

# BirdLife Shoalhaven Magazine

## Autumn 2020



Photo by Ian Parrott

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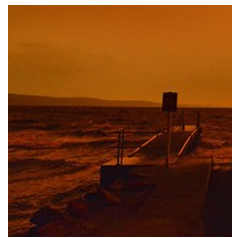
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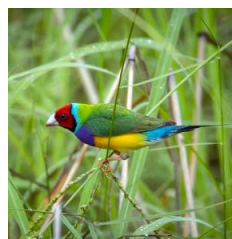
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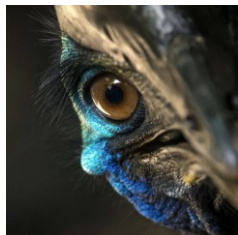
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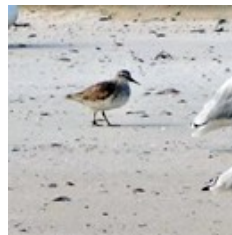
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### Cover Photo:

Our cover photo this month - for the first time ever - shows no birds. Given the devastating bushfires we have had in the Shoalhaven, it reflects reality to some extent, but it does have a positive side because it does show that recovery is happening. Special thanks to Ian Parrott who donated this image.

BirdLife Shoalhaven acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the Shoalhaven, their care of country, birds and habitat, and pays respects to all Elders.

## Responding to bushfires and Covid 19

- by Rob Dunn, President BirdLife Shoalhaven

It seems a lifetime ago in the pre-Covid 19 era when we launched our Bushfire Recovery Program. Actually, it was only on March 8th at Mollymook Golf Club, that we talked about how we would focus on priorities for bird conservation with so much habitat lost from the fires in the Shoalhaven.

Of course, the first step had been the summer edition of the BLS Magazine - which was an amazing effort by everyone who contributed - to put together an excellent overview of the impacts of the fires on Shoalhaven's birds in such a short space of time.

At the same time BLS joined other environmental groups as part of Shoalhaven Council's work to better coordinate a response to the fires. This included water and food station volunteers, animal rescue, Shoalhaven Landcare, Southern Local Land Services, NPWS, DPIE and University of Wollongong. This forum to share information and ideas will have many advantages for BLS.

from Mayor Amanda Findley and Fiona Phillips MP, Member for Gilmore, provided additional insights.

Martine's research indicates that fire conditions are worsening in SE Australia with extremes of temperatures and rainfall the new norm.

She added that these types of events were actually predicted by Professor Ross Garnaut back in 2008 "...fire seasons will start earlier, end slightly later, and generally be more intense. This effect increases over time, but should be observable by 2020."

Martine outlined that the increasing frequency of weather extremes will change habitats and there will be winners and losers for all wildlife.

It is now critical to protect unburnt forests as they are providing the last refuge for many birds and animals. She concluded that due to widespread climatic changes the future will be very different.

So we will all need to think now about how we will protect our unique wildlife and ecosystems.



Dr Martine Maron  
at Mollymook

In March 150 people attended the event at Mollymook Golf Club to hear Dr Martine Maron, a Professor of Environmental Management at the University of Queensland and Vice-President of BirdLife Australia, discuss what her research is revealing about the potential impacts of the bushfires on Australia's birds and biodiversity. A welcome to country by Vic Channell, Deputy Chair Ulladulla Aboriginal Land Council, and words

This really laid down a challenge to all of us to see how we can contribute.

Many wrote letters in support of existing local campaigns and called for a moratorium on all clearing to allow habitat time to recover. Others made submissions to the Australian Government's independent review of the Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act.

We can only hope that this review takes into account the impact of the bushfires and that controls are tightened and expanded.

The central platform of our program, the Bushfire Research Project, had already started in January and was gathering pace with six new volunteers signed up at the Mollmook event. Early sightings presented some signs of hope of how birds had fared in certain areas. Kim Touzel posted sightings on Facebook of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and Rock Warblers in January and February.



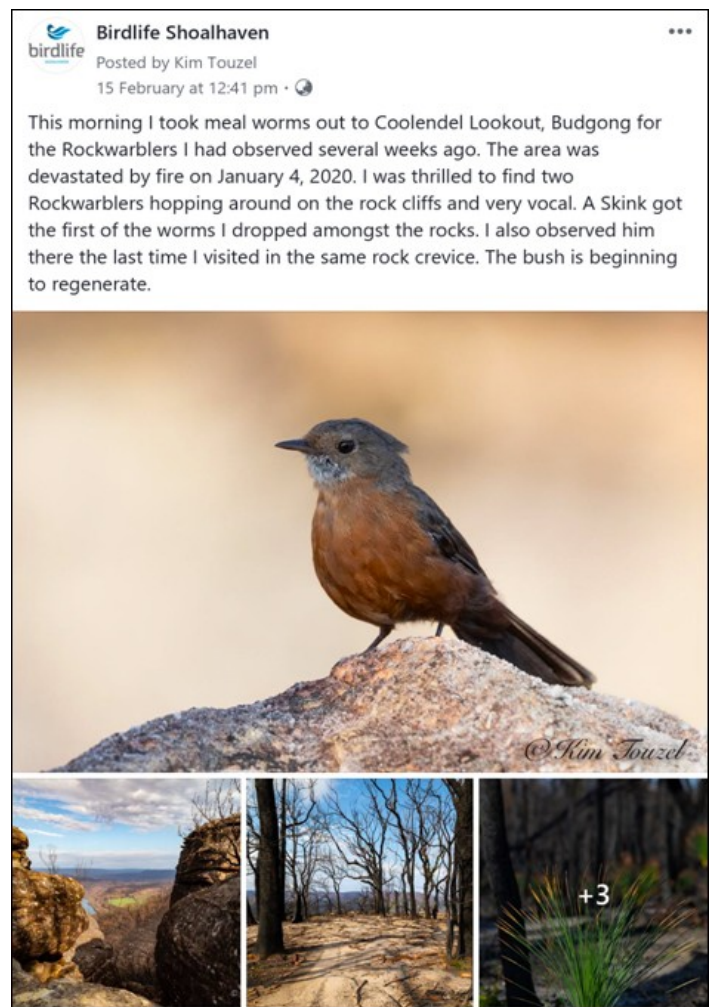
The article by Gary Brady (on page 10) outlines the great progress that had been made by volunteers by the end of March.

Looking forward we were hopeful that more national parks would be opened to allow us to conduct surveys at new sites. We started discussions with the Shoalhaven Landcare Association about expanding the project onto private rural properties.

And then Covid 19 arrived!

As the article (on page 5) by Chris Grounds, the BLS Conservation Officer, outlines, the recovery of the bush after recent rains is starting to be seen, but increasingly we have been confined to our home bases or close to them. Inevitably the Bushfire Research Project has slowed and it is unclear when we will be able to re-ignite it.

Meanwhile the world has had to learn new skills and people have looked for interesting ways to fill their time. For many this has included taking up watching birds.



It was great to see that Council's April newsletter recommended backyard bird watching as an activity for Easter. Hopefully this will become part of the new normal in the post-Covid 19 world. Certainly, while we have more of a house-bound audience, it is the ideal time to forward this magazine on to your family and friends.

As for BLS, we are currently developing a Birds for Beginners course for Shoalhaven Landcare, using Zoom. Subject to feedback, we may continue this into the future and hold Zoom events with guest speakers, when business returns to normal.



How birds will respond to the bushfires in the Shoalhaven and how Covid 19 impacts the world into the future are two huge unknowns. We are not qualified to comment on the latter. But let's hope enough changes are seen to allow us to get focussed again on what we are qualified to assess - the Bushfire Research Project.

# The Devils are in the Detail

## A Bushfire Feature

- images and text by Chris Grounds, Conservation Officer

In late January and throughout February a field inspection was undertaken of environment sites in the Shoalhaven fire zone, a sort of 'ground-truthing'. The object was to build a firsthand picture of the geography of these areas, especially of damaged vegetation and habitat that occurred in December and January and participate in monitoring for bird presence as an extension of the study.

