

Woodlands on the Wing

Issue 15 Spring 2017

The Great Western Woodlands in Western Australia is the world's largest remaining temperate woodland. The Birds of the Great Western Woodlands (GWW) Project aims to assess distribution, population status, movements and ecology of the bird species there, to better inform the conservation and management of this significant region. The Great Western Woodlands Committee (BirdLife WA) oversees the project, which is now in its sixth year, 2017. The first three and a half years (2012 to 2015) were funded by a partnership between BirdLife Australia and The Nature Conservancy

Autumn surveys 2017

Survey Teams visited Karroun Hill Nature Reserve (NR), Jilbadji NR, Cave Hill Area, Frank Hann & Peak Charles National Parks and Dundas NR. Forecast rain forced hurried completion of the Dundas survey but participants got out well before a violent thunderstorm produced a deluge.

As several individual groups initiated their own surveys in addition to those organised by the Survey Coordinator, Dundas NR, Karroun Hill NR and Frank Hann/Peak Charles were also surveyed a second time by privately organised groups. We're very happy for people to do that as it helps us to survey each area as often as possible.

In June, the Goldfields Naturalists' Club surveyed Karlkurla Bushland Park.

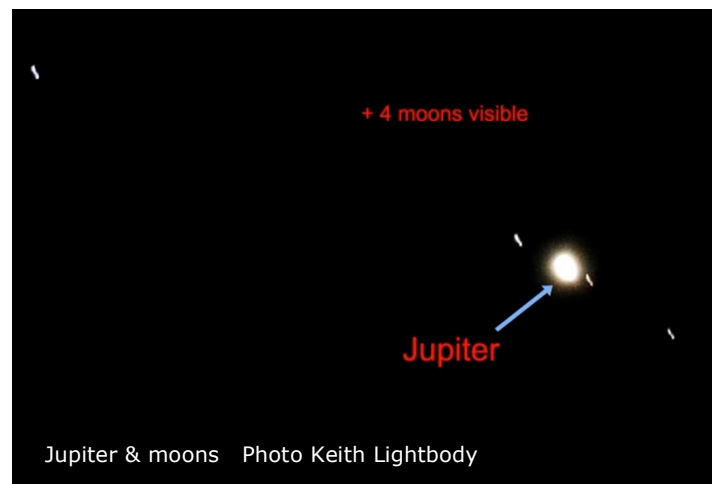
Karroun Hill March 2017 Survey Report by Maris Lauva

The Karroun Hill survey area is the closest regular GWW survey area to Perth. There are north-south runs at the eastern and western ends of the reserve that are connected by a track running east-west along the State Barrier fence. Permits are required from the Agriculture Department to travel along the Fence. Doing a GWW survey here is usually the only way people can explore all parts of this extensive Nature Reserve.

High among my aims when organising this bird survey was to minimize moving campsites and to efficiently arrange the surveys in such an order that it reduced the time commitment for participants. As a result we were able to manage with only one move of camp and completed the surveys in 5 days.

The weather was close to perfect with clear skies, beautiful cool mornings, comfortable nights and warm days. The stars were brilliant. My best view ever after the Nullarbor plain

last year. We enjoyed watching satellites and the wonderful Milky Way. Keith was able to indulge in some astronomical photography.



The trip started with four of us on a recce on the first day. We took the opportunity to survey two sites along the northern side of the fence to avoid some back tracking later on. A **Southern Scrub-robin** was our first recorded bird. We then found a suitable campsite near site KH7 on the western side of the reserve in a lovely open woodland area with plenty of room for the others to camp up the next day.

On the second day the recce party surveyed three more sites near the camp in the morning and then welcomed the rest of the group who arrived after lunch with plenty of time to set up their camp and look around.

On the third day we split into two teams leapfrogging each other. There was a possible sighting of a **Chestnut Quail-thrush** at the campsite, however, there was no doubt about the one seen and photographed later the same day, on the track to Mt Churchman. We completed the western surveys by late morning.

Late that morning, after packing up to move east, we again split into two teams. Each completed one survey along the way, about 100km away on the other side of the reserve. Of note were the many **Emus** along the State Barrier fence – groups of up to 11 birds. All but one of them were on the 'wrong side' of the fence (the Wheatbelt side). We slowed down because the **Emus** refused to leave the track, running ahead of us, as they tend to do and we didn't want to run them into the ground.

Terry Giles re-joined us on the way along the fence, having left to find someone in Beacon to put a tube in his tyre that



Along the state Barrier fence.

Selfie by Peter Jackoby

he had staked the previous day. We welcomed him back. His knowledge was much valued (and the hot showers he later provided from his super duper Ford pickup were by all accounts exquisite).

Sunday was our big day, once again two teams leapfrogging north along the fence, to eventually head east then south-west back to our campsite. All went well and despite some minor delays - from small trees across the track and staking a tyre myself, we were back in camp well before dusk with the last of the regular survey sites completed.



