

AROUND THE PARK

Thankfully, even in mid-winter shows glimpses of spring and the return of summer. Coastal Wattle *Acacia sopharæ* and Coastal Rosemary *Westringia fruticosa* blossom are vibrant in the Park and along the Fernleigh Track. Fur seals¹ have been seen pursuing schools of salmon and tailor along Nine-mile Beach, and several uncommon bird species have appeared around the Park recently.

BELMONT LAGOON

An Eastern Long-necked Turtle² *Chelodina longicollis* was spotted recently by Ranger Zac at a vulnerable location; it was relocated within the Park. Australia is home to 23 species of native freshwater Turtle. NSW is home to 7 species; this one was last noted here in 2021.

An Eastern Barn Owl³ was found on open ground in broad daylight along the Kalaroo Fire Trail by Ranger Shane last week. It seemed dazed (immobile) so he reported it to WIRES (0418 628 483) and *Hunter Wildlife Rescue* sent a trained volunteer to assess, capture and rehabilitate the bird. At 35-51cm this beautiful nocturnal species (opposite⁴) is more often seen in open, arid country. Interestingly, it was also recorded here two years ago (GF: 28/7/21).



A recent bird survey (GF:13/7/23) recorded 32 species and 249 birds around Belmont Lagoon. Lewin's Rail⁵ calls were noted from reed marshes either side of Cold Tea Creek Track. Its calls have been recorded here several times over the past 5 years but sightings are rare. This species is not listed as *threatened*. It simply shows highly secretive behaviour.



Another recent, 'occasional' Park visitor is White-necked Heron⁶. This species was seen by volunteers and Rangers at a freshwater pool near the BWSP site office (18/7/23). Previous sightings at BWSP (GF: 15/9/17) were recorded at spoon-drains along George Fire Trail. This recent observation coincides with the next likely El nino⁷ cycle and as inland drought conditions return to western NSW.

OBSERVATIONS ALONG 9-MILE BEACH

Rangers ask all who fish here to take their rubbish with them. Birds in distress from tangled lines are very hard to capture and release. Rangers also report regular sightings of Eastern Osprey⁸ at Third Creek and White-bellied Sea Eagle around the Lagoon. Both species are rated *Vulnerable* on NSW's Conservation list, but the good news here is they each have recent breeding histories in north-east Lake Macquarie.

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24jul23

¹ <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/7305820/sealing-the-deal-with-visit-to-blacksmiths-beach/>

² Eastern Long-necked Turtle. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/native-animals/native-animal-facts/freshwater-turtles>.

³ Eastern Barn Owl. <https://australian.museum/learn/animals/birds/eastern-barn-owl>.

⁴ Both bird images courtesy of Rob Palazzi (Hunter Bird Observers Club Bird Image Library)

⁵ Lewin's Rail. <https://bie.ala.org.au/species/https://biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/a6a18732-c749-4c2a-968c-b35e95270dde/>

⁶ White-necked Heron <https://birdlife.org.au/bird-profiles/white-necked-heron/>

⁷ WMO Update: Prepare for El Niño <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-update-prepare-el-ni%C3%B1o>

⁸ Eastern Osprey. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=10585>