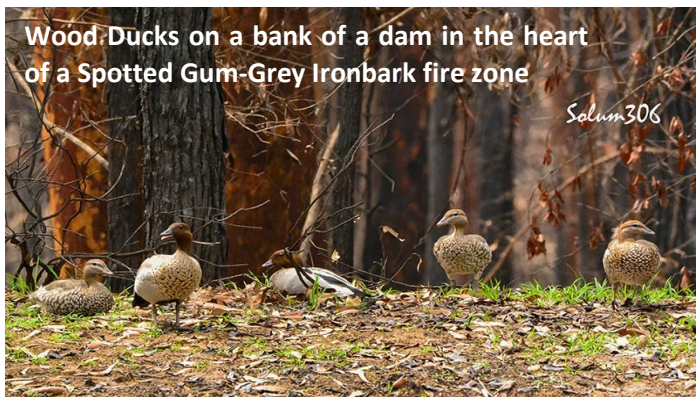
### Key Points

- The weather patterns on top of "The Drought" were major fire ingredients
- The fire zone was a mosaic of burns
- Differing burn impact is reflected in different vegetation communities
- Seasonal circumstance is a major ecological element
- The follow-up East Coast Low has been critical in recovery

In December, Nowra experienced 12 days near or over 30 degrees and 3 days over 40 degrees including a December 21 maximum of 45.6 degrees with wind speeds of 81 kph. Wind exceeded 50 kph on ten days of the month, mostly in the NE-NW arc in relentless high pressure.

In January, Nowra experienced 14 days of temperature near or over 30 degrees and two days over 40 degrees, including January 4 with 43.2 degrees. There were 7 days with winds over 50 kph, again mostly in the NE-NW arc. January was also a relentlessly high pressure time with only one day below 1000hpa.

This circumstance was on the back of "The Drought", one of the worst droughts in the state's experience.



The first inspections of fire sites in the Shoalhaven revealed that as extensive as the fires had been, there was a **mosaic of burn impacts** from no impact to severe and total impact. This was being verified in satellite imagery, GEEBAM images and mapping which recognized no impact, no canopy burn and complete burn zones but the actual distribution in the fire zone was interesting.

This was the first clue to some of the detail involved in the historic Shoalhaven bushfires.

Areas not burnt within the fire zone as mapped could thus be regarded as important refugia and, in some cases, provide habitat corridor to areas outside the fire impacted zones.

The various types of fire and burn impact, embers, flame and radiant heat, were clearly all involved and even some small sites as well as broader landscapes showed clear evidence of a mix of burns.

Sites monitored in the Birddata Recovery Project [BRP] have certainly indicated this but also that these undamaged areas are important when situated adjacent damaged areas to enable or even encourage birds into or across fire damaged areas.

Site inspections also indicated that the detail of **local ecology**, particularly the vegetation community and the range of plants which compose a community, is an important consideration in examining fire impact which has varied within some communities.

The actual **visual encounter** of burn sites is usually the first impression created for everyone.



Visually, for example, trees that carry bark to their branches looked the blackest and thus accentuated the burn impact in peoples' observations and anecdotes. These include trees such as the Grey Ironbarks [*Euc. paniculata* ], Red Bloodwoods [*Corymbia gummifera*], Stringybarks [*Euc.sp.*], Silvertop Ash [*Euc. sieberi*] and Turpentine [*Syncarpia glomulifolia*], all quite common trees in the burn zones.

Reports of areas and photos reflected this, but often without recognition of the species seen. The impact of fire was different depending on the nature of the bark of the blackened trees. Turpentine bark burned to a black, thin paper-like state whilst ironbarks were black with the surface burnt but bark texture maintained.

As well, it was these trees that first produced epicormic shoots and to the greatest degree compared to gum trees, though the gums did follow. This recovery was well underway by the end of January and proceeding toward the end of February.

It was noticeable in some sites that gum trees such as the very common Bloodwood Spotted Gum [*Corymbia gummiferra*] and the Eucalypt Scribbly Gum [*Euc.sclerophylla*] were not blackened in the same way when side by side with the heavy barked trees in the same burn zone sites. At other sites, especially on the plateau, the Scribbly Gum were severely burnt and blackened, and as in so many sites, shed the burnt outer bark in plates. Where the fire intensity was extreme - along the Bendalong Road for example - Blackbutts [*Eucalyptus pilularis*], with their stringybark-like lower bark and gum-like branches, were burnt entirely.



Sites with these species where the burn had clearly been more intense - like on the Nerriga Road - shed blackened bark to reveal further plating of bark.

The bushfire season involved **persistent and strong winds**, sometimes howling, producing a bellows effect. It was surmised this may have been more so on the exposed hinterland plateau and inspections in the Jerrawangala vicinity and Nerriga Road certainly verified this with totally burnt herb, shrub and tree strata severely affected.

Another element in evidence was the contribution of eucalypt regrowth in logged areas, which produced a 'broomstick' regrowth that forms a middle level strata that can carry fire into the taller, main canopy.

### Seasonal Impact

The fires came right at the height of the presence and usual breeding for the range of **migratory, warm season avian visitors**. The Koel, Channel-billed Cuckoos and Fan-tail Cuckoos are well known visitors to the Shoalhaven.

One of the most important impacts discerned in fire impact zones relates to the **seasonal flowering regimes** of the various trees, which relates to the specific concerns with damage to habitat.

In the early warm season of November and December, Bangalay [*Euc. botryoides*] and Rough-barked Apples [*Angophora floribunda*] were in flower. Where these trees occur in the early burn zones there would be a loss of blossom.

In some occasional undamaged sites, Bangalay flowered into February and were a magnet to species such as the New Holland Honeyeater.



The Scribbly Gums [*Euc. sclerophylla*] were heavy in bud in the early warm season at this time. Where these trees and vegetation communities were not fire impacted, a reasonably profuse flowering commenced in February and continued through March. The same description applies to the Corymbia Red Bloodwoods [*Corymbia gummiferra*] which also flower at about the same time and are favoured by many species including the Noisy Friarbird.

There has also been some flowering in March of Spotted Gums, a rarer Eucalypt event and where this was identified it was a great boon to many bird species such as the Rainbow Lorikeet, Little Wattlebird and Eastern Spinebill. Many Spotted Gum forests such as at West Tomerong and Turpentine Road were badly burnt though, so this flowering was lost. These trees in flower outside the fire zone have been a boon to Rainbow Lorikeets and Grey-headed Flying Foxes.

However, this does point to and emphasize the habitat impact of fires for birds. These trees are common and extensive through the fire zones and the burning of December to January has decimated the buds and subsequent flowering on these trees on a large scale. There has therefore been much less blossom available on a large scale and in the longer term much less fruit and seed. Gang Gangs are rather fond of such 'gum nuts'.

The corollary is of course that where these trees flowered in refugia zones, these traditional sources of blossom for birds, especially the Red Bloodwoods, are vastly more important than usual.



Another layer to this damage involving trees is that various bird species also forage heavily on lerps - the protective, white, sugary, waxy coverings made by nymphs, the larval stage of psyllids - which excrete honeydew on the leaf surface and this crystallizes to form lerps, which are foraged by birds. The underside of Bangalay leaves are well known for this - they produce a spectacular mosaic visual effect. The often extensive loss of leaves on Bangalays leads to the false impression that the trees are dying. In most cases they recover, but they do seem particularly vulnerable.



As can be seen in the image at the bottom of this page, Bangalay leaves provide a spectacular display of lerp-psyllid damage (white marks). Basket Lerp appear as the cage-like objects.

Clearly, in the extensive areas of canopy burn, this source of food was also destroyed and on a large scale, but in fire zones where the canopy was not burnt, some of these trees have been seen to be in flower, although in many trees there appears to have been a radiant heat impact, destroying buds, flowering and leaves. In the Spotted Gum forest, strong winds after the fires caused loss of retained leaves, forming a dense leaf litter.

This again points to a higher value of the refugia where these trees are flowering, either in the burn zones or unaffected areas.

One of the other specific details, which relates to trees is that of bark shedding or decorticating with the gum trees. Spotted Gums usually shed bark in the early warm season in November so new bark was thus exposed to fires. Likewise the Scribbly Gums shed their bark in early warm season and the new bark was exposed to fire impact. Both species are subject to plating and shedding of the new bark as a result of fire impact.

The association of this with the fires is that any remaining loose bark harboring insects was burnt and the collection of decorticated bark at the base of these trees provided ready fuel and further insect damage.

The point is of course that the bushfire's impact on ecology, habitat corridor and species relates very strongly to the actual fire type, weather conditions, vegetation communities, site character and tree species but also just as importantly, to the seasonal characteristics of the native plants. It is this element of the bushfire impact on fauna and especially birds that needs to be recognized to grasp the full impact of the fires.



Variegated Fairy Wren (female)

A major factor in the **plant recovery** after the fires has been the exceptional rainfall received across the fire zone. It eventually led to all fires being declared extinguished.



According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the rainfall record for Nowra was 81mm in January, 473mm in February and 45mm in the first half of March.

The Bureau also said that the high rainfall of February was associated with a "slow moving east coast trough and embedded East Coast Low".



Had the major drought conditions that existed prior to the fires and contributed so much to the bushfires persisted, the recovery and regeneration process would have been very different and surviving bird populations even more impacted. The steadier rain of January was good soaking rain.