Varied Sittella at Karroun Hill

Photo Keith Lightbody

On Monday, we exited the reserve south along the State Barrier Fence. After delays to adjust the wheel I had improperly re-seated (after my flat tyre) and a walk through a breakaway that begged to be explored, we safely returned to civilization via Mukinbudin, getting back to Perth before dark. We saw many **Emus**, once again they were all on the wrong side of the fence. However, not all of us came straight home. Several people spent another night camping and found their way out via Elachbutting Rock. Amongst other sightings they were rewarded by a flock of around 50 **Major Mitchell's Cockatoos**.

The Group: Maris Lauva, Keith Lightbody, Peter Jacoby, Susan Quartermaine, David Macey, Kim Macey, Jane Putland, Michael Pekin, George Shevtsov, Linda Brotherton, Terry Giles, Darryl James.

The Bird List:

Emu, Mound builders

Emu

Birds of Prey

Brown Goshawk, Brown Falcon

Pigeons, Doves

Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon

Cockatoos, Parrots

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Galah, Australian Ringneck

Night Birds

Southern Boobook, Australian Owllet-nightjar

Treecreepers

Rufous Treecreeper

Wrens, Pardalotes

Splendid Fairy-Wren, Striated Pardalote,

Scrubwrens, Allies

Western Gerygone, Weebill, Inland Thornbill, Chestnut-

Honeyeaters

rumped Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Redthroat

Chats, Robins

Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-fronted Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, White-

Babblers

eared Honeyeater, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Red Wattlebird

Quail-thrush, Allies

Jacky Winter Red-capped Robin, Wester Yellow Robin, Southern Scrub-robin

Whistlers, Shrike-thrush

White-browed Babbler, Chestnut Quail-thrush

Magpie-lark, Flycatchers

Golden Whistler, Gilbert's Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush.

Cuckoo-shrikes

Magpie-lark, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail.

Woodswallows

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike

Magpie, Butcherbirds

Dusky Woodswallow

Ravens, Crows

Grey Currawong, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie.

Swallows

Australian Raven. Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin.

Karroun Hill May 2017

Surveyed by Brenda Newbey

Prior to a trip up north Brenda Newbey and Robert Morales were planning, Brenda volunteered to survey some Karroun Hill sites on their way back to Perth. Coming from Paynes Find they had intended to enter the reserve from the north, but were unable to access the northern section of Bibimjy Road. It appears to be incorrectly shown on maps as being a through Road. After detouring south and entering the reserve from the southern end of Bibimjy Road they surveyed 12 sites prior to resuming their trip home to Perth. Little blossom was in evidence, but Brenda reported that there were plenty of buds and that prolific flowering was not far away. Two stake caps were replaced (see later article). A bonus was seeing 2 pairs of **Chestnut Quail-thrush** along the State Barrier Fence.

Special feature: EPA rejects mining at Helena & Aurora Range pg 7

New feature: Trees in Focus by Malcolm French pg 8

Cave Hill Easter 2017

Survey Report by Maris Lauva

A recreational campout for birdlife members around Cave Hill was organised for Easter 2017. Six regular survey sites around Cave Hill Rock itself were surveyed during the campout, which finished officially on Easter Monday morning. I took the opportunity to organise a follow on after the campout to survey the remaining 20 GWW fixed survey sites.

As over 20 people were already enjoying the campout, it was no trouble to find a dozen or so volunteers to stay a couple of days longer. Eventually we had enough vehicles to organise 3 teams leapfrogging each other from site to site, which made for speedy completion of each day's surveying and allowed plenty of time for people to have a good look around.

The 14 volunteers headed west as 3 teams, completing surveys along the track leading to Victoria Rock Road. This track was in reasonable condition and we were able to tow a couple of campers down it. Judging from the nature of the surface and the existence of old ruts though, it would be wise to treat it with great caution if rain was about.

We came out onto Victoria Rock Road in mid-afternoon in good time to find a pleasant campsite in open woodland. There were plenty of mallee roots from recent grader activity so a great campfire was in prospect. Most of our remaining surveys were along this road, which was great news as it was in very good repair. (We found out the next day that it did deteriorate somewhat when we left the stretch maintained by Norseman Shire.)



Campsite along Victoria Rock Rd. Photo Maris Lauva

On Tuesday we headed south doing surveys along the way. The woodlands here are truly magnificent and lifted our spirits. Areas of woodland that had been cleared to service the goldfields last century were only still obvious from the swathes of Bluebush that had regenerated more strongly than the eucalypts in places. It was very pretty in dawn's early light. Along the way south we found that Banks Rock (Site CH4) is well worth a visit. A granite monolith hidden from the road. The track in is not immediately obvious though. Find it at 31°56'19", 120°47'22" and beware of meandering side tracks.



Bluebush along Victoria Rock Rd

Photo: Maris Lauva

Surveys were completed in time for lunch at McDermid Rock, which was overrun with **Purple-gaped Honeyeaters**. We all had the afternoon off, each of us returning to the campsite at our own pace, exploring along the way. The rock itself can be circumnavigated in a couple of hours. There's an interpretive track, a large "wave rock" formation and an extremely delicately balanced boulder amongst other features. I waited with my camera by the boulder for a while but sadly didn't get a chance at the million dollar shot!



