

**GLOSSY IBIS**

Scientific Name: *Plegadis falcinellus*  
 Atlas Number: 178

**Description:**

The Glossy Ibis is a small dark Ibis that looks black in the distance. At close quarters the neck is reddish-brown and the body is a bronze-brown with a metallic iridescent sheen on the wings. The distinctive long, curved bill is olive-brown, the facial skin is blue-grey with a bordering white line that extends around the eyes.



The eyes, legs and feet are brown.

**Similar species:**

There are no similar species to the Glossy Ibis. Both the Straw-necked Ibis, *Threskiornis spinicollis*, and the Australian White Ibis, *T. molucca*, are larger and have variable areas of white on their body and wings.

**Distribution:**

The Glossy Ibis frequents swamps and lakes throughout much of the Australian mainland, but is most numerous in the north. It is a non-breeding visitor to Tasmania and the south-west of Western Australia.

**Habitat:**

The Glossy Ibis requires shallow water and mudflats, so is found in well-vegetated wetlands, floodplains, mangroves and rice fields.

**Seasonal movements:**

The Glossy Ibis is both migratory and nomadic. Its range expands inland after good rains, but its main breeding areas seem to be in the Murray-Darling Basin of New South Wales and Victoria, the Macquarie Marshes in New South Wales, and in southern Queensland. Glossy Ibis often move north in autumn, then return south to their main breeding areas in spring and summer.

**Feeding:**

Glossy Ibis feed on frogs, snails, aquatic insects and spiders in damp places. They feed by probing the water and mud with their long, curved bill.

**Breeding:**

The Glossy Ibis builds a platform nest of sticks, usually with a lining of aquatic plants, between the upright branches of trees or shrubs growing in water. Glossy Ibis breed together with other Ibises and other water birds in small colonies.

**Living with us:**

Diversion of water flow into wetlands for irrigation and other purposes disrupts breeding by restricting areas of shallow water. The Macquarie Marshes have suffered greatly in this regard over many years, with the resultant failure of Glossy Ibis to nest there.

Bird species cover text courtesy of <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/>

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**Founded in 1977**

**Club's Aim:**  
 To join together people with a common interest who wish to further their knowledge and enjoyment of the bird life around them.

**ILLAWARRA BIRD OBSERVERS' CLUB INC.**

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## SPECIAL NOTICE FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Fellow IBOC friends,

Please note that the committee has had to take the extraordinary measure of cancelling all meetings, walks and activities until further notice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone, please stay safe, sane and well.

Instead, we would like to issue the following challenges:

### Lockdown list

Keep a list of birds that you see or hear (only if you know the call well/reliably!) on your property\* from now through the end of April and we'll announce the person with the most species and the most unusual sighting later.

\*Two categories with blocks  $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 acre or smaller and also larger blocks.

### Walking Together, Separately

Between now and April 19, visit the location of the midweek walk (Bellambi lagoon) on your own (as long as still permitted and/or advisable by government/health officials) and keep your own list with start/end time and approximate distance walked. The lists will be combined and published in the May newsletter; please feel free to include any anecdotes from your walk for inclusion in the walk report!

Submissions to:

[Email—info@iboc.org.au](mailto:info@iboc.org.au)

Mail---41 Joseph St, Woonona, NSW 2517

## APRIL ACTIVITIES

### CLUB MEETING

**NO MEETING FOR APRIL**

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### MIDWEEK WALK

Suggested Outing for April at Happy Valley Reserve at the end of Dobbie Ave (near corner at Birch Crescent) in Bellambi.

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### MONTHLY OUTING

**NO MONTHLY OUTING FOR APRIL**

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### NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING

**TO BE ADVISED**

Any members with anything they wish to raise are welcome to attend the meeting.

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### Newsletter

**DEADLINE 25<sup>th</sup> May**

For all articles & photos in the next IBOC newsletter PLEASE E-mail contributions:

To Charles Dove [newsletter@iboc.org.au](mailto:newsletter@iboc.org.au)

or post to 1/13 Horrocks Crescent, Kearneys Spring, Toowoomba QLD 4350.

