

LINKS Living with Nature



ISSUE 1. Winter 2005

Foreword

Sandhurst Club Environmental Background

Sanctuary Lakes Resort Environmental Background

Bird Watching Getting Started

Bird Watching Descriptions and images of our birds

Please Note: further birds will be added regularly

Bird Watchers List For print out



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sanctuarylakes.com.au/nature.html

Living with Nature

Foreword

... A special visitor:

Dr David Suzuki



Links Living with Nature is one of the main underlying design criteria for Sandhurst Club, Sanctuary Lakes Resort and other proposed projects.

The development of this bird eBook project on these two projects with one of Australia's most respected and leading conservation bodies, the Gould League, is a reflection of this long term commitment to environmental sustainability by the Links Group.

The creation of the first edition of this eBook, which will be expanded as projects proceed, is aimed at providing access to knowledge about the interaction between communities and birdlife on Links projects.

Through Links Living with Nature residents, golfers, neighbours in the region, environmental groups, schools, local government, planning officials and visitors we hope will gain a wider appreciation of the environment we all share.



Stephen Head
Managing Director Links Group



Dr David Suzuki, visiting Sandhurst Club.

It's a chilly morning at the Sandhurst Club. The sun is rising slowly over the 100-year-old river red gums. The local ducks, pleased to have found the newly built marshlands, are paddling in pairs, oblivious to the reporters and residents gathered for Dr David Suzuki.

When his car pulls up, he steps out and into a waiting golf buggy. The 68-year-old is in town to deliver the Frankston City Council's sustainable development seminar, but not before casting an eye over Sandhurst, an environmentally sensitive residential and golfing estate in Melbourne's south-east.

The Sandhurst Club, built on reclaimed pasture and wetland, is of interest to Suzuki for a few reasons. When all 1850 homes have been built, it's estimated that one million buckets of water a day will be recycled, and the pipe supplying the recycled water will continue towards the market gardens near Cranbourne. The public watering systems have been placed underground helping avoid water loss through evaporation, and eventually all private gardens in the development will use recycled water (gardens use about 35 per cent of all household water consumption). And with the water supply all but guaranteed, local golfers are protected against fee rises in times of drought. It's schemes like these that environmentalists like Suzuki see as the way forward.

"We are the earth. We are the air. We are the water. We are nature, and our very best interests lie in a world where nature flourishes..."

Dr David Suzuki, speaking at the environmental seminar, Frankston Arts Centre, 2004.

Living with Nature online:
www.linksliving.com/nature.htm

The full article can be read in LINKS LIFE Magazine. Issue 5. Winter 2004.
www.sandhurst.com/linkslife/profile/suzuki.pdf



Sandhurst Club

Background

Sandhurst Club is a development that will include two golf links, a large residential area and many parks and wetlands.

The most significant natural feature of Sandhurst Club is the magnificent river red gums. All the living and dead remnant river red gums have been retained and protected. Sandhurst Club is committed to creating an environment that is highly compatible with nature.

A partnership between Sandhurst Club, its residents and the Gould League will study how nature has responded to the development by monitoring the diversity of birds.