Teetering Rock

Photo Maris Lauva

That night a thunderstorm passed over our camp with much light and noise but luckily not an awful lot of rain. I wasn't going to let it force me from our campfire so Ed and I had a pleasant time chatting around the fire under our umbrellas.

The next day we finished up the surveys as we headed north. The road was still very good despite the occasional large puddle. We ended with a survey at Victoria Rock. The bush at the base of the rock was alive with countless Honeyeaters, especially Spiny-cheeked. Some of the group stayed there overnight whilst the rest of us headed home. In the morning one couple decided to try the short cut via the track heading due west from Victoria Rock to Great Eastern Highway (Only 30 minutes digging I believe Ed). If anyone finds a bag of cables and electronic gizmos in this area they belong to him. The rest of the group were conservative and went the longer way through Coolgardie.

The group. Andrew & Jill Hobbs, Sue & Rob Mather, Lorraine Marshall, Ed & Alison Paul, Richard & Lorraine Chyne, Libby McGill, Maris Lauva, Susan Quartermaine, Jan Grimoldby, Ross Campbell, Greg Muir.

The Birds:

Grebes

Cormorants

Birds of Prey

Pigeons, Doves

Cockatoos, Parrots

Cuckoos

Night Birds

Wrens, Pardalotes

Scrubwrens, Allies

Honeyeaters

Chats, Robins

Babblers

Whistlers,

Shrike-thrush

Flycatchers

Woodswallows

Magpie, Butcherbirds

Ravens

Bowerbirds, Pipit

Mistletoebird

Swallows

Thrushes, Allies

Australasian Grebe.

Little Black Cormorant.

Brown Goshawk, Collared Sparrowhawk, Brown Falcon.

Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon. Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Regent Parrot, Australian Ringneck, Western Rosella

Pallid Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo Southern Boobook, Australian Owlet-nightjar

Blue-breasted Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote.

Weebill, Western Gerygone, Inland Thornbill, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Redthroat, White-browed Scrubwren.

Brown-headed, White-fronted, White-eared, Brown, Singing, Purple-gaped, Grey-fronted, Yellow-plumed, Black, Spiny-cheeked, Red Wattlebird, Tawny-crowned.

Jacky Winter, Red-capped Robin, Western Yellow Robin

White-browed Babbler

Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Gilbert's Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Crested Bellbird.

Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail

Dusky Woodswallow.

Grey Currawong, Pied Butcherbird, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Magpie. Australian Raven.

Richard's Pipit

Mistletoebird

Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin

Silvereye

Frank Hann/Peak Charles Survey Report by Terry Powell

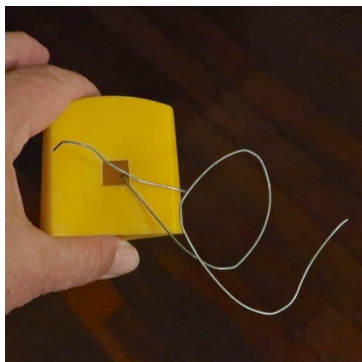
On Sunday, 7 May 2017, accompanied by Simon Binder, I drove to Lake King and onwards to the Frank Hann National Park. We proceeded directly to Lillian Stokes Rock and camped by the gnamma holes in the late afternoon. There was the usual water level in the gnamma holes and also much water in several depressions in the main rock. It was overcast with periodic sunshine and light wind. The heath areas had some evidence of local wildflowers (*see following recce report below*).

Seven surveys were carried out the next day. Our campsite was at an old road workers camp north-east of FH8.

Responsibility for road maintenance changes near FH12 from Lake Grace Shire to Esperance Shire and the quality of the road deteriorates rapidly to very bad corrugations and large potholes. There are also long sections that have been developed using a light coloured local stone where caution is needed to avoid tyre damage. Towards PC15, half the road was missing and there were deep ruts to be negotiated. This could be impassable when wet. Surveys were continued as far as PC15 but due to the late hour and the distant indications of a rain system it was decided to by-pass the next 5 sites and travel directly to the Peak Charles Campground. This was reached just after dark. There were no suitable campsites before the campground was reached, especially given the uncertainty of the weather.

On Wednesday, 10 May, we decided to go back to survey sites PC18, PC19 and PC20 but not sites PC16 and PC17 due to the state of the road. On the completion of PC23 there was spitting rain and a system moving across the North. We drove quickly back to the Peak Charles Campground as the track south of the Campground is signposted as impassable after rain. At midnight on the Wednesday, severe thunderstorms could be seen and heard from the direction of Norseman (*see Dundas report*), although it was still clear over Peak Charles.