As it was, various sites with significant damage soon carried evidence of plant recovery, not just of abundant epicormic shoots but of grasses and herbs which created a very 'green' ground level recovery.

Many of the regrown herbs were flowering by early March, and in a blackened landscape. Shrub layer plants such as banksia [*Banksia spinulosa*] were reshooting and had shed seed from heat-opened cones.

By mid-March the first orchid appeared!



This post-fire rainfall was also significant for birds in supplying water in the drought-fire landscape as it produced runoff in channels, streams and roadsides and increased dam storage, not to mention bringing total control on the fires.

The scene by mid-March, for example in the Jerrawangala plateau BirdLife Recovery Project survey area, was that there was in fact ample water and food for fauna, with the upper Wandandian Creek in the St Georges Basin catchment resembling a cascade. That suited one of the two known Superb Lyrebirds at the site, who performed its repertoire across the bubbling waters in an adjacent refugia area, which also produced an 18 strong flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.

A Grey Currawong was also spotted flying through the fire zone with its unusual call - for a Currawong at least - and the Grey Shrike-thrush was a welcome sight and sound.

Despite the blackened landscape birds were offering their special presence and enjoyment but in very limited numbers and variety.





Solum306

The Jerrawangala BRP monitoring site didn't produce a high number of species in four visits but the list was engaging as it included the calls of three Superb Lyrebirds.

Also seen were 18 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos), one White-throated Tree-creeper, one Grey Currawong, one Pied Currawong (pictured), two Welcome Swallows, one Grey Shrike-thrush, two Australian Ravens, one Lewin's Honeyeater, one White-browed Scrubwren, one Eastern Yellow Robin, one Yellow-faced Honeyeater and a most amazing surprise, one Australasian Pipit!

Somehow, the Gang Gangs seen recently in Jervis Bay National Park - a family of two adults and a male fledgling still being fed (see the photo below) - must have come through all of these disastrous times in a breeding cycle - December to April. It would be quite amazing if this was in the burnt Shoalhaven!

What a phenomenal sequence of events for the Shoalhaven so far in 2020 - the drought, the heat, the bushfires, an East Coast Low, and Covid 19!

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# Bushfire Research Project

- by Gary Brady, BLS Project Officer

The 2019-20 bushfires in the Shoalhaven have had severe impacts on many animal species. Around 313,000 hectares of Shoalhaven Local Government Area has been burnt. This represents 68% of the entire Shoalhaven and around 90% of our national parks, state forests and crown land.

The fires have covered an unusually large area and, in many places, they have burnt with unusually high intensity (see map on next page). Some species were considered threatened before the fires, and the fires have now likely increased their risk of extinction. Many other fire-affected animal species were considered secure and not threatened before the fires, but have now lost much of their habitat and may be imperiled.



Half of the birds on BirdLife Australia's most impacted list have been seen in the Shoalhaven. We cannot be sure of the state of our bird populations or how they might react through the recovery.

Birdlife Shoalhaven Bushfire Research Project (BRP) has the aim of encouraging birders to record sightings across the variety of habitats and burn intensities across the Shoalhaven. With little publicity to date many have taken up the task. 23 Surveyors are monitoring the bird populations at 51 sites across the Shoalhaven.

Point counts are the survey technique chosen for this Project, specifically the 2 Hectare/20 minute survey. In consultation with the scientific team at BirdLife Australia this was chosen as the best method to produce robust data that will, over time, show the progress of bird populations in the variety of habitats.

**Table 1: Summary Statistics for Shoalhaven bird surveys recorded in Birdata**

	Jan 2019	Feb 2019	Mar 2019	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter 2020
Surveyors	5	4	3	12	9	10	3	23
Survey Sites	10	3	3	16	18	39	31	51
Completed surveys	46	32	35	113	25	50	43	75
Average Species per site	16.56	16.1	15.8	16.19	10	9.43	9.66	9.63
Average Individuals per site	41.14	40.8	50.34	43.91	36.79	27.31	37.69	32.98

From this preliminary summary the number of sites being surveyed has increased significantly over the previous year. Many of these new sites are in fire affected areas such as Coolendel Lookout, Jerrawangala Lookout, Parma Creek Nature Reserve, Griffins fire trail and new sites along the roads up to the Clyde from Bawley Point. Still plenty of area to log along the Nerriga Road where the fire was particularly intense.

Birdata has added a new Bushfire Assessment feature that allows you to enter information on Bushfire extent, Bushfire Intensity and any supplementary feeding provided at the site. Bushfire information can be added to your Survey Site data the next time you enter survey results. Click the button and follow the prompts.

The data in Table 1 (below) indicates a decrease in the number of species and individuals recorded at each of the sites, but these figures are influenced by the wider range of sites being surveyed and cannot be attributed to the fires directly.

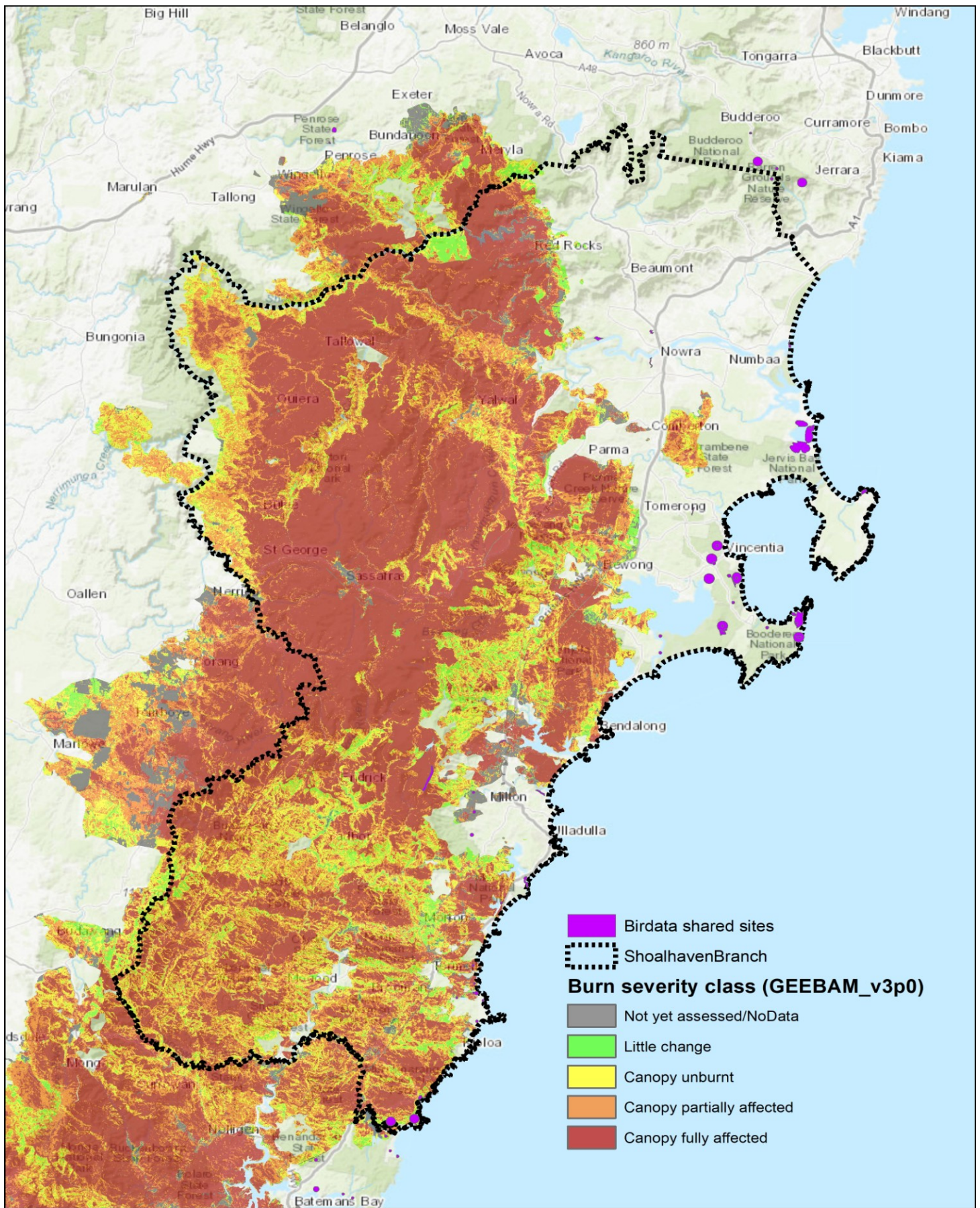
### Endangered birds

Australian Government bushfire recovery package for wildlife and their habitat published a provisional list of animals requiring urgent management intervention. This list included 13 bird species. Eight of the 13 have been recorded in the Shoalhaven and so will have been impacted by the extensive fires.