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**WISHING YOU HAPPY BIRDING AND A BIG WELCOME TO ALL NEW MEMBERS**

# Illawarra Bird Observers Club Reports

## Monthly Meeting Report

It looks like Galapagos and Ecuador need to be added to the long list of places to bird. Kara presented interesting information and great photos while David provided technical support and had taken many of the photos. Blue-footed and Red-footed Boobies were impressive and the Magnificent Frigatebird was aptly named. Aracaris, Toucans, Toucanets and Barbets were all pretty good but the Plate-billed Mountain Toucan left them for dead with its incredible colour combination, complete with video. We learned how poetic and diverse the names of Hummingbirds were and that over a third of the world's species can be found in Ecuador. Bills (Sword-billed), tails (Violet-tailed Sylph) and colours were admired. The bright greens, reds, yellows and blues of the birds in general were splendid. It was also very interesting to learn about the nocturnal Swallow-tailed Gull (not to mention a sharp-looking bird!) and the Diurnal Galapagos Short-eared Owl. Having more than twice the number of bird species as Australia, the presentation featured many outstanding birds. A final video featured Turtles, Fish, Sharks, Rays, Seals, Penguins and the famous Marine Iguanas swimming. Thanks to Kara and David for sharing their latest birding adventures with the club.

Ross Gowans

## MONTHLY MID-WEEK WALK REPORT

WEDNESDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH FARMBOURGH HEIGHTS

Terry Edwell

It was a beautiful day for our walk on Wednesday. The undergrowth was all green and everything looked healthy after our "rain event" as it is now called (in other words we had good heavy rain). The road is wide and quite steep especially the first hill but it has some nice views of Lake Illawarra and is well maintained.

The first bird we heard was the very musical Grey Butcherbirds' call echoing through the trees. A Wonga Pigeon was seen hurrying down a side track and lots of Grey Fantails danced around fanning their little tail feathers in and out. There was not a great amount of birds to be seen, no Scrubwrens or Pardalotes they must have been busy elsewhere. We had sightings of Eastern Spinebills and a Yellow-faced Honeyeater along with Silvereyes and Brown Thornbills. A silent Grey Shrike Thrush was spotted high in a gumtree he didn't share his lovely song.

Morning tea was enjoyed sitting on a nice fallen branch while a few of our group walked a little further on just to have a look, then we all started back. It was good to see Betty who walked all the way. Thanks to Ross and Jan for leading the walk while Rupert is recovering from an operation. We wish you all the very best Rupert and hope to see you soon.

Bird List for Farmborough Rd		14 Members	27 Species
Brown Cuckoo-Dove	Satin Bowerbird	Red Wattlebird	Rufous Fantail
Wonga Pigeon	Superb Fairy-wren	Eastern Whipbird	Grey Fantail
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Yellow Thornbill	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Australian Raven
Rainbow Lorikeet	Brown Thornbill	Golden Whistler	Eastern Yellow Robin
Crimson Rosella	Eastern Spinebill	Grey Shrike-thrush	Silvereye
Laughing Kookaburra	Lewin's Honeyeater	Grey Butcherbird	Common Myna
White-throated Treecreeper	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Australian Magpie	

## MONTHLY WEEKEND WALK REPORT

**Saturday 15th March 2020**

*Alan Cousins*

Comerong Island Nature Reserve

6 members met at 9am at the ferry crossing. As the numbers were small, we waited until 9.30am in case there were any late comers. As there were no further attendees, we proceeded very slowly along a very quiet road towards the first car park making

numerous stops along the way to see a good few water birds on the many small dams dotted along the way e.g. Straw-necked Ibis, Australian White Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Intermediate Egret, Wood Duck, Great Cormorant, White-faced Heron etc. we also had the good luck to see a juvenile White-bellied Sea-Eagle flying overhead. We reached the car park at 10.10am and decided to have morning tea as it was a fair time since rising and would also save carrying it. After morning tea, we explored around the car park and track spotting many small birds including an Olive-backed Oriole and Anna called us to see a Noisy Pitta, probably at the southern end of its range. Following this productive stroll, we proceeded along the bush track towards the beach. We took our time and saw many additional species. We arrived at the beach to be met by a very strong wind but we upped our list to include Eastern Curlews, Australian Pied Oystercatchers, Caspian Terns, Crested Terns, Red-capped Plovers etc. On the walk back to the car park we saw numerous other species e.g. Yellow Thornbill, Red-Browed Finch, Grey Shrike Thrush, Silvereye, White-browed Scrubwren etc. We had lunch at the car park and decided to call it a day having covered 4km. We had a grand total of 50 species with thanks to Ken for recording. It was a great day out and well worth the visit which we will schedule again in the future.