The land prior development

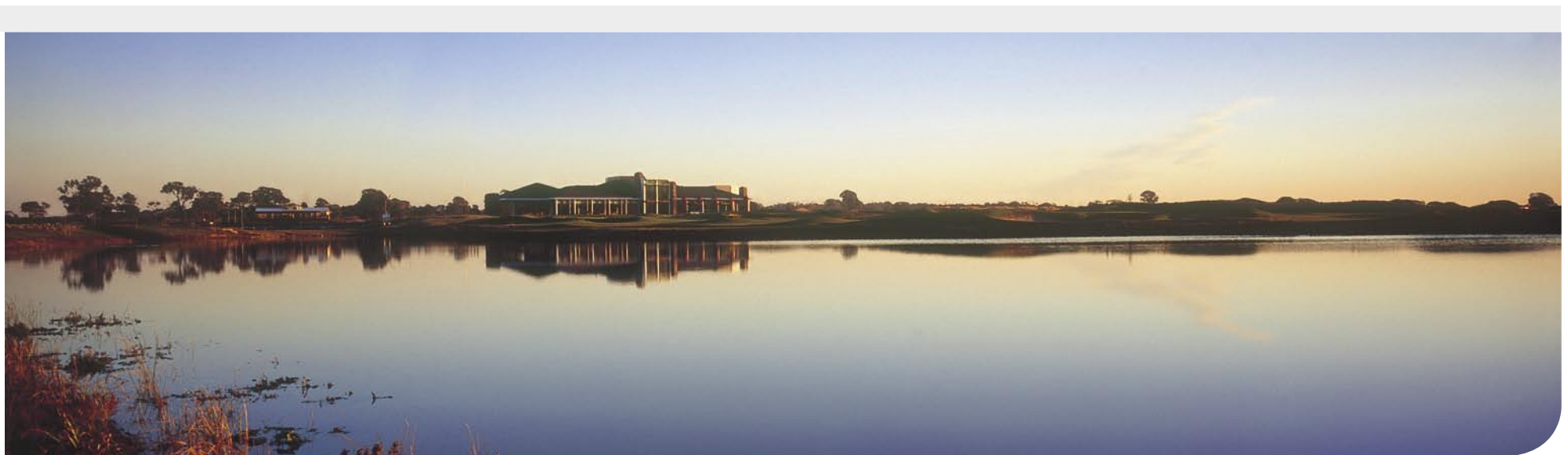
Prior to development, the area was uniform farmland with about 200 old river red gums spread throughout the property. The farmland consisted of pasture with no shrubs, small trees or natural ground litter. This type of habitat would have contained an interesting range of farmland birds. However the impact of grazing animals would probably have reduced the variety of birds.

... Creating a greater Diversity of habitat

Sandhurst Club has been designed to improve the natural values of the area.

The improvement in natural values will be achieved by:

- Protecting every remnant river red gum whether it is alive or dead.
Each tree has been checked for its health.
Careful planning has kept development away from the root systems of individual trees.
- Creating wetlands around Sandhurst Club to provide a range of wetland bird habitat.
- Increasing the diversity of habitat by establishing golf links. These have shrubs, small trees and permanent ground cover. There are many wetlands that have been appropriately planted.
- Establishing parkland that has been specifically designed for wildlife.
As an example, the well planted bogs will potentially attract an interesting range of birds.
- Sandhurst Club has a comprehensive street scaping plan that will potentially provide many birds with a network of wildlife corridors.
- Residential gardening will attract a range of garden birds.
- Maintaining wetlands and green areas throughout the year will provide a refuge for some birds during hot summers.



Sanctuary Lakes Resort

Background

Sanctuary Lakes Resort includes golf links, a vast lake, a large residential area, many parks and wetlands including Skeleton Creek, a significant wetland with its adjoining salt marsh habitat. Sanctuary Lakes is committed to creating an environment that is highly compatible with nature. A partnership between Sanctuary Lakes, its residents and the Gould League will study how nature is responding to the development by monitoring the diversity of birds.