### Status under review subject to post fire data

Some of these birds have not been recorded in the Shoalhaven in 20 minute/2 Ha surveys on Birdata for a number of years, but are more usually seen as incidental sightings. We encourage birders to log incidental sightings of these endangered species and other rare visitors as an important part of the BRP.



For further information or feedback  
please contact [stephanie.todd@birdlife.org.au](mailto:stephanie.todd@birdlife.org.au)



## Covid 19 and birding

Continuing birding and surveys during the pandemic presents an unprecedented dilemma. The situation is dynamic and I am sure that advice will change frequently.

Given the current lockdown situation, BirdLife Shoalhaven is not qualified to offer any recommendations about the personal birding activities of individual members and would not encourage people to travel any great distance to collect data for the Bushfire Research Project.

If you are conducting bird surveys and it is at a site where you usually exercise, you might be able to continue to do so without transgressing guidelines - but that will be your personal choice.

## Contact

We have prepared a more detailed introduction to the project with advice on setting up survey sites and logging surveys in Birdata.

If you would like copies of these documents, or if you have any questions about the Bushfire Research Project or are in a position to survey sites at or around your homes, you can contact me at [brp@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:brp@birdlifeshoalhaven.org)

Table 2: provisional list of animals requiring urgent management intervention

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status		Last recording Birdata Shoalhaven
Western Ground Parrot	<i>Pezoporus wallicus flaviventris</i>	Critically Endangered	WA	
Kangaroo Island Glossy Black-Cockatoo	<i>Calyptorhynchus lathami halmaturinus</i>	Endangered	SA	
Rufous Scrub-bird	<i>Atrichornis rufescens</i>	Endangered	NSW Qld	
Regent Honeyeater	<i>Anthochaera phrygia</i>	Critically Endangered	ACT NSW Qld SA Vic	September 2018
Eastern Bristlebird	<i>Dasyornis brachypterus</i>	Endangered	NSW Qld Vic	April 2020
Albert's Lyrebird	<i>Menura alberti</i>	*	NSW Qld	
Mainland Ground Parrot	<i>Pezoporus wallicus wallicus</i>	*	NSW Qld Vic	August 2018
Bassian Thrush (South Australian), Western Bassian Thrush	<i>Zoothera lunulata halmaturina</i>	Vulnerable	SA	
Black-faced Monarch	<i>Monarcha melanopsis</i>	Migratory	NSW Qld Vic	February 2020
<b>Species that are provisionally included as high priority whilst more information is gathered</b>				
Rockwarbler	<i>Orioma solitaria</i>	*	NSW	March 20
Pilotbird	<i>Pycnoptilus floccosus</i>	*	ACT NSW Vic	October 2017
Superb Lyrebird	<i>Menura novaehollandiae</i>	*	ACT NSW Qld Vic	March 2020
Red-browed Treecreeper	<i>Climacteris erythroptis</i>	*	ACT NSW Qld Vic	October 2018

- Status under review subject to post fire data

## Beach Wardens of the Shoalhaven \*\*

- by Jessica Sharp, NSW SOS\* Project Officer

You may have noticed a couple of fresh faces around your local birding areas this Summer. Decked out in shirts reading 'Ask me anything about birds' and armed with binoculars, a scope, camera and bags of educational material, Nathan Browne and Simon Lee set out to conduct shorebird counts and educate visitors on the amazing journeys and vulnerability of migratory species that frequent Shoalhaven Heads and Lake Wollumboola.



Columbian tourists who were observed lifting up temporary fencing to enter a Pied Oystercatcher nesting site later spent over half an hour with the wardens learning about the species that frequent the site. The tourist is in the middle!

This is the second time these 'beach wardens' have patrolled critical shorebird regions as part of the Saving Our Species Program, the NSW Government's flagship threatened species initiative. The idea? To increase awareness of the birds over the busy summertime period and to help reduce human disturbance on key roosting and foraging sites.



Critically Endangered Eastern Curlews

The numbers of people frequenting the estuaries, lakes and beaches in the Shoalhaven more than doubles over Summer as visitors flock to the places that make this part of the world so special. This puts significant pressure on a whole host of shorebirds, from fleeting migratory visitors who've flown from the other side of the world to permanent shorebird residents that are just as local as we are. Many of these birds tenuously teeter between different categories of 'threatened' under both NSW and Federal listings.

This project was adopted to complement existing efforts of the long-established NPWS South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program (SRP), which sees dedicated volunteers managing threats to nesting shorebirds at these sites.



Tourists investigating the birds at Lake Wollumboola - one of the many challenges facing the shorebirds - and the wardens - during peak season

The wardens, who are recent graduates from the University of Wollongong, educated both locals and tourists on the miraculous feats and terrible plights of migratory species, arming visitors from all corners of the globe with this important knowledge.

Of course, this year was far from a 'normal' summer for those on the South Coast of New South Wales.

With the fires that ripped through surrounding areas in late December and early January and the flood event that followed, the numbers of tourists descending onto the beaches and coastal areas fluctuated significantly. However, despite these challenges, the overall response from everyone who engaged with our wardens was extremely positive.

As Simon and Nathan went about enlightening people about the birds, they themselves learned more and more about the characters, habits and behavioural patterns in a host of avian (and non-avian) species – including the visiting homo sapiens!

\* SOS = Saving Our Species  
\*\* Original title was "Oh Sure Bird"  
\*\*\* All photos credited to Nathan Browne



Our wardens will be on the beaches for the 2020/2021 nesting season, so keep an eye out for their funny T-shirts, come say hi and have a nerd-out about the birds that are out and about!



Bar-tailed Godwits foraging. Bar-tailed Godwit populations have declined about 75% in the Shoalhaven River estuary since the 1970-1990 period but at summer peak are in the 200-300 bird range.



A flagged Pied Oystercatcher on the shoreline



Migratory Shorebirds signage trialed as part of the project to try and raise awareness about the bird's presence on the beach and to encourage the public to keep a responsible distance while observing them.



Simon's set up for the day

## Interview - Cathy Law & Perrie Croshaw

- by Perrie Croshaw and Cathy Law



It was a road bypass that prompted Cathy Law and Perrie Croshaw to launch the Bird Haven Festival in 2018. Shoalhaven Heads had suffered as a result of the Gerringong to Berry bypass and was calling out for help to stimulate business in that region.

Cathy lives at Shoalhaven Heads and Perrie in Gerroa, at the other end of Seven Mile Beach.

During a workshop on How to Run a Festival, Cathy sidled up to Perrie and said – "Shoalhaven Heads has birds...let's celebrate that!"

Both were greatly concerned by the global extinction crisis. At this time in history, with birds under threat on so many fronts, a Bird Festival was seen as a fun way to increase awareness of birds and their habitat, learn what we can do to help and celebrate the difference birds make in our lives, and to prompt bird lovers to become bird advocates.

Thus, the Bird Haven Festival, which in 2019, its second year, attracted more than 2,000 people from several states to 3-days of talks, walks, dinners, musical events and general revelry all brought together by the love of feathered friends.

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### Cathy Law

**BLS:** Have you always had an interest in the environment?

**CL:** I honestly don't know how people can say they aren't interested in the environment, but obviously some people aren't or the world wouldn't be in the state it is in.

I grew up in North West Queensland, in the dust and heat, so was always aware how harsh but beautiful a landscape could be. The Leichhardt River would be bone dry 95% of the time, but then the floods would come with almighty force to divide the town and fill the near empty dam.

People tempered the heat by planting big trees to shade their backyards, creating their own micro-environments - an oasis for birds, particularly parrots.

Mt Isa is nestled in the Selwyn Ranges, with its rocky hills and ghost gums reminiscent of a Namatjira painting. But plonked right in town, only 500 metres as the crow flies from our place, was an enormous industrial smelting complex along the lines of Port Kembla in its heyday.

My primary school was right opposite the copper smelter, and it was part of our normal day to have to close the doors to keep the sulphur fumes out. Nowadays, there is no way a town of 40,000 people would be built next to any mine, let alone one of that size.



Eventually an enormous stack was built to take the smoke from the lead smelter up to a higher level to dissipate - not that the old timers thought it was necessary.

My Dad always said we were lucky to live so close, as it didn't take so long to get to work. Our house was just across the creek, dubbed Lead Creek, from the school. I shudder to recall how we used to love the look of the rainbow coloured shine on the polluted water, and would drink it regularly...

Our 1,000km drives east to Townsville, sometimes just for a football match, would take us through never-ending plains until we reached the Great Divide and the paradise

of the coast. It seemed another world, teeming with birdlife (including broilgas) and tropical greenery.