Comerong Island Nature Reserve 15 <sup>th</sup> March		6 members	50 species
Black Swan	Great Cormorant	Noisy Pitta	Willie Wagtail
Australian Wood Duck	Little Black Cormorant	Superb Fairy-wren	Rufous Fantail
Grey Teal	Australian Pelican	Lewin's Honeyeater	Grey Fantail
Chestnut Teal	White-necked Heron	Little Wattlebird	Magpie-lark
Rock Dove	Intermediate Egret	New Holland Honeyeater	Australian Raven
Crested Pigeon	White-faced Heron	White-browed Scrubwren	Eastern Yellow Robin
Australian Pied Oystercatcher	Australian White Ibis	Brown Thornbill	Welcome Swallow
Masked Lapwing	Straw-necked Ibis	Yellow Thornbill	Silvereye
Red-capped Plover	Royal Spoonbill	Brown Gerygone	Common Starling
Eastern Curlew	White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Australian Magpie	Common Myna
Silver Gull	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	Pied Currawong	Red-browed Finch
Caspian Tern	Little Corella	Grey Shrike-thrush	
Crested Tern	Rainbow Lorikeet	Olive-backed Oriole	

## **Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike**

Proposal by Darryl Goldrick

*The Illawarra Escarpment Alliance Group representatives presented it's Position Statement on the Draft Strategy at the final meeting of the Advisory Group meeting on 25 Feb '20.*

*Consensus was not reached in this meeting among key stakeholders as to whether the draft Strategy was acceptable. Stakeholders did however, support a solution that takes into account environmental and cultural constraints.*

*There were a range of recommendations and considerations that were supported, though not all unanimously, by members of the Advisory Group*

*We now are waiting for recommendations from the Governance Group, consisting of representatives from National Parks and Wildlife Service, WCC, Regional NSW (formerly Premier's and NSW Cabinet) which will be presented to the Minister by May.*

*I will keep members informed as further information comes to hand. The Alliance, nonetheless, will be meeting in the near future (dependent on the prevailing coronavirus health advice) to re-assess its position and future strategies.*

## NOTICES & ARTICLES OF INTEREST

# IBOC ITEMS FOR SALE

### BADGES

<u>Car Stickers</u>	<u>\$2.00</u>
<u>Cloth Badges</u>	<u>\$5.00</u>
<u>Metal Studs</u>	<u>\$5.00</u>
<u>Metal Pins</u>	<u>\$5.00</u>

### BOOKS

A Handbook of Birds Found in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Adjacent Tablelands	M \$20	NM \$25
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CLUB FLEECES ARE AVAILABLE FOR INDIVIDUAL ORDERS  
(any size full or half zip available). See the Librarian to order

### A few links

<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2020/03/birdingathome-is-officially-a-thing-and-its-never-been-a-better-time-to-become-a-birder/>

[https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/65184/Birds-of-Lake-Illawarra.pdf](https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/65184/Birds-of-Lake-Illawarra.pdf)

<https://www.bou.org.uk/blog-elliott-ornithomycology/>

<https://www.robertashdown.com/blog/?p=9380>

## KOELS STAYING ON -

The Koels appear to be still active here in the Balgownie area. Over the past couple of weeks, I have noticed females coming to our garden and disappearing into the camellia bushes where the little wattlebirds nest.

This morning my attention was drawn to two females sitting in our large gumtree. They were calling and flicking their tails. Shortly after a male flew in and began conversation and then to my surprise another male flew in. They all were flicking their tails by now. One male approached the two females who were close together. One female flew off with the male in close pursuit and disappeared into other large trees. The remaining male then tentatively approached the remaining female but she flew away leaving him behind.

I was expecting them to be well on their way north by now, but I guess they may be taking advantage of birds nesting since the rain. Has anyone else observed this happening?



Pam Hazelwood

## Hundreds of birds dead in SA's Gluepot Reserve during scorching summer

ABC Riverland By Anita Ward

[Photo: A dead bird at the Gluepot Reserve in South Australia's Riverland. \(Supplied: Ian Falkenberg\)](#)

Extreme heatwave temperatures over summer have led to a mass bird kill at Gluepot Reserve in South Australia's Riverland.