Mystery of the vanished caps



Each GWW survey site is marked with a short star picket and a stamped aluminium tag. We have been noticing that an increasing number of the yellow plastic caps atop the pickets have been vanishing. A few have been found nearby but most are gone completely. Even

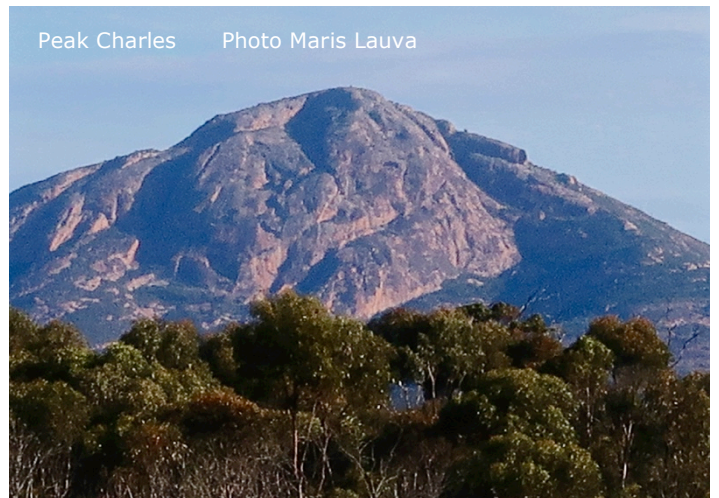
when they fade to white they make finding the stake much easier so we prefer not to lose them. We speculate on the cause, possibly



Photo Brenda Newbey

curious Emus. I hope they haven't been eating them! Future surveys will be equipped with a few replacement caps and wire to secure them for use as required. That should fix the Emus (unless they learn to use wire cutters). Contact us at gww@birdlife.org.au for a supply of caps and wire if you're planning to organise a survey.

Peak Charles Photo Maris Lauva



It started to rain in the early hours and there was a thunderstorm directly over us with rolling thunder out across the plain. The rain only eased off at about 9.00am.

It was decided that it might be better to take a chance on getting to Norseman immediately rather than risk more heavy rain. The track south from Peak Charles was flooded from just near the Campground turnoff. The road to Lake King would likely have been cut near PC15.

The 65 km journey from Peak Charles to the bitumen, on the Norseman – Esperance Road, took 3 hours to travel. There were constant large pools up to 50 meters long with water up to the floor of the vehicle. There were also numerous large flooded potholes with the road turning to soft mud in sections. The main bitumen road had water flowing over it in two places and Norseman apparently had 30 mm of rain during the storm - and looked like it. The road from Norseman to Hyden was closed as were all other routes to Hyden so we had to travel home via Coolgardie and the Great Eastern Highway.

In summary:

Completed sites were FH1 – FH12 inclusive, PC13, PC15, PC18 – PC21 inclusive, PC23 and PC24.

Not completed were PC14, PC16, PC17, PC22, PC25, PC26 and PC27.

The Birds:

Emu, Mound builders

Emu.

Birds of Prey

Brown Falcon, Nankeen Kestrel.

Cockatoos, Parrots

Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Australian Ringneck.

Cuckoos

Fan-tailed Cuckoo

Night Birds

Southern Boobook.

Wrens, Pardalotes

Striated Pardalote.

Scrubwrens, Allies

Rufous Fieldwren, Weebill, Inland Thornbill, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Redthroat

Honeyeaters

Brown-headed, Singing, White-eared, Purple-gaped, Red Wattlebird

Chats, Robins

White-fronted Chat, Red-capped Robin, Western Yellow Robin

Flycatchers

Grey Fantail

Cuckoo-shrikes,

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

Woodswallows

Dusky Woodswallow

Magpie, Butcherbirds

Grey Currawong, Grey Butcherbird

Follow up Recce Report by Maris Lauva

As another survey trip to Frank Hann/Peak Charles is being planned for this coming spring, Terry's report on road conditions was timely but also a concern. I went out on a recce on 12 June 2017 to assess any potential problems. Thankfully, it looks OK to go ahead, although the stretch of Lake King-Norseman Rd "maintained" by Esperance Shire will need to be treated with caution. Whilst we were out there we came across Shire workmen putting up "4WD only" signs, which may indicate the Esperance Shire's attitude to future maintenance. When I contacted their roads Engineer he advised me that they preferred people to use Cascades road to the south. Even so, several vehicles passed us going both ways in the couple of days we were there (including one Commodore from SA!).

The road is severely corrugated, surfaced with loose stone and completely washed away in parts. I would agree with Terry and rate it impassable in the wet, but we comfortably

traversed it when dry by driving slowly and carefully. A full day should be allowed for travel between Frank Hann and Peak Charles as speed needs to be reduced to 10km/hr or so in several places. More than one team will be required if we are to complete the surveys along the way in one day with the intention of reaching Peak Charles in daylight.

The wildflowers were just starting to blossom in a small stretch of heath at Frank Hann. They should be spectacular by Spring.



Calectasia species Photo Maris Lauva

Dundas Nature Reserve Survey Report by Sue Abbotts

This survey area follows the Old Telegraph Track and crosses over (usually dry) lakes at either end. The best time to travel this road is in autumn or after a long dry spell. With any amount of rain the road can be under water at each end for a considerable length of time and escape routes north and south are along pretty poor tracks.

Contacts for road conditions

Norseman Shire roads:

John Fry: works@dundas.wa.gov.au He is out and about much of the time, making it hard to contact him by phone.

Esperance Dept. BCA (formerly DPaW):

Stephen Butler Ph: 9083 2100. Steve is friendly to talk to and very supportive of BirdLife WA. He has helped with projects in the past.