I have a very strong memory of a high school biology excursion there in the mid-Seventies (we went by train, which took even longer than by car for reasons of history). Our biology teacher was a very enthusiastic character normally, but he was in 7th heaven being able to explain concepts in the field.

We stayed on Magnetic Island, examining everything from coral to koalas. He took us to the fledgling Marine Biology department at James Cook University where they were studying ways to protect the reef from the Crown of Thorns starfish (now the least of its worries).

While my eyes were being opened to the wonders of nature, I was also being brought up in the Joh Bjelke-Petersen era where anyone looking to protect the environment or heritage was derided. "Progress at any cost" and "don't you worry about that" were the mantras.

Going to university to study economics and government (not biology), my world view widened and I had my first foray into activism as we fought to retain the right to protest.

That early lesson (I was only 18 when I graduated, but that is another story) that people in power don't necessarily consider all the factors when making decisions has held me in good stead over the years. Money plays too big a role in deciding the future of our country and the world.

The courageous decision by Hawke not to dam the Franklin River remains an anomaly. If someone wants to spend money and employ people (to make more money for themselves) then the cost in environmental terms is still heavily discounted in importance.

Slowly, the tide is turning. Hopefully not too late. To too many people, 'greenie' is still a derogatory word rather than a badge of honour.

**BLS:** So how did your interest in birds happen?

**CL:** Show me someone who doesn't admire birds and I'll show you someone without a soul. Much to the surprise of people I spoke to at the Bird Haven Festival, I'm still not a very active birder. It was quite stressful trying to hide this fact from Sean Dooley and Tim Lowe when they stayed at my place during the Festival. I'd suddenly have a reason to leave the conversation when things got technical, and got funny looks when I'd talk in generalities about things they are used to being very specific about. I think they guessed ...

I'm just not the sort of person who loves the minutiae of classification. I am a bird lover, just more in the abstract. And it is people like me that you need to draw into your fold (or should I say flock) to create a wider support base

of bird activists. That is what we are trying to do with the Festival, by combining expert talks with art, music and fun. Rather than preaching to the converted, it is a joyous way of making people appreciate how much they love birds being in their lives.

I love watching birds fly and am overwhelmed by the works of art they have inspired. Birds are an enduring motif throughout civilizations around the world, and I've done my small part by making my cockatoo dress. People have literally stopped me in the street to tell me they love it (see image on previous page).

Living in Shoalhaven Heads, birds are a constant in my life. The abundant birdlife is a source of joy, even if I don't know exactly what I'm looking at. I hate to think that my yet-to-be-born grandchildren might only know about them through books and other media.

**BLS:** How did you get involved with BirdLife Shoalhaven?

**CL:** When Perrie and I came up with the concept of the Bird Haven Festival, we knew immediately we had to get the backing of people who actually knew about birds. We are very grateful for Birdlife Shoalhaven taking a leap of faith and supporting us in our left field idea. We had to keep stressing it wasn't your normal ornithological conference, but a celebration of the beauty and wonder of birds which was accessible to people like us. Last year proved what was possible.

**BLS:** What is your favourite bird?

**CL:** I'm sorry it isn't more unusual, but I just love kookaburras. Nothing is better than hearing a dawn chorus, or just a good old laugh-in during the day. I also love how wise they look when not laughing. One often sits on the fence outside my study, and he always gives me a sense of calm.



Photo by Charles Dove



## Perrie Croshaw

**BLS:** Have you always had an interest in the environment?

**PC:** I grew up in the suburbs of Sydney, and always took fresh air and open spaces for granted. We spent weekends with relatives either in Berry or Mittagong and we always seemed to be in the bush, walking, camping, fishing or generally hanging out. While we weren't a birder family, we certainly knew all our local birds. Again, we took them all for granted during the sixties.

I was a bit of a surfer girl in my youth and loved the beach, the gulls, the sea eagles, the albatross. A school excursion to the Gerroa rock platform to see fossils was a seminal part of my high school experience. On my subsequent world travels, I sought out more fossils, especially the ones at Lyme Bay in East Devon – the first natural World Heritage site.



I studied journalism at uni and in my twenties ended up in London working for the Financial Times. I truly revelled in the British love for nature, spending all my time off rambling across the countryside – picture a Jane Austen movie! I was a keen gardener, studied at Kew Gardens, and it wasn't long before we moved to the countryside so

that I could live out my gardening passion. In my thirties I had children and gardened in Norfolk. We chose Norfolk to live in as it was one of the few English counties to retain hedgerows. Elsewhere in the UK the hedgerows had been scrubbed up to give way to larger fields which could be farmed with combine harvesters.



I find the British love for nature such a delight. On a recent trip back to London to visit my oldest son, I found myself sitting in a café in Bloomsbury (not a terribly smart café) and there was a businessman in a very fashionable suit eating a wrap at the next table. He had his phone in hand and was intently watching something – maybe a training video, marketing tips or the latest investment news? But no, as he turned away from me, I could see that he was intently watching the BBC's latest episode of Springwatch about badgers in the Cairngorms National Park.

**BLS:** So how did your interest in birds happen?

**PC:** Our Norfolk 5 acres, called The Garden of Eden, had been between the wars a pleasure garden and apple orchard producing Eden brand cider. Our home was originally a tearoom. Locals would cycle there, eat scones and tea on the terrace, then wander through the orchard to pick roses.

The garden was organic and after restoring some of it, I would hold open days to raise money for the Soil Association.

A friend was the tree warden in Kenninghall and she explained to me the importance of hedgerows as a habitat for small birds who could control the insects. We had hedgerows in this part of Norfolk that dated back to Saxon

times. During this time, I was Secretary of the South Norfolk Friends of the Earth. We spent weekends in Diss, our local market town, doing days of action, either demonstrating how to reduce, reuse and recycle or marching to End Third World debt and stop deforestation in the Amazon. It was a wonderful period of my life when I was totally immersed in nature.

**BLS:** How did you get involved with BirdLife Shoalhaven?

**PC:** I knew about Birdlife Australia, then when doing research for our Festival was really pleased to see such an active local group.

I continue to be amazed by the dedication and time Birdlife Shoalhaven members devote to the protection of our local birdlife.

**BLS:** What is your favourite bird?

**PC:** It changes every few months! I've always been in love with Blue Wrens as they remind me of the Blue Tits that lived in my hedgerows in England.



Sadly, Bird Haven Festival 2020 has been cancelled due to this year's pandemic. But we are determined to get a festival happening in 2021, even if we have to do it virtually!

It takes a village to make a festival, so we ask all Birdlife Shoalhaven members to let us know what they would like to see, do and hear at the next festival. All help and ideas are gratefully appreciated, and you can send them to us at [twobirds@birdhavenfestival.com.au](mailto:twobirds@birdhavenfestival.com.au)



Last year I took a trip up to the Noosa Everglades and thought I'd died and gone to heaven when I spotted a Sacred Kingfisher sitting on a branch staring at me as I kayaked past. Of course, I didn't have a camera. We just looked at each other, both quite shocked. It was amazing!

This month, the birds that share my space are the Conspiracy of Ravens that live in the trees behind my house. Their call is so eerie. I think they are waiting for me to fall over in my back yard so they can come and peck out my eyes!



**BIRD HAVEN**  
**2021**  
**VIRTUAL**  
**FESTIVAL**  
**SHOALHAVEN HEADS**



## Web Watch

- by Chris Grounds

### Threat from Weak Environmental Laws

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2020-02-16/bushfire-wildlife-extinction-offsets/9622980?>



This summer, bushfires have wiped out an estimated one billion animals (and that's a cautious estimate). But devastating losses of wildlife and wilderness were already happening before the season began. Australia has one of the highest rates of extinction of any country in the world. And the key policy that is supposed to minimise the harm — *environmental offsets* — isn't working, experts warn.

Since 2011, the impacts from significant environmentally damaging activities in Australia have been required to be offset. The Federal Government defines an offset as: "An activity undertaken to counterbalance a significant residual impact of a prescribed activity on a prescribed environmental matter."

What that means in plain terms is that when you destroy the habitat of a threatened plant or animal, you need to compensate somewhere else.

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### Gouldian finch populations struggle in WA

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-19/gouldian-finch-populations-struggle-in-wa-far-north/11972256>



The rainbow-coloured Gouldian finch was once found across northern Australia but it is now thought there are fewer than 2,500 birds left in the wild. Key points: A dire wet season in 2018-19 has had a serious impact on many bird species, including the Gouldian finch; It is believed there are fewer than 2,500 of the tiny jewel-like birds left in the wild and Volunteers travel from as far as the UK and US to help track the birds

In Western Australia's East Kimberley region, lower than average rainfall during the wet season and deliberately lit fires are having a serious impact on endangered species.