### Key points:

Record-breaking temperatures in SA's Riverland are thought to have killed many birds. More than 190 species of bird have been recorded at Gluepot Reserve in the past, including 18 threatened species. Portland couple Ted and Carmel Meissner spend a couple of months a year maintaining the natural environment. Ian Falkenberg from the reserve's management committee said more than 100 birds died in late December heat, and it was likely to have happened in other places across the state.

"Birds were basically dropping out of trees, they were found dead and highly stressed," he said. "Irrespective of where those birds are, it's a really challenging time for them to survive." Wood Swallows, Crows and Wattlebirds were among those that died, which Mr Falkenberg said was unexpected because they were generally more tolerant of the heat than other species.

### The heat is still on

Now, more than two months since record breaking temperatures were recorded in the Riverland, the volunteer-run reserve is feeling the effects of ongoing dry conditions. "Just a look at the vegetation tells you the story," Mr Falkenberg said. "There's a fair bit of die back of some of the smaller shrubs. Mr Falkenberg said bird diversity was also low as dry conditions continued. "Whilst we still have birds here, the species diversity is much reduced compared to what it was maybe a couple of years ago, when we had wetter seasons," he said. "Some species may have migrated further south and to other less heat affected areas. "The silence and lack of birds [when monitoring] the reserve is obvious." More than 190 species of birds have been recorded at Gluepot in the past, including 18 threatened species, and Mr Falkenberg hopes to see a return of these numbers into the future. "This is why it's so important to monitor bird numbers each season to gain perspective of the changes in the numbers and varieties of birds that rely on Gluepot's Mallee habitats," he said.



# Rufous Scrub-bird decline revealed

## Drought blamed for alarming drop

The Rufous Scrub-bird is a species few people ever get to see, and it's become more difficult to find them in recent years, as their numbers have declined due to severe and persistent drought over the last decade or so.

The species is classified as Endangered nationally, and Vulnerable in New South Wales, and surveys of scrub-birds in the Barrington Tops National Park in NSW led by BirdLife Australia member Alan Stuart have revealed an alarming drop in the density of the species' territories since a peak in 2011.

Rufous Scrub-birds advertise their territories most vigorously in the lead-up to their breeding season, but during dry springs, males have been observed to cease calling to advertise their territories.

Coupled with the run of dry conditions has been a couple of bushfires. A fire in 2009 burnt part of the study area, and scrub-birds were not recorded there for another seven years. Another fire burnt the same area not long after the birds returned, and the species has not been recorded there since. Although the extensive bushfires of 2019–20 have blackened areas of Rufous Scrub-bird habitat, the study area in Barrington Tops National Park escaped the flames.

Although 2010–11, the first two years of the study, were renowned as being wet years, which may have elevated the number of territories recorded, the study area has been affected by drought ever since, and the density of territories there has more than halved over that time, from a peak of 5.3 territories per square kilometre in 2010–11, down to 2.3 in 2019. That's a mean annual decline of 5.5 per cent in territory density.

The correlation between the drought and the decline is undeniable. If drought conditions are to become more common and persistent due to climate change, as has been predicted, the future of the Rufous Scrub-bird – and other species which share its habitat – is not looking particularly bright.

BirdLife Australia is seeking funding for much-needed on-ground research of a whole suite of our threatened birdlife, like the Rufous Scrub-bird, which will assist the tireless efforts of our dedicated volunteers.

You can read the full account of Alan's study, published in Hunter Bird Observers' Club's journal *The Whistler*, link [here](#).



## 'Wonderchicken':

### *Tiny ancestor to today's birds revealed*

SMH 19 Mar 2020

A tiny fossil skull nicknamed "Wonderchicken" is giving scientists a rare glimpse at early ancestors of today's birds.

It may be the oldest known fossil from this group.

With a face like those of today's chicken-like birds and a backside like that of living duck-like birds, Wonderchicken is "down near the bottom of the modern-bird family tree", said Daniel Field, of Cambridge University.

He and others announced the find in a report released on Wednesday, US time, by the journal, *Nature*. They named the creature *Asteriornis maastrichtensis*, but let's stick with Wonderchicken.



Researcher Daniel Field holds a life-size 3D print of the *Asteriornis maastrichtensis* "Wonderchicken" skull in Cambridge, England. *Credit: Daniel Field/AP*

Found in Belgium, it is 66.7 to 66.8 million years old. A previously reported Antarctic fossil find is about as old, but its precise age and place on the evolutionary tree are not clear. Field said the Belgian skull was slightly older.