We had 4 cars and 7 people so we could form 2 teams carrying out alternate surveys as we progressed.

Day 1: Left Perth 0830hrs. Refuelled at Hyden and continued east. We camped at McDermid Rock, which on this occasion had much better birding than The Breakaways. Arrived early at 1530hrs as the road was in good condition. The last pair into camp saw **Australian Bustard** near the turn off. We got an excellent list here including **Purple-gaped, Brown-headed, Spiny-cheeked** and **White-eared Honeyeaters, Shy Heathwren, Blue-breasted Fairy-wren, Gilberts Whistler, Australian Owlet Nightjar, Inland Thornbill**. We also heard **Southern Scrub-robin** and **Crested Bellbird**.

Black Shouldered Kite with lunch.
Norseman-Hyden Rd. Photo Maris Lauva



Day 2: Following a warm night we left at 1000hrs after birding around the rock. The corvids were interesting and may have been **Torresian Crow**.

On the way to Norseman we heard **Purple-crowned Lorikeets** and saw **Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters**.

We arrived at Norseman for lunch, a distance of 666km from Perth. We then drove 17.5km south of Norseman and turned due east into Dundas Road (the old Telegraph Track). We didn't see a sign. We immediately encountered many more birds including **Chestnut Quail-thrush** and **Gilberts Whistler**. **Western Rosella** has been seen here before but not this time. We found the causeway across the lake to be passable unlike our previous attempt a couple of years ago.

We camped just before the causeway overlooking the lake on a headland (32° 20' 53", 121° 49' 11"), enjoying a lovely fire under an almost full moon. An eerie phenomenon of moonlight illuminated leaves above and around us like thousands of glow worms. They looked like fairy lights.

Campsite overlooking Lake Dundas Photo Maris Lauva



Day 3: We started out at 0800hrs and headed due east doing surveys as we went. We then turned south down to Jyndabinbin Rocks, about 4 km off the main track at GPS 32° 25' 05.3", 122° 05' 21.4". There are gnamma holes there and it is an interesting area. Evidence of camels was all around us out here.

We then continued east on the old Telegraph Track carrying out surveys with the intention of camping near the cross roads beyond DR6. However that area is all Mallee regrowth, too thick to camp. We camped back near DR6 at 32° 24' 32.9", 122° 25' 38.4" which was a bit off the road (on the south side) and turned out to be quite good except for the powder dirt underfoot, but there seems no getting away from that out here. We camped there 2 nights.

Alternative campsites could be; 1 km south of the cross roads where there is a space in Mallee regrowth, and just west of DR12 in unburnt country where there is a big space although near the road.

Day 4: We went south on the Fraser Range Road to carry out the 5 surveys along this track. It was slow going averaging about 25km/hr about 40km down to DR10, mostly past Mallee regrowth. We came across a 'bird wave' at one point and saw **Dusky Woodswallow**, **Golden Whistler**, **Crested Bellbird**, **Willie Wagtail**, **Striated Pardalote**, **Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater**, **White-eared Honeyeater** and **Weebill**.

In the afternoon we hastened to survey DR11 to DR15 because the weather forecast was for heavy rain the next evening and we needed to be through the lakes area before it arrived. Normally I would have done that next section the following morning.

There is an excellent campsite on sand and next to a lake just east of DR16 at 32° 27' 10", 123° 04' 29". It's located just east of where the road crosses the (hopefully!) dry lake.

Day 5: Site DR18 was in a recently burnt area where we surprisingly saw **Redthroat**, **Rufous Treecreeper** and 4 **Red-capped Robins**. Later we also saw 2 **Cockatiels** fly across the road – the only ones for the trip. We continued on to the eastern end of the reserve and completed the surveys in an occasional light drizzle by late lunchtime. We then headed back to Norseman via Balladonia and booked into the Railway Motel for showers just as the storm hit. We managed to time our exit a little more fortunately than Terry Powell who was caught up at Peak Charles by the same deluge.

Distance travelled from Norseman, doing the surveys and out to Balladonia was 355km. This included quite a bit of to and fro at the last camp. Therefore, only one driver (with a petrol fuelled car) felt any fuel anxiety. However, as it turned out we all finished with fuel to spare, even those with gas-guzzling Subaru.

Thorny Devil Photo: Maris Lauva



This Thorny Devil “froze” on the road at the western end of the Telegraph Track and didn’t twitch even when picked up and placed off to the side. They have a scaly formation is called a “second head” for it’s appearance seeming to look back to deter predators. Their defence mechanism seems to be “I can hang here looking fearsome longer than you can hang around wondering if it’s worth the risk”

EPA Rejects mining at Helena and Aurora Range

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has once again recommended to the State Government that mining the Helena and Aurora Range would be ‘environmentally unacceptable’.

It recommended that Mineral Resources’ proposal to mine iron-ore at the range ‘should not be implemented’.

The EPA went on to say that the Helena-Aurora Range should be included in a Class A reserve to protect one of the state’s unique banded ironstone ranges.

This is the second time the EPA has rejected Mineral Resources’ proposal. The EPA initially rejected the proposal in 2015.