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### Seabirds rescued after wild weather pushes them inland

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-13/seabirds-rescued-after-wild-weather-pushes-them-far-inland/11957734>



Wild weather off Australia's east coast has pushed seabirds hundreds of kilometres inland, with some rescued at Canberra and on NSW's Southern and Central tablelands.

A number of the seabirds were found exhausted and underweight; some have since died. It's hoped they will eventually be released back out to sea, certainly not until Cyclone Uesi has had its time impacting the east coast and there's also been another rare sighting of a Bulwer's petrel, which don't usually venture too far from the equator.

Mick Roderick from Birdlife Australia said it was not unusual for rough weather to knock birds off course, but the latest weather system had resulted in some very rare sightings. "Even before the wild weather, we saw a lot of sooty terns close to the coast, which is unusual - there may be something going on with their food source," he said.

"But then the east coast low hit during the week and that has absolutely sent a lot of these seabirds off course."

### Edible-nest swiftlet sighting first time sighting

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-12/birds-nest-soup-bird-blown-to-australia/11953830>



A researcher says he has photographed two types of Asian swiftlets for the first time in Australia after they blew in on the winds of Tropical Cyclone Damien. The edible-nest swiftlet and the Himalayan swiftlet are believed to have been photographed in Australia for the first time. The two species are thought to have been blown from Asia by the developing tropical cyclone Damien. The species can be hard to distinguish from other species of swiftlet, so photos have to be high quality. University of Queensland bird researcher Nigel Jackett said he snapped the edible-nest swiftlet and the Himalayan swiftlet over Broome as the cyclone was strengthening off Western Australia's Kimberley coast.

### Bulwer's petrel found at Cronulla RSL

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-20/buggerlugs-the-bulwers-petrel-released-off-darwin/11975440>



A rare bird normally found in the central Pacific, which lost its way and ended up on a pub balcony in Sydney, has been released back into its natural habitat.

A rarely seen Bulwer's petrel, usually found in the central Pacific, blew way off course and ended up in Cronulla in NSW. After spending a week recovering, the bird — nicknamed Buggerlugs — was flown to Darwin and released. An ornithologist involved in Buggerlugs' release says letting him go in New South Wales would have been "like releasing it in the desert".

In the first officially recorded appearance of a live Bulwer's petrel in Australia, the bird nicknamed Buggerlugs, is thought to have been blown south by adverse weather. He may even be an undiscovered species. He was found on the balcony of the Cronulla RSL, and later dug in his claws when two attempts were made by well-meaning wildlife carers to release him onto the chilly waters off Sydney.

### Buildings kill millions of birds

<https://theconversation.com/buildings-kill-millions-of-birds-heres-how-to-reduce-the-toll-130695>



As high-rise cities grow upwards and outwards, increasing numbers of birds die by crashing into glass buildings each year. Many others break beaks, wings and legs or suffer other physical harm. We can help eradicate the danger by good design. Most research into building-related bird deaths has been done in the U.S. and Canada, where cities such as Toronto and New York City are located on bird migration paths. In New York City alone, the death toll from flying into buildings is about 200,000 birds a year.

Across the US and Canada, bird populations have shrunk by about 3 billion since 1970. The causes include loss of habitat and urbanization, pesticides and the effects of global warming, which reduces food sources. An estimated 365 million to 1 billion birds die each year from "unnatural" causes like building collisions in the US. The greatest bird killer in the US remains the estimated 60-100 million free-range cats that kill up to 4 billion birds a year. Australia is thought to have up to 6 million feral cats.

### 113 Aussie native species needing urgent help after fires

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-12/113-native-animals-in-urgent-need-of-help-after-bushfires/11956016?>



More than 100 native species are in urgent need of help after this summer's bushfires, a panel of experts has reported to the Federal Government. The report identifies 113 species which have had at least 30 per cent of their range burnt. The list includes 13 birds. The panel was asked to provide scientific advice to help salvage what animal populations have survived the recent blazes. It found there have been no extinctions as a result of the most recent bushfires so far. But it warned urgent action was needed.

Among those at the top of its list for help were the Kangaroo Island Glossy Black Cockatoo, the Western Ground Parrot, and the Rufous Scrub-bird (especially the southern subspecies).

"There have been some species that were not previously listed as threatened, that were not in peril before the fires, but it looks like they might have been quite severely impacted," Dr Box said.

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### Hoodie Chicks survive after the Fire



<http://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/6384999/hoodies-in-the-mallacoota-hood-awareness-of-vulnerable-beach-birds-plight-grows/?cs>

"A couple of days after the New Year's Eve fire in Mallacoota, birds of all kinds began to wash up on the beaches. I'm so glad I wasn't here to see that. On the morning of Saturday 1 February I went for my first beach walk with my friend Jenny.

"We walked through the charred remains of bushland that surrounded Betka Beach ... through evidence of heat so intense that it split and sliced rocks as neatly as any machine ... and down on the beach we discovered a tiny miracle - two tiny miracles in fact - running gaily about on the beach with their parents - two Hooded Plover chicks, perhaps a couple of weeks old!"

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### India now plans to protect its endangered birds

<https://qz.com/india/1799776/modi-government-proposes-plan-to-protect-endangered-indian-birds/>



On Feb. 4, images of a rare oriental darter struggling to free its beak from a piece of plastic went viral. The incident was reported from Palwal in Haryana which, according to the news report, has lost more than half of its wetlands in 30 years (1970s-2000) due to land-use change like agricultural expansion. In June 2018, in a wetland just outside Delhi, a black-necked stork had its beak sealed with a plastic ring around it. Its photo had gone viral. The bird was later rescued after extensive efforts by forest authorities.

Now, a 10-year plan proposed by the Indian government hopes to help in the conservation of birds and their habitats in India. The plan proposes a series of short, medium, and long-term plans to protect endangered and rare species of birds, start species recovery programs of critically endangered ones, protect birds in urban areas, protect their habitats from turning into wastelands and conserve wetlands and coastal areas that are frequented by birds.

## Wonderchicken: oldest fossil of modern bird discovered

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/wonderchicken-oldest-fossil-of-modern-bird-discovered?>



Experts have discovered a fossil of the world's oldest known modern bird – a diminutive creature about half the size of a mallard duck.

Dubbed the Wonderchicken, the remains were found in rocks dating to about 66.8m to 66.7m years ago, revealing that the bird was active shortly before the asteroid strike that wiped out the dinosaurs 66m years ago.

"This is the oldest evidence of modern birds that we have so far," said Dr Daniel Field of the University of Cambridge, an avian palaeontologist and co-author of the research.

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## Endangered Asian fairy pitta overshoots migration route

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-12/australian-cat-kills-endangered-asian-bird/10799464>



The second-known sighting of an Asian fairy pitta in Australia has ended "tragically" with the endangered bird overshooting its migration route and hitting a bar window in Broome before being killed by a predator, with bird-lovers saying a cat is the likely culprit. Bruce Greatwich, a conservation coordinator in Broome for the Western Australia Parks and Wildlife Service, said it was a sad end to what had been a pretty rough time for the bird in the north-west West Australian town of Broome.

"It's really symbolic of the threats all of our native species face every day in Australia," Mr Greatwich said. The colourful Asian bird was found unconscious outside a Broome bar last week. It was thought to have crashed into one of the bar's windows, temporarily stunning itself.

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## Flight Lines: the heroic story of two migratory shorebirds

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/22/flight-lines-the-heroic-story-of-two-grey-plovers-and-the-man-who-followed-them>



Nearly 20 years ago, in pursuit of a different sort of life, I spent six months commuting between Brisbane and Robbins Island, a remote chunk of privately owned land just off the far north-west coast of Tasmania. My job at the time was identifying and counting birds as part of an environmental impact assessment for a proposed windfarm.

Now the windfarm proposal is back on, and Andrew Darby – a Hobart-based journalist and the author of a new book, *Flight Lines* – has been helping survey birds on the island again. In 2015–2016, the curlew sandpiper, great knot and the local subspecies of bar-tailed godwit were all listed as critically endangered. Last year's counts turned up just one grey plover.

## Endangered N Z seabirds crash landing in fog

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/20/taxi-endangered-new-zealand-seabirds-get-a-lift-to-safety-after-crash-landing-in-fog?>



Local cabbie Toni Painting leads a volunteer army that scours the streets of the South Island town of Kaikoura NZ in the middle of the night in search of Hutton's shearwater chicks that crash-land onto the road – mistaking the shiny bitumen for the sea. Painting was the first to spot the seabird chicks dazed and confused around town on foggy nights five years ago. Now she patrols each evening in fledgling season, collecting the wayward birds and delivering them to a nearby rehabilitation centre, who then take them out to sea.