The land prior to development

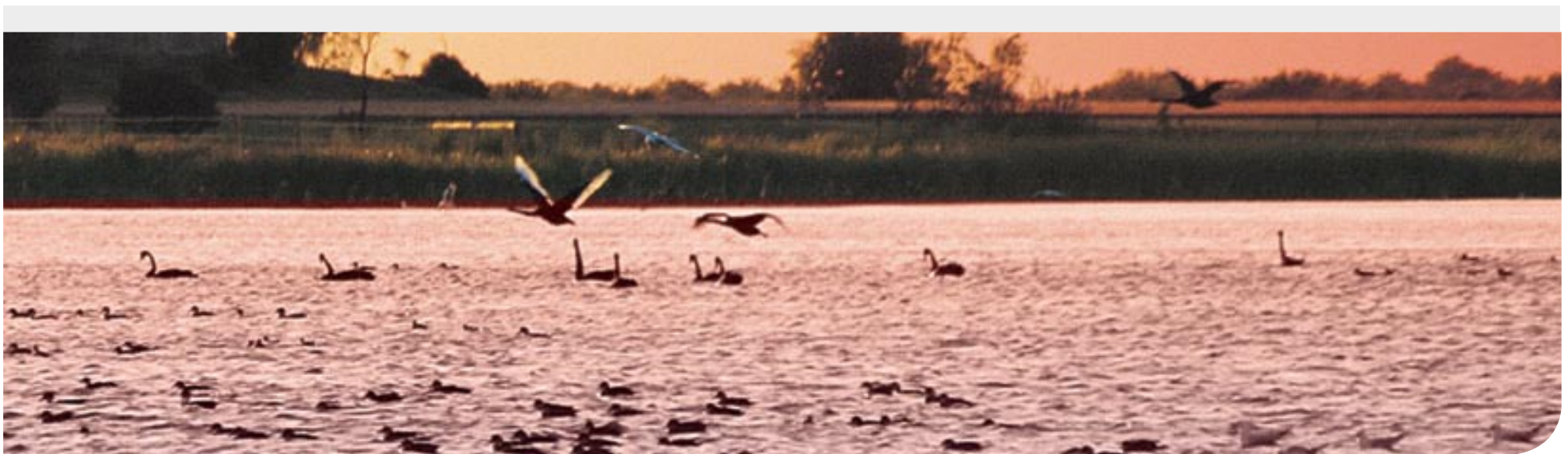
Prior to development, the area was a disused saltworks. Other than Skeleton Creek the land had been left as a wasteland encrusted with high levels of salt. While the saltworks operated, there were ponds filled with seawater. These ponds presented opportunities for various wading birds to feed. Once the saltworks stopped functioning, the ponds were no longer managed. These ponds became inhospitable salt pans. A significant proportion of the saltworks were given by the developer to Parks Victoria to extend the internationally significant Cheatham Wetlands. Cheatham Wetlands is protected under the international Ramsar treaty. Sanctuary Lakes adjoins the Cheatham Wetlands, Skeleton Creek, Point Cook suburbs and grazing land.

... Creating a greater Diversity of habitat

Sanctuary Lakes has been designed to improve the natural values of the area.

The improvement in natural values will be achieved by:

- Protecting Skeleton Creek with a 70 metre buffer and fencing the remnant creek salt marsh plants.
- Treating stormwater in stormwater ponds before it enters Skeleton Creek.
- Establishment of a significant lake and many varied smaller wetlands throughout the development.
- Increasing the diversity of habitat by establishing golf links. These have shrubs, small trees and permanent ground cover. There are many wetlands that have been appropriately planted.
- Establishing parkland that has been designed with wildlife in mind.
- A comprehensive street scaping plan with every road planted with trees. This will provide many birds with a network of wildlife corridors.
- Residential gardening will also attract a range of garden birds.
- Maintaining wetlands and green areas throughout the year will provide a refuge for many birds during hot summers.



Introduction to Bird Watching

Getting Started

In Australia, birds are plentiful and can be found in urban, rural and natural environments. No matter where you are, expect to be surprised and delighted by our fascinating and attractive birds.

In the centre of Melbourne, a pair of peregrine falcons regularly nest on the window ledge of an office block. Make sure you buy or borrow a pair of binoculars to view birds at close range. This will allow you to see the exquisite detail and colour of feather patterns and unusual and sometimes funny bird behaviour.