This does not guarantee that the range will be protected

On the face of it, this is positive news, but the EPA’s decision is only a recommendation based on environmental grounds. Nine appeals have been lodged against the recommendation. These will be reviewed by the Office of the Appeals Convenor, who will make its own recommendation to the State Government.

Environment Minister Stephen Dawson and State Cabinet will make the final decision on the mining proposal later this year.

Our State Government also holds the power to protect the Helena and Aurora Range in a national park.

If you think it’s worth saving one of WA’s natural wonders, you could meet with your local Member of State Parliament to make your views known.

With the final decision pending, now is a crucial time to meet with our local Members of State Parliament to let them know that you care about the Helena and Aurora Range.

Let them know that the Helena and Aurora Range is no place for mining and that you want it protected in a national park for future generations to enjoy.

Never met with a Member of Parliament before? Help is at hand:

- We have prepared an [email template](#) asking your local Member of Parliament for a meeting www.birdlife.good.do/helena/MP. You are welcome to modify it as you see fit.
- We published a fact sheet about the Helena and Aurora Range and Mineral Resources’ mining proposal in the last edition of *Woodlands on the Wing* (pages 7-12) www.birdlife.org.au/documents/Woodlands_on_the_Wing_Issue_14_v9cmp.pdf
- We can send you an information pack, which you can present to your Member of Parliament.
- We will even do our very best to send someone with you to your meeting for support if you like.
- You can always contact us at gww@birdlife.org.au or on 08 9383 7749 — we will be more than happy to help.

BirdLife WA and the Great Western Woodlands Committee want everyone to have the opportunity to experience the wonderful Helena and Aurora Range, and to have this opportunity for years to come.

There is nothing else like it in WA!

Alasdair Bulloch, Shapelle McNee, and Mark Henryon
The Great Western Woodlands Committee

Thanks for sharing your thoughts

In May, we asked you to tell us what you love about the Helena and Aurora Range. www.birdsyoulove.org/helena. BirdLife WA met with Environmental Minister Stephen Dawson in July and presented him with all of your wonderful responses.

Thank you!

The meeting was to brief Mr Dawson on BirdLife WA’s environmental priorities, including Helena and Aurora Range, Black-Cockatoos, and Western Ground Parrot.

A special treat!

Drone footage highlighting some of the wonders of the Helena and Aurora Range
youtu.be/LyflBHvrP4E.

If you know anyone who would like to see more of the Range, but cannot visit it in person, this is one quick way to share it with them.

A lighter side to surveys

Experiences by Mark Binns

Remote surveying is mostly keeping busy getting site to site, counting birds and enjoying the company of interesting people, camping with the occasional staked tyre, breakdown or getting bogged to interrupt the process. But other things happen.

Last year, on the way to a rendezvous in Norseman for remote surveys further out, I spotted a perched **Brown Falcon** and stopped to record it with a photo (which is in issue 14 of *Woodlands on the Wing*). I lined up the bird only half noticing a man loading sleepers into a trailer some distance behind the Falcon. Back on the road leaning on the bonnet filling out an observation form I was surprised when a very angry man drove up accusing me of writing his rego etc down and taking a photo of him helping himself to the sleepers. He took some convincing that it was the bird on the post, (luckily it was still there) that I was interested in and he left still not pleased.

Recently, out the back of Jilbadji on the Holland Track, (a rather seriously cut up track that passes through some very interesting country) I was sleeping in my swag right against the track itself when at 10.30pm I was woken by a tremendous noise. In the pitch dark of a moonless night I vaguely saw a monstrous vehicle roar past like something from *Mad Max*. I was more than a little concerned when it stopped a short distance past me and two burly blokes walked back towards me. Thinking what kind of lunatic drives a machine like that in a hurry down a track like this in the dark I quickly got up. Then the first guy shook my hand and said "I'm Andrew, we're army - and sorry but you won't be getting much sleep tonight. We're doing night vision driver training". From then till 3.30 am, at intervals, I had the monster vehicles roaring past, travelling from Hyden to Kalgoorlie in total darkness without headlights. The next day there were no branches to scratch the duco, all trimmed by the scrub bars of the extra wide army vehicles. Ruts were flattened out nicely too.

Birds in Focus

PURPLE-GAPED HONEYEATER

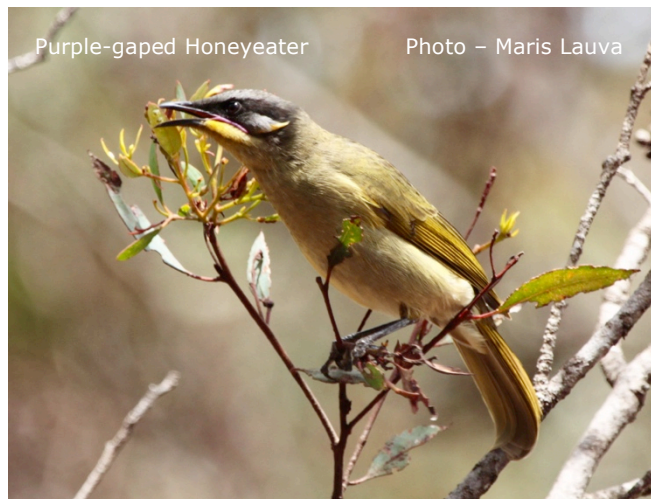
LICHENOSTOMUS CRATITIUS

The Purple-gaped Honeyeater is endemic to mainland Australia. Its range extends east from south east Western Australia. Absent along the Nullarbor though present in the mallee on the coast in the Great Australian Bight at Eyre Bird observatory, then east from the Eyre Peninsula into western Victoria. There is an isolated sub species on Kangaroo Island.

