species) in this area. This means not willingly disturbing the temporary resting areas or beach nesting territory of any shorebirds. Bird sightings and breaches should be reported to BWSP rangers on duty. This applies to dog-walkers along the beach or around 3<sup>rd</sup> Creek. Fines may be applied.

If you would like to know more, or to report your bird observations in north-east Lake Macquarie consider visiting or joining the Hunter Bird Observers Club<sup>7</sup> ([www.hboc.org.au](http://www.hboc.org.au)). Details of their monthly club meetings and activities are advertised online.

Local bird-watching events (eg. <https://www.lakemac.com.au/News-articles/Annual-bird-count-ready-to-take-flight-in-Lake-Mac>) are advertised on LMCC's website.

Bird-watching brochures, walking trails and related information can be found on BWSP's website (<https://www.belmontwetlands.com.au/>) or by visiting the Rangers office at 119 Kalaroo Road, Redhead 2291.

Queries? Contact BWSP Rangers or Grahame Feletti 0429 455 243, [gfeletti@hotmail.com](mailto:gfeletti@hotmail.com)

			
White-bellied Sea Eagle	Pied Oystercatcher	Red-necked Avocet Knudsen lithograph 1988	Black-winged Stilt

<sup>7</sup> Hunter Bird Observers Club meets every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month, except in January, at Shortland Wetlands Centre. Further details may be found via the website <https://www.hboc.org.au/>