Using binoculars: Binoculars usually need to be adjusted. Locate the eye piece that rotates. Look for the markings on the eye piece. If you don't wear glasses, rotate the eye piece to zero. The adjustable eye piece allows people to use binoculars without having to wear their glasses. Focus on an object using the eye piece that does not move and then rotate the other eye piece until both eyes focus on the same object. Binoculars bend in the middle to allow both eyes to see clearly through the two eye pieces. Bend the binoculars to fit the eyes. There is a central rotating knob or lever that allows you to focus both eye pieces together.



Buying binoculars: Binoculars come in three categories, sensational, OK and shocking. Sensational binoculars can cost thousands of dollars. It's worth making the investment if you like nice optics or bird watching is a major hobby. It is possible to buy OK binoculars at a modest price, however there are some shockers at the same price. Most cheaper and smaller binoculars will, when dropped, have their prisms knocked out of alignment rendering the binoculars useless.

Binoculars have two numbers on them, eg. 7 X 40. The first number indicates the magnification. Most people can't hold an image stable above 8 times magnification. The second number indicates the amount of light the lenses collect and angle of view. 8 X 50 binoculars have large lenses and are very heavy. You will need a robust neck and arms that don't tire to use them. The best value for money binoculars that will last a few years are likely to be about 7 X 30 or 7 X 40. These look like your traditional binoculars. There are many smaller binoculars that neatly fit into your pocket eg. 8 X 20. These are light, but less robust. The joints of cheaper models often wear out, so don't expect to them to last for too long.

Bird Watching

Introduction continued...

Bird books: In Australia there are a number of excellent field guides. All the modern field guides are worth owning so this may make your choice difficult. Some guides are lighter while the heavier guides have more information. Most bookshops will stock several guides to read and compare.

What scares birds? Three things will frighten birds unnecessarily. Pointing with an outstretched arm will often frighten birds close-by. Sudden movement eg. a child swinging a bat, throwing a ball or play fighting will frighten birds because they see fast dangerous looking movement. Sudden loud sounds unsettle birds, but talking in an even pitched tone will cause little disturbance.

Locating birds: To find birds, look for movement and locate where sound is coming from. The brightest parrot is invisible in a green tree when it remains motionless. Look for movement in the air, on the ground and among plants. You may also find some birds resting on structures like power lines, roofs etc. Look in the direction of bird calls. Remember not to point with an outstretched arm.



How close can you get? Most birds will allow you to get reasonably close before they fly away or run off. You can get closer by moving slowly, approaching from the side and not walking directly towards the bird. How close you get may depend on the environment. So parks and your own garden, where birds are used to people are good places to begin bird watching. During duck shooting season, waterbirds may be nervous, and may not let you get within 200 metres of them. But in a park, the same duck may come up and take food from you.