Purple-gaped Honeyeaters are mostly found in temperate to semi-arid country, generally in mallee, tall heath and low eucalypt woodland, often in association with granite outcrops such as McDermid Rock and Peak Charles. The nominate sub-species on Kangaroo Island is of somewhat different behaviour as it occupies a larger range of habitats.

Gould described the section of bare skin, for which it is named, as "a beautiful lilac colour very conspicuous....".

However, depending on your viewing angle the purple gape is often not so obvious. Whilst at a glance it may be confused with a couple of other species of Honeyeater, with a halfway good view there is little chance of confusion. Grey-fronted, Yellow-plumed and Singing Honeyeaters have a superficial resemblance but are clearly separated by differences in the eye stripe, lores and/or breast striations.



Purple-gaped Honeyeater

Photo – Maris Lauva

Nectar forms only a small part of their diet. They actually consume more invertebrates than nectar. In addition to insects and some nectar they are known to eat fruit and seeds. They feed mainly in the foliage of trees and shrubs and are also known occasionally to forage under loose bark on outer branches of (mainly) eucalypts, but rarely on the ground. They are seen in singles or pairs but when food sources are abundant are known to form larger flocks.

When present they make themselves known with their constant chatter and movement especially during the breeding season (August to January). They are reasonably common in the south eastern corner of the GWW with 130 recorded sightings in the first three years of the project.

Trees in Focus

SMOOTH-BARKED YORK GUM

EUCALYPTUS LOXOPHLEBA SUBSP. *LISSOPHLOIA*

Photos and text by Malcolm French

Many thanks for the opportunity to write in your newsletter about a eucalypt that you will encounter whilst researching birds in the Great Western Woodlands (GWW). I've often thought the study of plants and birds go hand in hand.

I've chosen one of my favourite eucalypts, commonly known as the Smooth-barked York Gum. It's one of my favourites due to the intense colour of the smooth shiny bark, the often white-waxy powdery substance seen on the small stems and buds, and by its very glossy, green adult leaves. On seeing this species, you often know that granite outcrops are nearby, particularly in the goldfields, as evidenced here with a good population on the entrance track to the special granite 'island', Peak Charles (see photo below).



The leaves of young plants of eucalypts usually have no resemblance to the adult or mature leaves. These can change dramatically in leaf colour, gloss and shape as the tree develops through to maturity. The Smooth-barked York



Gum is a good example with the young leaves being somewhat round, dull and grey-green contrasting to the lanceolate shaped, glossy, green leaves of the mature plant.

For birds, insects and mammals, the Smooth-barked York Gum could be one of their favourites as it usually flowers profusely, providing clusters of up to 13 buds in each flower umbel. The flowers are white, usually

flowering spring to late summer, although I have noticed it starting to flower more recently in mid-July.

One of the easiest ways to determine the species of eucalypt you are looking at is to take a sample of the buds and fruits and from there,



recognise them in a field book as most books will have their plants in taxonomic order, similar to a bird book I'm sure. The type of bark is also useful in identifying eucalypts and in the case of the Smooth-barked

York Gum, (its name here helps!) its shiny, smooth very colourful bark from intense tans and bronze (mostly autumn, early winter) to yellow-cream, greys is usually conspicuous in the field.



The Smooth-barked York Gum is of a mallee habit, being multi-stemmed and having a lignotuber - which is the woody mass at the base of the tree that contains dormant vegetative buds, ready to spout after fire events or other disturbance.

If you see a guy out in the woodlands with a heap of gumnuts, taking tree images, parked indifferently on tracks, say hello, as chances it will be yours truly!

Malcolm French is the author of the comprehensive and respected book "Eucalypts of Western Australia's Wheatbelt" describing 159 species. Many of those species overlap in range with the GWW and form a useful reference for us. He is currently working on a further book "Goldfields Eucalypts". As this would have even greater relevance to the GWW we look forward to seeing it in the future.

GWW Committee Notes

From Alasdair Bulloch

My goodness, what a busy few months it has been, the 2017 activities will stamp the value of the Great Western Woodlands outcomes in the WA community's mind and for that matter Australia.

When one considers the time and effort each individual contributes towards the wellbeing of the GWW surveys and projects, there is only one word to describe this, "outstanding".

The dedication from the GWW Committee members and Birdlife volunteers are of such a high standard, that it is a pleasure and delight to be part of it all. Thank you all for your assistance and support.

We do have some real challenges ahead to keep the GWW projects and its financial health in good order. I am sure this will be achieved by our dedicated members and volunteers going forward.