It appeared as a block of broken rocks with some broken leg bones sticking out. After it was donated to a museum, Field tried CT scanning to get a better look at those bones. To his astonishment, the scanning revealed a well-preserved skull inside the rock "staring out of the computer screen right at us".

The leg bones let researchers estimate the creature was the size of a very small duck, weighing only about 395 grams. Its legs were long and slender, and it was evidently a shore bird and it could probably fly, Field said.

Wonderchicken lived just before the asteroid impact that's blamed for killing off many species, most notably the giant dinosaurs. That suggests the evolution of the family tree for modern-day-birds was in a very early stage when the asteroid struck, Field said.

Close relatives of Wonderchicken survived the cataclysm, and the fossil itself shows some traits that have been proposed as beneficial for making it through, Field said. It was small, and its legs suggest it did not live in trees, an important factor since forests were thought to have been devastated by wildfires.

"It also probably paid to not be picky about what you are eating" since there wasn't much on the menu in the aftermath of the asteroid strike, Field said. Wonderchicken's beak shows no signs of a specialised diet.

Scientists unconnected to the research were enthusiastic.

Kevin Padian, a palaeontologist at the University of California, Berkeley, said the fossil provided the best evidence yet of when and how the earliest ancestors of today's birds evolved.

Genetic studies have suggested that those ancestors appeared tens of millions of years earlier than Wonderchicken, he said. But at this point the fossil record shows no support for that, and there's no known fossil that is clearly from this lineage that predates Wonderchicken, he said.

Julia Clarke, a fossil-bird expert at the University of Texas at Austin, said the fossil "has a lot of information that can start to add to our picture of the earliest steps" in the proliferation of living birds species.

Fossils are snapshots, she said, and "right now our photo album has almost nothing in it" from this time period that relates to modern-day birds. "Any new picture is of key importance."

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## Rare Bristlebirds rescued in Chinook helicopter mercy dash during East Gippsland bushfires

[ABC Gippsland](#) By [Sarah Maunder](#)

It was a daring mission to rescue some of Australia's rarest birds from the ferocious East Gippsland bushfires.

Fifteen bristlebirds have been rescued from far-eastern Victoria as an insurance population against bushfires. Three of the birds died after a few days at Melbourne Zoo. The East Gippsland fires are still active, and the birds will not be returned until it is completely safe for them.

**Photo:** *Around 160 bristlebirds are estimated to live on or around Howe Flat, just east of Mallacoota. (Supplied: Tony Mitchell)*

Nothing quite like this had been done before. The rescue team needed to get in, take a few bristlebirds for safe keeping, and get out. There are only three populations of bristlebirds left in Australia: one on the Queensland border, one in New South Wales and a third, tucked away in a tiny, far-east corner of Victoria. When a huge fire threatened the town of Mallacoota on New Year's Eve, biologist Rohan Clarke watched the news in fear. "That little corner of Victoria is really important in terms of biodiversity," Dr Clarke said.



"It's got really rich species numbers, and because it's jammed right in that corner, it gets a little of the humid weather from NSW, so it's got species that don't occur anywhere else in the state." In early February, Dr Clarke flew by military Chinook to Mallacoota with a small team of colleagues, some experts from Wollongong University, and representatives from DELWP and Parks Victoria. Their goal was to rescue at least 15 of the 160 bristlebirds that live in that tiny pocket of Howe Flat. The group originally planned for five days of catching, but the continuous threat of bushfires reduced the mission to just a day and a half. "There were literally planes water-bombing the fire only a couple of kilometres away while we were working," Dr Clarke said. "It [the fire] was incredibly close; it burnt into the northern edge of the heath where the bristlebirds live." In the end, the rescue team were able to take 15 bristlebirds back to Melbourne Zoo, to keep them safe in case the population left behind was wiped out by fire.

### **Three birds lost**

Three of the 15 rescued bristlebirds did not survive long after arriving at Melbourne Zoo. General manager of Threatened Species Programs at Zoos Victoria Craig Whiteford said all the birds were stressed and carried a heavy parasite load. "Unfortunately we lost three of the birds over the first few days, but since then the remaining birds have settled in well. Our vets have done a fabulous job keeping everything in order," he said. "We think that the three birds that died had a fungal infection in the lungs, and this fungus is just everywhere. "They would have brought it with them from the wild, but given that they were stressed, they were caught, they were transported in small boxes on a boat, in a plane and in cars, and put into a new environment, it wasn't a surprise to us that we lost a few birds." Once the bushfires in East Gippsland are completely extinguished, the 12 remaining bristlebirds will be returned to eastern Victoria — as long as their population and habitat has not been destroyed. "We are hoping that we don't have to keep them to breed from," Mr Whiteford said. "We're hoping to return them."

