

Newsletter 138 March 2006

Description

Dear Friends

It may be autumn but the summer heat remains and the chances of rain seem remote at present. The warm weather did not deter a willing band of fourteen members to assist with the nest box work. Five boxes were replaced on the Donchi Hill block. Twenty boxes have been erected so far, with another eight scheduled for placement at the April meeting. Bruce Quin sends his thanks to Friends for this valuable work.

All the nest box sites have now been GPSed and this will make locating them for checking quicker and easier. We look forward to recording the first evidence of use. In locations where there is a single box showing good evidence of use we plan to erect an extra box close by.

Lunch at Valley No 1 was the usual friendly occasion. Telescope up at the water's edge for constant observation of the passing waterbirds enabled everyone to have good views of a Great Egret and Royal Spoonbill resplendent in their breeding plumage. Pelicans, Latham's Snipe, Cormorants, White-faced Heron, Chestnut Teal and a Darter were among the other 21 species listed.

The bird list at Valley No 2 was difficult to record as there was so much movement on the water and the birds were quite distant. However 24 species were recorded including 57 Pink-eared Ducks including young, 10 Black-tailed Native Hens, 10 Great Cormorants, 14 Little Blacks and 4 Little Pies. The old dead trees standing in the water at the southern end of the dam are favourite nesting spots for the cormorants and when nesting is in full swing the trees look like high rise flats!

It is interesting to contrast the shorelines of these two dams with the shoreline at the Great Southern Swamp where there have been countless dotterels, sandpipers, stilts, White-fronted Chats and snipe (yes, those snipe!) probing the shallows for the abundant food. Only 4 Black-fronted Dotterels were seen at Valley No 2

Back on the swamp of the year the water levels are now about 30% of the January levels and consequently the birdlife has been reduced. Recent arrivals have been the Marsh Sandpipers and White-fronted Chats. Notable absentees as the submerged reeds/grass beds dried out are Great Egrets and White-necked Herons, all the crakes and Whiskered Terns and finally the Painted Snipe. The latter have drawn all and sundry from far and wide with telescopes, cameras, videos and the humble binoculars making this a most memorable summer of wetland watching. I wonder what 2006/7 will bring?

One thinks of Black-winged Stilts as peaceful birds but judging by the behaviour Mark and I witnessed at the swamp this may be from true. Twice we saw aggressive behaviour, first towards a Black-fronted Dotterel and secondly and repeatedly towards a Marsh Sandpiper. Each time the sandpiper came within 2 metres of the stilt it was vigorously chased until it was forced to fly off.

Our day closed with a quick trip to the swamp to see if we could find the snipe for a couple of people still in need. We failed. The last one recorded by our group was on Thursday, March 9th and it was hard to find.

Around the Park

Things have been fairly quiet. The usual forest birds are about, seemingly in reduced numbers. The most rewarding dam for sitting at has been Lappinâ??s Dam in the Donchi Hill block. Many people have raised concerns about the lack of bee-eaters in the area. Now is the time when they are usually apparent and vocal as they gather to migrate north but they are only being seen in very small groups of 4-6. In contrast the woodswallows are in hundreds in the early mornings and evenings and they are making the most of the prolifically flowering grey box along the roadsides. The White-browed ones are by far the most numerous.

The first Swift Parrot for the year was recorded at Honeyeater Picnic area on February 13th. Regents are yet to show up!

Box Mistletoe is in heavy flower but like the grey box not attracting many birds.

Projects for this year

Depot Revegetation area: The tree plots will be fenced out and the ground inside covered with newspaper topped with forest mulch from the drains to suppress the capeweed. Hand pulling of Inkweed will continue over the winter and spring and an extra plot of trees will be planted. We also hope to establish some small plots of native grasses.

Chiltern Valley No 2 Dam:

A planting of understorey is planned for the eastern side of the entrance.

Rutherglen Conservation Reserve:

Erection of nest boxes and planting of understorey. Continue to expand the flora and fauna lists. Parks will burn the felled olives when practicable and it will be interesting to see what germinates in the soil post burning.

Rainfall: February 8.6mm over 3 days 2006 Rainfall total: 21.2mm over 10 days.

Annual General Meeting: The meeting has been moved to Saturday September 2nd in order to accommodate the speaker. Andrew Silcocks from Birds Australia will speak on coastal and inland waders . Details closer to the date.

NEXT MEETING SUNDAY APRIL 2NDâ?!.MEET AT CHILTERN POST OFFICE 9.00AM.

Nest boxes again. BYO lunch, chair, binocs, sunscreen, hat etc. Contact: Neville 0260 208 632.

Category

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