There are notes on the mining submissions/proposals for the Helena and Aurora Range, and I will not elaborate further, other than to encourage all Birdlife members and the community to voice their concerns to their respective State Parliamentarians over the next six weeks, before Minister Dawson's decision.

How big should your survey group be?

If you are thinking about organising your own survey trip to the GWW you don't need a cast of thousands. The minimum requirement is for two 4WD vehicles so a group could be as small as you and a mate. Having 4 vehicles and being able to form two survey teams helps if you want to minimise the duration of your trip but even at a leisurely four or five surveys per day you could comfortably knock off a complete survey area in a week.

Contact the Survey coordinator at gww@birdlife.org.au for advice, maps, and all the information you need.

An Improved EPIRB

The SPOT Messenger combines an EPIRB (emergency distress signalling) function with the ability to send 3 pre-determined messages to your selected Email contacts. The messages go out via Satellite and include your GPS coordinates. You decide the content such as a "Reached camp for tonight OK" or possibly "Car immobile need non-urgent recovery". Anyone travelling in remote areas should



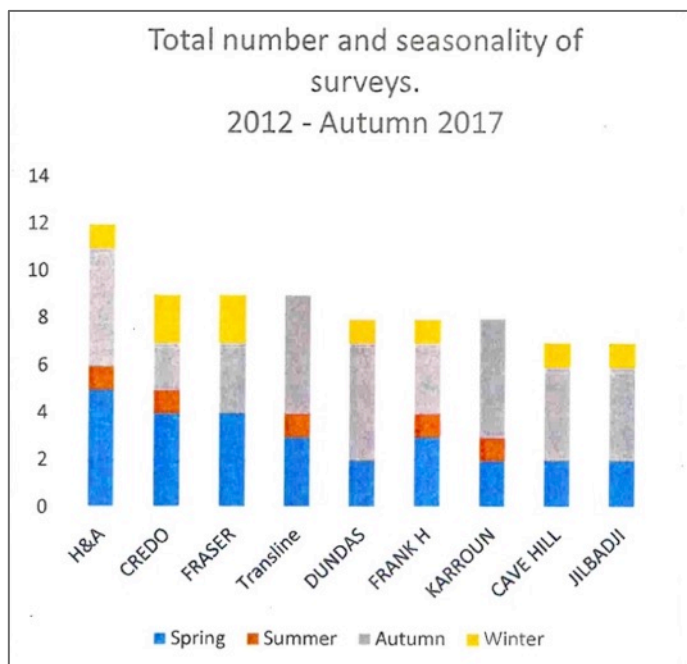
carry some sort of emergency comms device and if you are considering purchasing a Satellite phone for example this could be a less

expensive (albeit less flexible) alternative.

Birdlife Australia does not endorse this product. Other similar products may be on the market. Please conduct your own research before any purchase.

Which area to choose for survey?

The graph below shows that we are keeping surveys reasonably balanced between the different survey areas. We no longer organize official surveys in winter or summer but if anyone finds a "window" of safe and pleasant weather in those seasons we would welcome the data. Otherwise our aim is to continue balancing out the seasonality and the areas surveyed. If you are wondering where to go you are of course free to pick any area but we'd like you to firstly consider going to any of the least visited places.



What's Coming Up?

GWW 2017 Spring Surveys

Spring is shaping up to be a spectacular explosion of flowers. Early and heavy rain events have people predicting a great wildflower season.

We are organising survey trips to Frank Hann and Peak Charles (15 September) as well as to Jilbadji (16 October). Frank Hann - Peak Charles will be constrained for numbers by the number of campsites available at the Peak Charles Campground. There are only 9 sites and although we'll be out of school holidays and we plan to get there on a Saturday night there's no guarantee all sites will be available. There simply are no suitable areas for bush camping nearby. We will also need to ensure there are enough experienced people to form at least two teams.

If you are interested in participating in either survey trip please contact the Survey coordinators to receive the relevant information.

Contact email address: gww@birdlife.org.au

In addition to these "official" surveys we welcome people getting together with friends and heading out to the GWW to do a survey at their own timing and pace. We can let you know the areas most in need of a survey but you are welcome to any of the 9 areas you please. We will support individual and group efforts with all the information and advice. Ours is a long-term project involving multiple revisits to survey sites. The aim is to have surveyed each of the 9 survey areas throughout the widest range of seasonal and climatic conditions possible so the more surveys undertaken the better. If as an individual you are looking for someone to accompany you we will make every effort to find like-minded people to go along with you to form a group. Likewise, if your group could use another participant we'll try to find one for you.

HELP WANTED

The Great Western Woodlands project committee is looking for volunteers to help with fundraising activities (office or home based).

We are currently without regular funding and need to raise money to enable the project to continue until at least 2024.

Enquiries to gww@birdlife.org.au

For more information about the project please contact:

Survey Coordinators:

Libby McGill, Lorraine Chyne, Maris Lauva

Great Western Woodlands bird surveys

E gww@birdlife.org.au

M 0403 029 051 (Maris)

www.birdlife.org.au/projects/great-western-woodland