### **Almost unprecedented action**

No other threatened species in Victoria had an insurance population flown out of the bushfire-affected areas, but extraction missions were considered for other animals. "The Long-footed potoroo is one that we had our eye on fairly early, but it seems they are recovering, or at least being found on the fireground. That's based on intelligence from Parks Victoria," Mr Whiteford said.

**Photo:** *Dr Clarke and the rescue team were flown to Mallacoota in a Chinook helicopter for their mission. (Supplied: Tony Mitchell)*

"Another one is the Eastern Ground Parrot, that's one that we are concerned about. "We really need to get in and do some assessments, and we are planning for spring extraction of spotted tree frogs." Dr Clarke said the Bristlebird rescue mission was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for him. "A biologist doesn't normally get to climb into a Chinook. It's an incredible experience, but it's also really sobering," he said. "We're at this point where we're not completely focused on the longer term, we're fighting this on the front to save things at the last moment."



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Or direct deposit

**BSB:** 641-800

**Account no:** 200613494

**Account name:** Illawarra Birds Observers Club

**Payment Reference:** Your name or a code number if not able to enter name

## In this early phase of Autumn by Mike Morphett

In this early phase of autumn, I've been finding small elongated 'bits' on the bonnet of my 4WD parked in our carport. I wasn't sure what to make of them: rat droppings perhaps. Yesterday curiosity got the better of me, so I got my torch to inspect the underneath of our bedroom, which forms the carport roof. The support beams average about 40 cm apart, with a depth of 25 cm; but space where the ensuite adjoins the bedroom is only 3.5 cm wide - right above the middle of the bonnet. It was here that I found the answer to the puzzle. Huddled together in this confined space was a group of dark grey creatures, nine of them as far as I could tell. So the bits were microbat droppings. Whilst grey-headed flying foxes had been very much in evidence in recent weeks - a colony has been growing beside Flanagans Creek on the south-eastern side of the abandoned Excelsior Colliery bushland - I hadn't seen any small bats flying around our neighborhood for donkey's years. Next question: What species? I searched through my 1983 'Complete Book of Australian Mammals' (edited by Ronald Strahan) and a number of websites and came to the conclusion of *Nyctophilus gouldi*, or in the vernacular Gould's long-eared bat. Average length 58 mm and weight 9 gram. Distribution: eastern and south-western regions. One of the most common species, they can be found in tree hollows, old buildings (Does our humble abode qualify?) and old nests of birds. Relying on their fat reserves, they hibernate during the colder winter months, so I'm wondering if this small colony will be hanging around for quite a while yet. Their diet is flying and terrestrial insects, such as moths, beetles and ants, plus spiders. Their main threat is predation by goannas, hawks, owls and cats. What risk may they pose for Carol and me? I guess there's the remote chance we could catch Australian Bat Lissavirus (ABLV), if bitten or scratched; we could add that to the current global problem posed by the coronavirus. Adhering to 'Dad's Army's' Lance-Corporals Jones's "Don't panic" declaration, I'm content to let our carport be these bats' roost and to keep sweeping off their droppings (More evidence this morning). They have gained my admiration for finding this sanctuary, so typical of adaptation and ingenuity by other forms of wildlife.



# Repurposed Oyster Farm Bags Offer New Real Estate for Migratory Birds

As development and rising seas diminish roosting sites, shell-filled bags provide “islands” to rest and refuel

By [Priyanka Runwal](#) on March 4, 2020

Terek sandpipers on a floating roost in the Geum Estuary in South Korea. Credit: Hong-Tae Jeon and Young-Min Moon

Standing atop a 16-foot-high seawall on South Korea's western coast, Chris Purnell and his colleagues slide mesh bags stuffed with empty oyster shells down onto the sandy mudflats of the Geum Estuary. They then clip the heavy bags to ropes and drag them into the gently lapping waters that run into the Yellow Sea.

