

BELMONT WETLANDS STATE PARK REPORT SEPTEMBER 2023

'Spring has sprung, the grass is riz, I wonder where the birdies is.' Taken from a well-known poem¹ this sums up birdwatching at BWSP in September 2023: an early onset of summer-like (hot, dry) weather, a short flowering period for native trees and shrubs, and scarce freshwater for fauna.

AROUND THE PARK, BEACH AND LAGOON

Rangers report few 'notable' bird sightings this month: flocks of (20-30) Crested Tern² roost along Nine Mile Beach. Osprey and White-bellied Sea Eagle were seen near 3rd Creek. Uncommon species were too 'flighty' to identify. An observer recently informed Rangers that Australasian Bittern³ *Botaurus poiciloptilus* was detected in the area south of Belmont Lagoon. In 2019 a Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis* was seen⁴ at the Lagoon. Both observations are rare; the former species being listed as Endangered in NSW (2011). It seems timely to update visitors on new developments supporting birdwatching in this area.

BWSP's Land Manager, Rangers and volunteers are committed to improving the Park's public facilities and resources. Plans for new camping facilities on site are ready for the next stage of development. Details are expected to be released soon.

Lake Macquarie Council notes that work is expected to begin on the final stage⁵ of its joint FAST project in September 2023. It includes a new platform with bird signage overlooking the Lagoon, and a safe boardwalk along its the south-western end. Visitors will soon be able to observe birdlife in that secluded area defined by shallow marshes and extensive reeds.

OBSERVATIONS AND INNOVATIONS FROM OTHER PUBLIC PARKS

Belmont wetlands is Awaba country. This State Park has a well-documented modern history⁶. Ongoing land management focuses on rehabilitation of its natural assets. Conservation of its fauna and flora is carefully balanced with plans for passive recreational use, public awareness and its sustainable future through tourism. Input may come from various sources: community groups and visitors, volunteers, its land manager board and rangers, or other Parks. Recently a volunteer (GF) was able to visit several museums and native Parks in Perth, WA. Summary notes⁷ from these experiences are available via email or Facebook.

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¹ First lines of a well-known poem, often attributed to Ogden Nash, prolific writer of comic verse.

² Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* https://ebird.org/species/grcter1?siteLanguage=en_AU

³ Australasian Bittern https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australasian_bittern

⁴ Black Bittern. Annual Bird Report Number 27 (2019) p.48. Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc. and <https://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Ixobrychus-flavicollis>

⁵ Lake Macquarie City Council <https://www.lakemac.com.au/Projects/Fernleigh-Awabakal-Shared-Track-FAST#:~:text=Council%20has%20received%20tenders%20to,completion%20of%20the%20entire%20project>.

⁶ [https://www.belmontwetlands.com.au/history.html#:~:text=Belmont%20Lagoon%20has%20particular%20cultural,%20\(Haslam%2C%20undated\)](https://www.belmontwetlands.com.au/history.html#:~:text=Belmont%20Lagoon%20has%20particular%20cultural,%20(Haslam%2C%20undated)).

⁷ Summary Notes on innovations at several museums and native parks in Perth region WA, September 2023

The [WA Museum Boola Bardip](#)⁸ in Perth (6/9/23) has an exhibition on Dinosaurs and the evolution of Living Birds. One short video I found interesting as a birdwatcher was *Dinosaur Dreaming*⁹. It is a Bugarrigarra dreamtime story from a tribal elder (Mum) to 'all my children'. Jibi the Giant Spirit Bird often flew over the land searching for children to take them far away.

[Trigg Reserve in Scarborough](#)¹⁰ has a coastal environment similar to Belmont Wetlands State Park. TR offer many walking trails through sandy coastal scrub and across hind-dunes. A major difference between them is the composition (and resultant stability) which makes them accessible as walking trails to various user groups. Contact information was collected for further enquiries. A Google search indicated various materials and methods are used for constructing such trails in WA (but not NSW); enquiries should be made by land managers.

[John Forrest National Park](#)¹¹ in WA's Swan Valley was also visited. An informal meeting with Paul Udinga, Senior Ranger at JF-NP provided useful information on an innovative outdoor table and seating design that might be suitable for BWSP.



Compared to current outdoor tables at BWSP these units are simple to install; comfortable and durable in humid climates; easily installed on flat, sloping or rocky ground; provide easy access for disabled or elderly visitors, and are readily removed or repaired. These may also be more cost-effective to mass produce¹².

[Aquarium of Western Australia](#)¹³ (AQWA).



This 'living museum' is well worth visiting any time, and more of a future dream for BWSP. But its key learning feature for all displays is 'interactive'.

On the way in there were some creative sculptures (on the wall) reminding visitors to be eco-conscious and purposeful in the way we dispose of drink containers and rubbish at the beach.

This might be an interesting alternative way to decorate sandcastles at Blacksmiths in 2024.

(L to R: aluminium cans, plastic bottles, bottle tops) near our oceans and waterways.



⁸ WA Museum Boola Bardip <https://visit.museum.wa.gov.au/boolabardip/exhibitions>

⁹ Jibi: the Giant Spirit Birds. A Bugarrigarra dreamtime story by an Aboriginal elder in WA, presented as a video

¹⁰ City of Stirling, WA. <https://www.stirling.wa.gov.au/>

¹¹ John Forrest National Park <https://exploreparcs.dbca.wa.gov.au/park/john-forrest-national-park>

¹² Information provided by Paul Udinga, Senior Ranger, John Forrest National Park, Perth WA.

¹³ Aquarium of Western Australia (AQWA) <https://www.aqwa.com.au/>

Construction methods suitable for use on walking trails and pathways on hind dunes.

Key features include using low-cost, stable composite covering on soft, sandy soil for different terrains and users (walkers, joggers, cyclists and small quad vehicles for Rangers). Bitumen emulsion type paths will be cheaper and/or more effective to produce for unstable dune access than standard boardwalk panels and/or chain-logs methods. They are also cheaper to remove and/or repair sections. These photos show how aesthetic and effective the composite base is in a range of bush settings in coastal suburbs.



Using signs, QR codes and phone Apps to provide interactive information at BWSP.

LMCC already uses signs and QR codes to provide limited information on local ecology, flora and fauna. Unfortunately, signs also require periodic surveillance for vandalism, maintenance (cleaning/repair) and recurring costs for replacement.

QR codes at Park¹⁴ or track entrances enable Rangers to give specific info or weblinks to seasonal updates on flora and fauna (bird, mammal, fish or reptile). Due to poor radio/phone reception in areas of the Park, Rangers may need to use other media to contact current visitors at any time. A BWSP App might also provide visitors more immediate alerts on Park closures, info on spot fire locations and protocols for personal emergencies, safety and evacuation exits. It may also enable immediate reporting of criminal behaviour to Rangers at BWSP.



¹⁴ Example of sign with QR codes used at nature trails in City of Stirling. *Choose your own app-venture.*