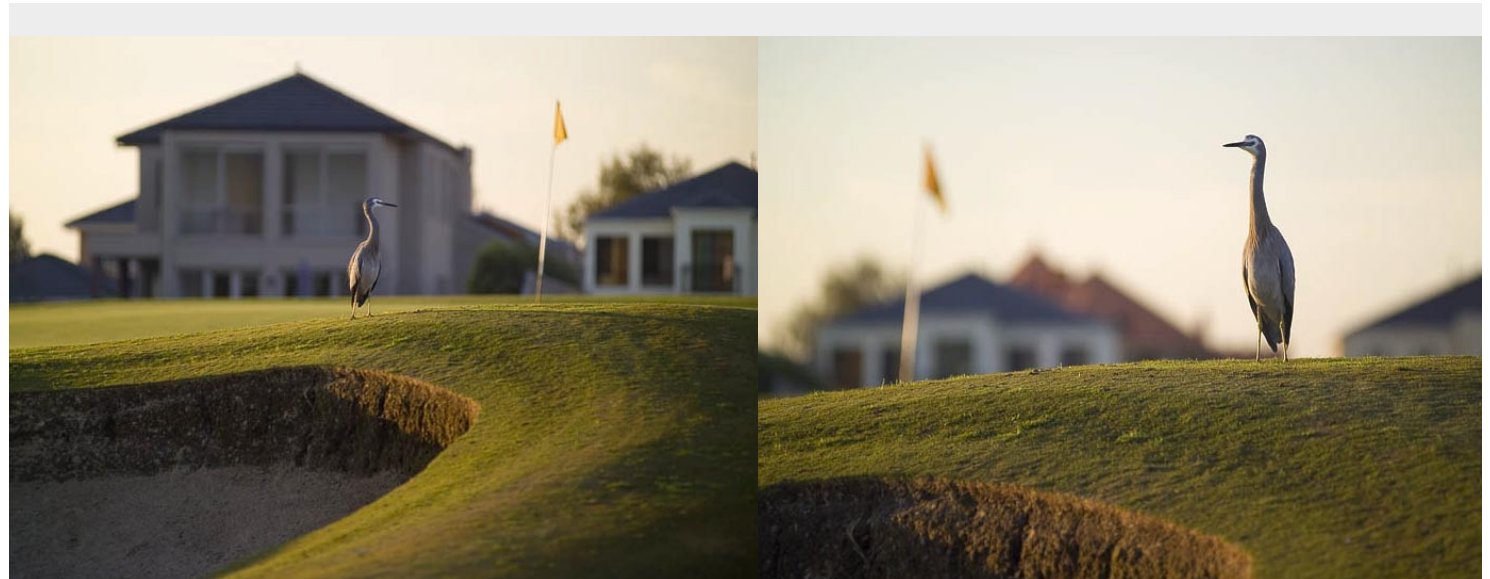
Feeding Birds: The best way to feed birds is to provide them with appropriate trees, shrubs, grasses and mulch. Many birds appreciate a shallow bird bath. Directly feeding feral birds can potentially cause problems for the survival of some of our native birds.

What do birds do? There are many interesting books describing the intriguing life of birds. You may like to read some of these books. However you can look through a window into your garden, or go outside and discover first hand the amazing life of birds.

Why do so many people bird watch?

People love bird watching for different reasons. I feel very peaceful when I tune my mind into a natural environment and start sharing the secret world of birds.

Other people are thrilled to discover a species of bird they have not seen before. . Others are committed to the conservation of birds and their habitats. Bird watching can also take you to remote and stunning parts of the country. So, if you're not already hooked on birdwatching, why not give it a go!



Great Egret

Ardea alba

Great Egret

Most people are mesmerised when they see this startling white bird sweep across a deep blue sky. Everything it does looks elegant. It is even manages to land delicately. Only when it's startled is its elegance forgotten as its powerful wing beats heaves it into the air. However its guttural honk is most undignified.

What to look for

They can be seen casually flying from wetland to wetland, between favoured feeding locations or to and from their evening roost. As they have long legs they can fish from the edge of a wetland or quite some way in depending on the water's depth. As they are often motionless, in poor light you may only see their tall silhouette. The great egret is the largest of four white egrets found in Victoria. The Great and intermediate egret are difficult to tell apart. If you see a group of egrets, they are probably cattle egrets. Cattle egrets invited themselves to Australia once we started grazing cattle and sheep.

How it lives

They often roost and nest in small colonies with other wetland birds. They take off, and cruise to their favourite wetlands. Standing patiently in the water, they wait for fish, frogs or large insects to snap-up in their powerful beak. They will also quietly stalk their prey to avoid making ripples in the water.



Where it lives

Great egrets favour shallow wetlands or the edges of deeper waterways. They need a good supply of fish and large insects to eat. No frog is safe from their lethal beak. They nest in small colonies with other wetland birds. Their flimsy nest of twigs can be seen high in a tree or sometimes among a stand of reeds. These egrets live around the world and are commonly seen around many Australian wetlands.