Purnell's aim is for these bags, attached to foam floats and lashed together in clusters up to 80 feet wide, to act as artificial roosting sites for the tens of thousands of migratory shorebirds that traverse the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Coastal development has deprived these travelers of crucial resting spots, leading to drastic shorebird declines in key stopover areas like this one. “We're hoping this could be a rapid-response intervention,” says Purnell, wetland birds program manager at Birdlife Australia, a nonprofit conservation organization.

The Yellow Sea coastline provides some of the most important resting and refueling grounds for shorebirds migrating between their breeding sites in China, Russia, and Alaska and nonbreeding habitats in Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. For bar-tailed godwits, the Yellow Sea's tidal mudflats are the only spot to rest and feed along a 6,000-mile journey. In the past few decades, however, coastal development has gobbled up more than 65 percent of this habitat.

In 2006, for example, the near completion of a 21-mile seawall—the world's longest man-made sea barrier—cut off a large portion of the rich Saemangeum tidal flat from the Yellow Sea so that the reclaimed land could be used for agriculture, aquaculture, industry and housing. This project caused an area almost seven times the size of Manhattan to become starved of tidal replenishment. As a result, the sea snails and other shellfish that shorebirds snacked on rapidly declined. By 2014, the number of birds annually returning to the site had dropped from more than 250,000 to about 50,000. Returning numbers of endangered birds, such as the spotted greenshank and great knot, were whittled down to a fraction of their 2006 levels. The critically endangered spoon-billed sandpiper nearly vanished from Saemangeum.

Migratory birds then increasingly turned to the Geum Estuary, a site north of Saemangeum that is one fourth of its size. Although they were able to feed along the estuary's narrow mudflats during low tide, the nearby sand dunes and sandspits they needed for roosting were often submerged during high tide. “You would see 10,000 to 20,000 birds circling the coast and swooping down, trying to find somewhere to land,” Purnell says. “It's pretty sad, because the birds are meant to get there to rest, refuel and get fatter. And instead, they're burning more energy.”

To provide some immediate respite and give shorebirds the best chance to reach their breeding grounds, Purnell and his team took inspiration from oyster aquaculture. Many farmers along Australia's eastern coast raise oysters in floating bags, which he thought could also provide the perfect ocean perch for waterbirds.

In proof-of-concept trials in 2018 and 2019, respectively, Purnell and his team built two such floating islands at Port Phillip Bay and the Hunter Estuary, both in Australia, where the shorebirds arrive at one end of their migration. Each consisted of 120 four-square-foot mesh bags connected by ropes. Foam buoys kept the bags afloat, and the weight of the empty oyster shells made them relatively steady in moving waters. The shells also provided a home for invertebrates to colonize—a bobbing waterbird buffet.

Even though migrating shorebirds did not make much use of the artificial roosts because they had access to their natural ones, the team did see waterfowl and terns landing on the oyster bag platforms. That gave the team the confidence to more thoroughly test the setup with a five-year trial in South Korea. Teaming up with Birdlife International in Asia and officials in Seochon County, which flanks the Geum Estuary, they deployed three clusters of the artificial floats during the peak northward migration period last April. Then they waited.

But they did not have to wait long. Within mere minutes of installation, birds were landing on the floats. By May 2019, 43 shorebird species—including the endangered black-faced spoonbill and far eastern curlew—were using these platforms to roost. That same month, a surveillance camera recorded nearly 300 individuals huddled on one of the clusters. This instant success surprised Hong-Tae Jeon, an official at Seochon County's Cultural and Tourism Division. “We were worried whether shorebirds would use the floating roosts,” he says.

In September 2019, during the peak migration period for returning shorebirds, the number of them roosting on an artificial island spiked to 600. Jeon hopes more will use them in the future, after they become more familiar with the new concept. Purnell envisions the use of artificial roosts in other Yellow Sea coastal areas undergoing rapid development—and possibly along other bird migration routes where sea-level rise may swallow up sandspits and low-lying roosting habitat as the climate warms. The team is scheduled to present results of the first year of the trial in November at the first [East Asian-Australasian Flyway Shorebird Science Meeting](#) in South Korea.

While he applauds the oyster-bag initiative, Nial Moores, director of a conservation organization called Birds Korea, points out that there are still many more displaced birds in need of diverse roosting sites. “Floating roosts by themselves are not enough,” he says. Moores notes it is also important to keep in mind the needs of local fishers who rely on the fish these birds may eat. And he cautions that artificial roosts could be used as a justification to continue coastal development. He advocates for active protection and management of remaining habitat.

