

BELMONT WETLANDS STATE PARK BIRD REPORT

FEBRUARY 2023

This month at the Park (BWSP) has been unusual for birdwatching. Unusually quiet for late summer; slow onset of blossom in some canopy trees; and unusual sightings of some 'common' waterbird and wetland bird species. At times like this it is useful to reflect on the physical world we share with them, encroaching on their flyways and coastal habitats¹.

Regular observations of bird species in the same area and analyses of that data by habitat type (woodland, wetland or shore) can yield a basic profile² of its users. Bird identification guides enable observers to provide accurate and useful bird data, and this process of citizen science may yields results that can help experts to make projections and predictions on bird numbers, and the vulnerability of species by noting trends over time³.

As noted in the January bird report some species noted in February in previous years weren't seen this summer at all. This absence may be linked to intense east coast lows in this area, or even the bizarre weather patterns experienced nationally. La Ninas emerge off WA's NW coast and produce severe storms and inland flooding over wide areas of central Australia and NSW. These disaster areas attract large groups of birds – not just waterbirds⁴ but many woodland⁵ and raptor species. Waterbird species in this area that do not migrate large distances may be experiencing other climatic or ecological factors adversely affecting their food chain (lakeweed, fish-fry, molluscs or crustaceans) – hence their low numbers.

In previous summer months a range of bird species (woodlands, wetlands and shorebirds⁶) were observed at BWSP. Groups of different species (called residents) remain in the same area year-round while other species may migrate seasonally (visitors). White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae* is regularly observed in small numbers (eg. 3 at Belmont Lagoon on 19/2). But this past month flocks of 30 (3/2) and 50 (27/2) were reported near 3rd Creek and the north dune on 9-Mile Beach.

Flock sizes for Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* observed on Belmont Lagoon (BL) have been relatively small during 2022 but now appear to be steadily increasing. Similar (low) numbers have been recorded at BL for cormorant, egret, heron, pelican and duck species. It is unclear whether these are locally nomadic, migrating mainly within the Hunter Region.



February 2023 has no reports of some shorebirds and waders seen in recent years (eg. Black-winged Stilt and Red-necked Avocet). However, White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* and Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles* (14/2), and Australian Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris* (27/2) were recorded on 9-Mile Beach.

Lower numbers of nectar-eating woodland species (lorikeets, parrots, honeyeaters and wattlebirds) at BWSP in February reflect a different, temporary food shortage.

¹ Milly Formby is an Australian zoologist committed to public education on this issue. <https://wingthreads.com/>

² Feletti, G. Birdlife at Belmont Wetlands State Park. *The Whistler*, 12 (2018): 43-49.

³ Fowler, J. & L. Cohen. *Statistics for Ornithologists*. (2nd ed.) BTO Guide 22. 1995. Chs. 9-11.

⁴ Birdlife Australia 2020 *Wetland Birds of south eastern Australia. Identification booklet*

⁵ Birdlife Australia 2015 *Woodland Birds of south-east Australia. Identification booklet*

⁶ Birdlife Australia 2020 *Shorebirds Identification booklet 2nd edn.*

Very few native trees or shrubs were in bloom. Species and bird numbers were low. Early morning bird walks have been relatively quiet. The raucous ‘feeding frenzy’ by nectar-eaters seen and heard in late spring/early summer will be observed again as many species forage noisily on Swamp Mahogany, Coastal Paperbark and other native flora⁷ blossom. Over the next few months this activity heralds the annual south-eastern honeyeater migration⁸ through this area.

WHAT’S LIKELY TO BE AROUND IN MARCH?

Woodland	White-cheeked Honeyeater, Rainbow Lorikeet, Little Wattlebird, Eastern Whipbird, Lewin’s Honeyeater, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Raven, Grey Fantail, Superb Fairy-wren, Spotted Dove
Wetland	Black Swan, Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Australian Wood Duck
Shorebird	Silver Gull, Crested Tern, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Osprey, Pied Oystercatcher, Striated Heron (3 rd Creek), Double-banded Plover

If you would like to report bird sightings at BWSP please try to include:

the date, time of day, species name, number of birds, and approximate location. Photographs may also help identify or confirm the species.

Thanks for your cooperation in conserving birdlife in Australia.

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⁷ Fairley, A. & P. Moore *Native Plants of the Sydney Region 2nd ed.*, Jacana Books, Allen & Unwin, 2010.

⁸ Margaret Clarke, Hunter Observers Club. April 25, 2019.

<https://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/6087179/autumn-the-time-to-spot-honeyeater-migration/>