Getting to know them

They are not bothered by your presence provided you don't get too close. Some egrets will hang around anglers knowing that there is a chance to eat the intestines of any caught fish. They are unlikely to visit your backyard fish pond.

Conservation

Like all wetland birds, they are at the mercy of wetland management. As wetlands have been drained and river flooding controlled, there are fewer places for these birds to feed. New wetlands such as farm dams and constructed urban ponds and wetlands are a bonus.

Australian Magpie Lark

Grallina cyanoleuca

Australian Magpie Lark

These engaging birds are also called peewees because of the engaging call. They do everything as pairs including their singing. They often stand together on their favourite perch. As the male calls and the female rapidly responds. The bonding duet is repeated over and over again. All the while their wings are raised back and forth over their heads.

What to look for

Magpie larks are a little smaller and rounder than the Australian magpie. When magpie larks walk, their head appears to bob backwards and forwards in rhythm with their legs. In fact their heads remains motionless with the ground so they are better able to detect any squirming creatures to eat. The adult male has a black forehead and throat, the female has white forehead and throat, while their juveniles have black foreheads and white throats.

How it lives

They must live near a source of water so they can make their nest. They collect mud and bind it with grass to build a very solid mud brick nest on a solid horizontal limb. It is lined with feathers and other soft material.



Where it lives

They are mostly seen feeding on the ground or along the edge of a waterway. Magpie larks need a solid structure like a tree limb to build their nest and near a water supply to obtain mud. These birds are likely to be hanging around your home, wandering about when you are having a picnic or on the side of the road when driving through the outback.

Getting to know them

Many black and white birds like the magpie lark are fearless of people. They are regular visitors to peoples' gardens and decks providing their pets are kept under control. A solid gum tree will make your garden even more attractive to these birds.

Conservation

Magpie larks live over most of Australia and are common anywhere there is open country and water. Young magpie larks often get killed on country roads.

Red-rumped Parrot

Psephotus haematonotus

Red-rumped Parrot

Walking along a flood plain or a golf course is when you are likely to disturb a group of quietly chattering red-rumped parrots waddling through the grass. In unison, they burst out of the grass and alight in the closest tree. Even though they are seen in flocks, when on a perch the male often sidles up to his mate.

What to look for

These are a small parrot that prefers to live in small flocks and at first they are difficult to spot. Looking for movement in the grass and listening for the quite chattering sound are the main give-away. The male is well camouflaged in the grass. They have emerald green feathers over most of their body with a red-rump that is conspicuous in flight, a yellow belly and some blue streaks through the wings. In comparison, the female is perfectly camouflaged making the male more of a sitting duck if a hungry falcon swoops through.

How it lives

The female secretively incubates her white eggs inside the hollow of a tree. Her loyal companion visits to feed her almost every hour during the day. The young remain in the nest for a month and then leave. They stick close to their parents for the next few months.



Where it lives

They are mostly encountered when they are feeding in the grass on seed. Once you have approached too close they erupt into the air and make for a substantial tree. As you can see, their preferred habitat is open grassland alongside large gum trees. They are also encountered along many country roads with roadside vegetation. They are common in open areas throughout Victoria, NSW and southern Queensland.

Getting to know them

You are most likely to find these birds when walking in a park, playing golf or going for a drive through the country. If you live near a flock of these parrots, try your luck and erect a nestbox in a gum tree in your backyard.

Conservation

In our cities, golf courses, parks and flood plains are important homes for these birds. Whether they live in our cities or rural areas, they need the old trees with hollows to nest.

Red-necked Stint

Calidris ruficollis

Red-necked Stint

Imagine a tiny 25 g bird that breeds in Siberia, up near the Arctic Circle. After breeding, it takes two months to fly to southern Australia where it will hang out in large flocks in one of our many marine or freshwater wetlands. The red-necked stint is among the smallest of our migratory wading birds but our most numerous. Hundreds of thousands of these stints escape the Arctic freeze to holiday in sunny Australia.