But Purnell envisions the use of these floats only in situations in which habitat has already been destroyed. “It's almost like an emergency-relief project,” he says. Over the next four years, his team will continue to monitor how many birds use the roosts and how well the floats and other materials stand up to the elements. Officials from nearby counties have expressed interest in the artificial structures, and results from this early effort could help in the development of a more comprehensive conservation strategy for the region.

In the meantime, Seochon County officials see the birds congregating on the artificial roosts as an opportunity to generate conservation awareness in the region. This project is helping to generate empathy toward natural resources among citizens, Jeon says, so “we are hoping these floating roosts remain in this region.”



**MONTHLY SIGHTINGS :- February/March 2020**

compiled by Darryl Goldrick

SPECIES	N0	DATE	LOCATION	HABITAT	OBSERVER
Eurasian Coot	34	15/03/2020	Bellambi	Bellambi Lagoon	Mike Morphet
Australian Pied Oystercatcher	2	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Wonga Pigeon	1	3/07/2020	Bendalong Holiday park	Forest undergrowth	Ian McKinlay
Rock Dove	10	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
White-headed Pigeon	1	3/13/2020	Corrimal	Meadow St powerline	Mike Morphet
Sooty Oystercatcher	1	2/22/2020	Bellambi beach	sandy beach	Ian McKinlay
Bar-shouldered Dove	1	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Topknot Pigeon	3+	2/26/2020	Russell Vale G C	Large native Fig	Ian McKinlay
Topknot Pigeon	4	2/27/2020	Macauleys hill, Thirroul	Large native Fig	Ian McKinlay
Eastern Great Egret	1	15/03/2020	Bellambi	Bellambi Lagoon	Mike Morphet
Red-capped Plover	6	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Double-banded Plover	30	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Caspian Tern	6	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Glossy Black-Cockatoo	2	3/05/2020	Bendalong Holiday Park	Casuarinas	Ian McKinlay
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	2	3/09/2020	Wollongong Botanic Garden	Garden	Alan & Anne Cousins
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	4Ad +1 juv	7/03/2020	Woonona	O'head	Ross Gowans
Straw-necked Ibis	40	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	1	3/05/2020	Bendalong beaches	overhead	Ian McKinlay
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	1	2/03/2020	Minnamurra	Beach-O'head	Sue/Ken Brown
Brown Goshawk	1	6/03/2020	Albion Park Rail	Tree	Peter Fackender
Swamp Harrier	1	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Nankeen Kestrel	1	3/09/2020	Wollongong Botanic Garden	Overhead of rainforest	Alan & Anne Cousins
Bar-tailed Godwit	60	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Eastern Curlew	35	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Dusky Moorhen	3	15/03/2020	Bellambi	Bellambi Lagoon	Mike Morphet
Musk Lorikeet	3	8/03/2020	Balgownie	Backyard	Pam Hazelwood
Little lorikeet	2	2/26/2020	Russell Vale Golf course carpark	inspecting saddle in tall Eucalypt	Ian McKinlay
Eastern Koel	1	3/01/2020	Thirroul	Roxborough Avenue garden	Mike Morphet
Eastern Koel	1	3/12/2020	Thirroul	front garden	Mike Morphet
Channel-billed Cuckoo	1	21/02/2020	Corrimal	O'head	Joan Wylie
Powerful Owl	1 heard	2/26/2020	Thirroul	old Excelsior	Mike Morphet
Powerful Owl	1	2/27/2020	Thirroul	old Excelsior	Mike Morphet
Spotted Pardalote	1	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	2	2/27/2020	excelsior firetrail, Thirroul	Regrowth forest	Ian McKinlay
Little Wattlebird	12	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Olive-backed Oriole	1	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Grey Butcherbird	1	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Rufous Fantail	1	3/07/2020	Conjola Nat Park	burnt sand dune scrub	Ian McKinlay
Leaden Flycatcher	1	3/07/2020	Bendalong Headland	open forest	Ian McKinlay
Black-faced Monarch	1	2/11/2020	Hewitts Ck lagoon	casuarina forest	Ian McKinlay
Tree Martin	10	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
Australasian Pipit	2	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders
European Goldfinch	3	13/03/2020	Shoalhaven	Comerong Island	Milton-Ulladulla Birders

Thank you to those members who posted their sightings to me for records and newsletter. So, please email me or phone.

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