Hutton's shearwater are the only seabird in the world that nests and raises its young in the mountains, at heights around 1200m. Since the 1960s their breeding colonies have reduced from eight to two, classifying them for "endangered" status by the Department of Conservation.

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## Jarlajirpi – the Australian Owlet-Nightjar

<https://blogs.crikey.com.au/northern/2009/02/02/bird-of-the-week-jarlajirpi-the-australian-owlet-nightjar/>



The Australian Owlet-Nightjar, *Aegotheles cristatus*, is the only member of the family Aegothelidae (Order: Apodiformes) found in Australia and is a common, though rarely seen, bird across the country.

And, while in the European imagination at least, the Owlet-nightjar is one of those ineffably cute small creatures that makes it an easy thing to love – even if you have never seen one – for the Warlpiri people living here at Yuendumu the Owlet-nightjar has an entirely different set of cultural meanings.

Rather than the cute and cuddly small bird of the popular European Australian imagination, for the Warlpiri, and many other central Australian language groups, the Owlet-nightjar is a *familiar spirit* of the Kurdaitcha man – part mercenary contract killer, part quasi-judicial executioner.

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## Gardeners to face backyard blitz on netting

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-14/gardeners-to-face-backyard-blitz-on-netting/11510416?>



Backyard gardeners could face fines of almost \$2,500 if they are not careful when covering their fruit trees with nets.

In an Australian-first, the Victorian Government wants to legislate the colour and size of any netting used to protect household fruit trees and veggie patches.

Anyone found selling or advertising netting that does not meet the state's regulations could also face a maximum penalty of almost \$2,500. Draft Prevention of Cruelty to Animals laws propose all household fruit netting: "must have mesh size of 5mm or less at full stretch, be white in colour, and have a strand diameter of no less than 500 microns".

The Government said the new laws would help protect wildlife, and authorised officers would be given powers to investigate any reports of illegal netting.

## Why is conservation failing?

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/18/losing-species-shocking-rates-why-conservation-failing>



Faced with stark evidence of nature's precipitous decline, scientists, researchers, philosophers, anthropologists and conservationists have come together to ask why conservation is failing, and to call for an urgent re-think of how the natural world should be protected.

What is conservation getting wrong? Top of the list were capitalism and neo-liberal policies that encourage the over-consumption of resources; the financial starvation of nature protection by governments; global trade; subsidies for energy industries, and a licence for agriculture and mining to expand into even the remotest places.

But identifying the cultural reasons for conservation's abject failure to stem the tide of nature's losses also emerged. These ranged from media disinterest in anything other than a few animals, conservationists' narrowness and out-of-date attitudes, and scientists' reluctance to shout. "Mainstream conservation's historic focus on rare species, "hotspots" and numbers is part of the problem", said Cambridge University Professor Bill Adams. "Charismatic species dominate conservation imagination. Birds and mammals grab the headlines, followed by unusual reptiles and amphibians. The occasional plant features, and sometimes a flamboyant insect. But for lower forms of life essential to making the ecosystem function ... there is rarely public attention," he said.

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## Tweets going viral

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/aug/03/tweets-going-viral-birds-can-learn-second-language-from-peers>



Birds can learn a second language by listening to the tweets and chirps of other birds, helping them to find out when a predator is approaching, scientists have found.

The fairy wren, a small Australian songbird, is not born knowing the "languages" of other birds. But it can master the meaning of a few key "words", as scientists explained in a paper published in the journal *Current Biology*. "We knew before that some animals can translate the meanings of other species' 'foreign languages,' but we did not know how that 'language learning' came about," said Andrew Radford, a biologist at the University of Bristol and co-author of the study.

Birds have several ways of acquiring life skills. Some knowledge is innate and some is acquired from direct experience. Radford and other scientists are exploring a third kind of knowledge: acquiring information from peers.

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## Birding at home

BirdLife Australia have recently set up an excellent [Birding at Home](#) web page with lots of fun ideas for things to do and learn while our movements are restricted due to Covid-19. Check out the links below!

You can also get instructions on how to get surveying at home - [About our Surveys](#) - and there is also a short and simple YouTube instruction video on how to sign up to Birddata and do surveys - [Birddata Instruction Video](#).



Tell us what birds are in your backyard

[\(click here\)](#)



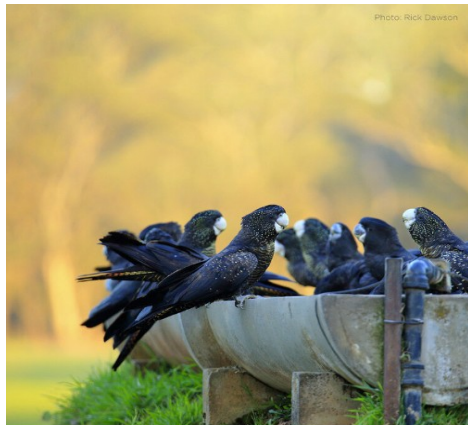
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Keep the kids chirpy!

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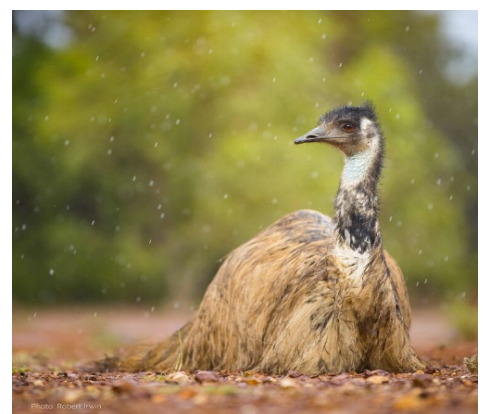
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## Conservation Curiosities

- by Chris Grounds

[Photos by Chris Grounds unless otherwise indicated]

### Wayward Sooty Tern



Photo by Robyn Hill

BLS member Robyn Hill discovered this unusual visitor at the Council Sewerage Treatment Plant in early February 2020. It is a juvenile Sooty Tern that seems to have been blown in by the fierce weather of the time. A Goshawk didn't miss the opportunity! Check web Watch for a few more species turning up in unusual places due to weather.

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### Currambene Interlopers



Currambene Creek always has an interesting array of birds but this pair near the Maritime Museum didn't seem to fit the "native species" catalogue. Maybe they are from the 'Birds in Backyards' catalogue?

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## Back to the Future



Still at the Huski Museum and the NPWS van at the site must be aging. The signage on the van associates it with the "Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW" - climate change recognized in the name of a state government agency - whaaat! Almost sounds progressive! It is about a 2010-11 vintage.

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### Burrill Lake - Lakes Estate Dam



This is a lake created with the development of an urban estate at Burrill Lake, based on storage of discharge in a storm water catchment. The lake is the same type of arrangement as Twin Waters at Worrigeer. It attracts the usual bird species culprits, some a bit special and others nesting (see below). There has been a Little Bittern there in recent times.



It is a good sign when birds will nest in a habitat. The Lakes Estate included a dam on a small catchment in the Estate to create a small lake with a walkway for residents and visitors around the perimeter. Some Little Pied Cormorant settled in there nicely enough to nest in the Melaleuca at the shallow end of the Lake.



The Lakes Estate Dam has also featured a pair of Royal Spoonbills and it has been possible to see these and the Little Pied Cormorants at closer quarters from the walkway around the lake without causing any disturbance.

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#### Unusual Wader Visitor amongst Huskisson locals



An alert to local birders about big numbers of Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers resting on Myola Spit in mid-March brought in that 'Eagle Eye' birdo, Stan Brown. Trust Stan – he spotted a small solo wader – identified as a Short-tailed Sandpiper, which was a very unusual sighting and probably a first for that site. Hope it made the Birdata App.

A couple of end-on-end observations of birds on the Myola Spit at the entrance to Currambene Creek at Huskisson in mid-March spoke to the conservation interests at the site. The first produced a good count of Oystercatchers but the second resulted in a big count of 32 Oystercatchers, 18 Pies and 14 Sootys.

They seemed to favour a higher tide and were happy in a crowd of other usual residents such as Pelicans and Crested Terns.



Myola Spit is a spectacular resting place for various waders and shorebirds at particular times. There is a long history of disturbance from walkers and walkers with dogs on the site, especially at weekends and holidays, despite the area being a Dog Prohibited Zone 24/7/365.

It has been the contention of BLS for some years that this is a very important refuge for such birds, a critical sandy resting place and probably the most important such site in Jervis Bay. This point has been to Council on many occasions with a view to better supervision of tourists with dogs at the site.

The site also accommodates Eastern Curlew in the warm season. We can now add the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper sighting by Stan Brown at this same time in March.