What to look for

They are commonly encountered on beaches, mudflats and edges of freshwater wetlands. This wetland wading bird has a small round body and stumpy legs and its beak is short compared with many other waders. For most of their five or six month holiday in Australia, they are out of their breeding plumage, so they don't have a red-neck. There are many other wading birds that this stint can be confused with.

How it lives

In Australia, they often form large flocks and run excitedly along a beach or mud flat jabbing and probing at the sand and mud for tiny creatures. They take off in tight swarms, weaving and manoeuvring in unison.



Where it lives

The largest numbers of red-necked stints are usually seen around vast areas of tidal flats where large feeding areas are exposed. They can be found in any wetland that has shallow water or extensive flat edges. While most return to Siberia each year, a small number of younger birds may spend the winter in Australian feeding grounds. However all must return to Siberia and West Alaska to breed.

Getting to know them

You will start seeing the migrating stints in September and they start leaving in March. You will need a good pair of binoculars or a spotting scope to get a reasonable look. You are most likely to encounter them on large tidal flats. Small groups and individuals are often found on beaches and the edges of other wetlands.

Conservation

The greatest threat to red-necked stints and other migratory birds is the disturbance of wetlands along their migration route. Between northern Asia and Australia, these birds need to rest and feed before continuing their journey. In the future, a warmer planet could impact on the breeding areas in the northern hemisphere.

Superb Fairy-wren

Malurus cyaneus

Red-necked Stint

Often called blue wrens, these tiny birds are seen hopping about in their family groups usually between five to ten birds. During the breeding season, adult males have startling patches of vivid blue and black. Overseas visitors are left in wonderment when they spot one of these delightful males. The females, often called jennies, remain brown and less conspicuous. Their slender tails are vertically up right. Some males retain their superb colour during the winter, but most join the jennies by moulting into a brown winter coat.

What to look for

They are mostly seen on hopping along the ground or perched low in trees shrubs or fences. Their constant calling gives them away. They are either very busy on the ground searching for insects or flitting from perch to perch all the while calling to members of their family. When they rest, they are often seen perched in shrubs or on a fences.

How it lives

Fairy-wrens live in families. Only the dominant breeding pair breed. The dominant female takes three or more days to build the nest. Which is normally low in bushes or thick native grasses. It is a dome made of soft grasses and lined with feathers. The side

entrance has a small over hang, a bit like a verandah. Only she incubates the tiny speckled eggs. The male may feed her, but will escort her as she gets off the nest to feed. Once the eggs hatch, the dominant male along with the older brothers and sisters are expected to help feed and bring up their younger siblings. This enables the family to raise more than one lot of hatchlings each year. When one of the dominant adults dies, it is quickly replaced by an outsider or a family member. During the breeding seasons, families become aggressive when they encounter other



fairy-wrens in their territory. Most families have more males as the dominant female seems to be more jealous and will drive some of her daughters away. During the breeding season they are mostly in their family groups. In winter several families can get together and also be accompanied with other small species of birds. Fairy wrens are constantly active searching for small insects and other tiny creatures.

Where it lives

This species of fairy-wren lives throughout south-eastern Australia and southern Queensland. While it lives in many habitats, it requires at least some patches of low thick cover which can include shrubs and bracken. This provides cover for them to retreat to and a place to hide their nest.

In many grazing areas, they substitute native shrubs for the only thickets available blackberries. Fairy-wrens don't stray too far from their territory, so if they are wiped out from an area, it can be difficult for them to re-colonize.

Getting to know them

These birds are relatively fearless. When in the garden, the male or males may spend months attacking their reflections in windows thinking it is an intruder. They are common in

many parks and golf courses, even in the Royal Botanic Gardens. They occur along creeks and the coast where natural ground vegetation occurs. They don't need feeding but often appreciate a shallow bird bath. They may use a bird bath to wash and drink in preference to using a nearby wetland. Growing thick native bushes and grasses will provide insect food, a place to retreat and nest. If you ever see a bird carrying a grub, it will be on its way to the nest to feed the hungry young. Remember, no birds like to have their nest interfered with.

Conservation

While there are many places where the superb fairy-wren is found, they have disappeared from many suburbs. It is thought they disappear because of the constant predation by cats and the clearing of undergrowth and dense shrubs in gardens. In rural areas it is important to protect remnant vegetation which is often only found along the side of roads. Shrubs and bushes in rural areas need to be retained and before blackberries are removed, the wrens need someone to plant some dense shrubs. If your garden is close to fairy-wrens, you can help by having a bird bath, growing a dense clump of native or indigenous shrubs and bushes and having large areas of the ground mulched. Keeping your pet cat fat and happily inside will also help.

Galah

Eolophus roseicapillus

Galah

One of the most classic Australian dawn scenes is a flock of excited galahs bursting from the top of a massive river red gum. Their constant clanking call fills the air with sound as the light of the warm morning sun reflects from their gorgeous pink and grey feathers. The flock will wheel around and descends onto a large dead tree and continue their animated calling. Galahs belong to the cockatoo group of parrots. Like other cockatoos they have a crest that they erect when they feel excited. In Australia when a person is referred to as a galah, it is indicating that their behaviour is silly. While galahs are not silly, their antics from our point of view appear quite comical. Among their interesting behaviours is what is called the rain dance. In light rain they sometimes hang upside-down from their perch with their wings outstretched absorbing the drizzle.

What to look for

Galahs are noisy and conspicuous. Particularly at first light, they let off steam by calling and circling about. Raucous flocks are seen speeding overhead at 70 km/h. They generally feed on the ground searching for seeds and other plant material. When busy, they make less sound. When walking, their short legs only allow them to waddle. During spring, pairs will search for the perfect tree hollow to build their nest. They will duck in

and out of potential nesting sites and take a long time inspecting its suitability.

How it lives

In spite of their liking for living in flocks, they usually mate for life. After choosing a suitable hollow, it is lined with leaves collected in their beaks where they lay their white eggs. After feeding their young for 100 days the young are abandoned so they join juvenile flocks. These juvenile flocks can roam over a large distance. Galahs feed on seed as well as roots, bulbs and vegetation found when on the ground. Except when breeding, galahs like to roost communally in the canopy of a large tree. During the night they often strip leaves from the tree. Galahs are meticulous at grooming their feathers and keeping their beak and feet clean.

Where it lives

Galahs are widespread over Australia being common on farmland, open woodland and even the outback. They were once less common around our cities. Now they



are commonly found in towns and heavily populated areas. In towns, galahs focus on golf courses, large parks and stands of large trees whether they are in a school ground, beside a town hall or in a main street. Galahs are very adaptable and can take advantage of many agricultural and other land practices.

Getting to know them

They prefer the company of other galahs so you will not get too close to a feeding flock. They will want a drink in the late afternoon, so you can position yourself by a likely waterhole, farm dam or creek.

They may come to a feeding table if seed is offered, but feeding tables can present a few problems. The seed will attract unwanted introduced birds and while you are not looking at night, what seed the birds left behind will be found by unwelcome introduced rats. When large cockatoos hang around homes for too long because they are being artificially fed, they may damage some plants in your neighbours' gardens.

Conservation

Along with most other species of parrots, galahs require hollow trees to breed. Today there are fewer hollows available because many old hollow trees have been removed during clearing. Even old trees in towns are cut down as they may present safety concerns. The problem of fewer hollows is made worse as introduced starlings and mynas take over many hollows. These pest birds leave the hollows filthy with dropping and crawling with bird lice. Parrots will only nest in a clean tree hollow. You can help by constructing and placing nesting boxes in trees in your garden. At Sandhurst Club, every living and dead river red gum has been protected and will be retained for the local wildlife.