Of course, Moona Moona is an encouraging second to Myola Spit and has gone one up with the very first ever POC nest which produced two fledglings this breeding season. There is a strong suspicion from photos that the Moona quartet were in the group of POCs at Myola. Moona as an extension of Collinwood Beach is likewise a Dog Prohibited Zone 24/7/365 but you wouldn't know most of the time!

## Flagging an issue for Shorebirds

- by Chris Grounds

Banding and the associated flagging of threatened species shorebirds is considered an issue among many volunteers in the NPWS Shorebird Recovery project.

I cannot and do not present this as an official position but as a volunteer it is a nagging concern of my own and certainly some other volunteers, that a lack of banding-flagging is hindering conservation.

I have come to learn that such banding-flagging is supposedly controversial in NSW but that Victoria is much given to the process, to our great benefit in the Jervis Bay-St Georges Basin group.



I have also come to learn through first-hand experience that the lack of banding-flagging is causing the loss of critical information that would lead to a much better and wider understanding of birds such as the Hooded Plovers and especially Pied Oystercatchers.

The Hooded Plovers on Cave Beach in Booderee NP that I am familiar with are a classic example. Most of the birds involved have had flags.

Flags have enabled clear identification of four varying pairs of breeding adults over five seasons, C7-E6, C7-M9, C7-E6 then finally E6 and an unbanded partner. The latter pair has now disappeared or at least E6 has because, with a flag, it could be identified on other adjacent beaches and hasn't been. Knowing this sequence firstly identifies four changes in partners.



It has also enabled the identification of the second E6-C7 pairing as the most successful breeding combination. The actual nest sites on the beach have also varied with the pairings, especially between C7-M9 and the successful C7-E6 pairing.



The C7 bird was injured in late 2019 but caught and successfully repatriated on Bherwerre Beach after suitable treatment. How do we know that? Because it is banded-flagged and volunteer observations have kept recording its presence. She would be easier to identify with her slight limp but the flagging totally verifies her ongoing story of injury, capture, treatment and recovery though she did not go on to breed.

Is this not critical to the knowledge base required for successful management of these threatened species birds? One would think so.



There has been an historic first time POC nesting in Jervis Bay at Moona Moona which produced two fledglings. This was despite the highly unfavourable people-dog-tourism conditions at the site. As raw numbers, 2 adults, 1 nest, 2 chicks, 2 fledglings - this is the story without banding-flagging. Where did they come from, where have they gone? Who knows?

The 2019-2020 Pied Oystercatcher breeding in Jervis Bay is a second classic but different example. The Booderee nesting pair have produced three fledglings in the last two breeding seasons.



We know it is the same adult male and probably the same adult female in the one pair involved in repeated breeding. How do we know? The adult male is banded and has the Yellow YW flagging.

Enquiry of the Yellow YW flag identified it as a bird banded-flagged at Corner Inlet in Victoria but it, and probably the partner as well, seem to disappear locally in the cool season. How do we know? The bird can be easily identified by the flagging – Yellow YW.

So, is this story of POC migration supported? Of course it is. A POC with a Red 2N flagging turned up in Booderee in 2018-2019 and enquiry determined it was banded-flagged at Westernport in Victoria.

A Red1N flag POC was logged in NZ. No verification of such migration could exist without the flags. If any of these birds had no flagging then all this value-added observation and information would never exist.

### **The Conservation Battle is being Lost**

The 2019-2020 Hooded Plover season in the Shoalhaven of this critically endangered bird has been far from encouraging and perhaps a lot worse, what might be called a Nett -4.



Keep in mind that this little plover is the Shoalhaven's one endemic critically endangered species of the sixty one threatened species of the region.

Indeed, with no wish to dramatise the situation, it is worth considering if there has been a geographically specific 'collapse'.

The most northerly breeding pair on Cave Beach-Booderee, E6 and partner, lost their 3.5 week old chicks from their first nest before the fires.

The E6 bird has been one of the most successful breeding Hoodies, producing two fledglings in 2018-19 with an old partner C7. The two chicks were very healthy and robust – were!



The disaster is that this adult pair subsequently disappeared, have not been seen for many months, and haven't occurred in any observations on other nearby beaches. It appears that both chicks and adults have been lost. This is a worst-case scenario. Nett -4.

On Bherwerre Beach in Booderee there were varying numbers of Hoodies logged from early September varying from 2 to 7 but never any nests nor eggs. Net 0.



At Sussex Inlet one pair of adult Hoodies were observed and logged on one occasion but seem to have been visiting from Bherwerre. That site is essentially a Pied Oystercatcher breeding site. Nett 0.

Cudmirrah Beach, the focus of a successful conservation campaign by local volunteer Mike Clear with BLS in 2018 with Shoalhaven Council, had not produced nesting Hoodies for a few years but, to great joy, produced a three egg nest to one pair - but it only survived for one week with the adults disappearing.

The three egg nest was logged on December 13 but a week later was gone and the birds abandoned the beach by Christmas Day. Nett 0.

Berrara Beach had two or three adult Hoodies logged at various times but there was no nesting. Two adults were flagged as N2 and D6. Nett 0.



Adult birds were logged on Monument Beach but there were no nests. Nett 0.

At Inyadda the scene held more promise but was ultimately just as disappointing. In early September a one egg nest to K9 and L3 didn't survive a week. Later in September a two egg nest was lost by early October. Later in October a three egg nest came and went by mid-November and 1 chick was logged by late November but there were no further observations. Net -1.



The reconciliation for the 2019-2020 season a Nett -5.

This is the "WHAT" based on volunteers observations and data base records for the Shorebird Recovery Project with the NPWS.

Our minds turn to "WHY?" Discuss in 1000 words or less!

Of course the bushfires certainly come into calculations though the bulk of failure and losses described above were before mid-December and the onset of the fires. Under that circumstance, the fires may have been responsible for causing nesting to basically cease when it would have normally continued. Perhaps.

The Mallacoota scenario in a ravaging fire zone produced a remarkable 3 chicks on Betka Beach.

Loss of nests, eggs and chicks is part of the Hoodie scene but the loss and inactivity of adults adds another factor.

Is this what the 'critically endangered' looks like? The 2015 and 2016 breeding seasons were reported as very unsuccessful. These were years of destructive East Coast Lows. On February 8<sup>th</sup> the Shoalhaven experienced what BOM described as "a coastal low pressure trough with an embedded east coast low".

The 2019-2020 breeding from September to March has seen a sequence of natural extremes - drought, bushfire and East Coast Low. 'How much can a koala bear?' To your 1000 words you might add the human influence.

**What would be the value of this data without so many of the Hoodies being banded-flagged?**

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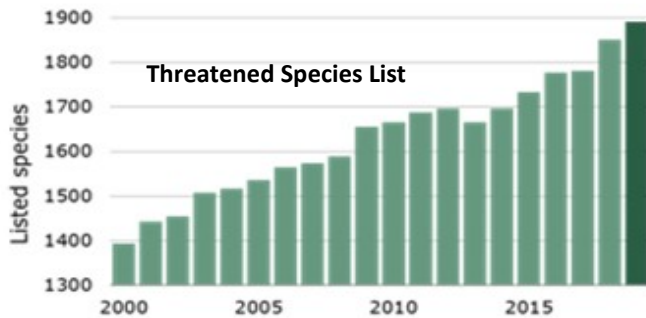
## Late Breaking Web Watch

### Biodiversity Report Card : FAIL

<https://www.wenfo.org/aer/biodiversity/>

A national report on the state of the Australian environment produced by the ANU notes "**Biodiversity continued to decline, with fire, drought and heat all impacting on ecosystems**".

Another 40 species were added to Threatened Species List, representing a 2% increase from the previous year and a 36% increase from 2000. A total of 1890 species is now listed. Conservation advice has been issued for 97% and recovery plans for 41% of species.



Nine species were down-listed, 33 added, seven up-listed and two declared extinct: the Bramble Cay Melomys (below) and the WA flower Myriocephalus nudus. The total number of species declared extinct rose to 91. Half of the six species extinctions recognised since 2000 occurred in the last two years. Arid zone bird species such as the Crimson Chat migrated towards the Victorian coast in response to inland drought.



Crimson Chat - a nomadic desert species observed migrating from its arid inland range

## The Fine Print

**Contributions** - any bird photographs, articles, conservation issues, birding experiences, anecdotes or sightings that you would like to share with fellow members, please send to the editor (Brett Davis) at [communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org](mailto:communications@birdlifeshoalhaven.org)

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**Apologies** to contributors and sources who have inadvertently not been acknowledged. Please let us know of our oversight and we will issue a formal apology in the next magazine.

**Acknowledgement** - BirdLife Shoalhaven acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the Shoalhaven, their care of country, birds and habitat, and pays respects to all Elders.

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