

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



August 2016 - Issue #240
Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.
PO Box 541, LEETON 2705 ISSN-1327-1172

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Objects of the Club

To facilitate and promote the knowledge of natural history, and to encourage the preservation and protection of the Australian natural environment, especially that of the Murrumbidgee River Valley



Fivebough Wetlands - Black Swans nesting & Black-winged Stilts in flight; Buff-banded Rail (left) by Phil Tenison

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the August issue by
Wednesday 31 August

To Rowena Whiting

Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com.

Phone: 6953 2612

*Outings to
Cocoparra National Park
and Galore Hill*

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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Treasurer:	Phil Tenison	6953 4869	Website Co-ordinator:	Phillip Williams	6953 3524

MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND THURSDAY EACH MONTH, EXCEPT JANUARY, AT THE Yellow Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street at 7.30 PM

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

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Annual Subscriptions:	Family	\$45.00	Adult/Single	\$35.00	Journal only/Concession	\$25.00

Opinions expressed by authors are their own and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

Some Images in colour for our non-email recipients

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What are these females going on about ?

Your comments are invited.

Red-capped Robin, View from the lookout at "Yarrabimbi", Variegated Wrens by Phil Tenison



Yarrambimbi" outing 17 July 2016

The day was beautiful and sunny and 11 members turned up for the outing to Andrew's place. We drove to the southern end of the property to the cadet shelter of old as Andrew was on his way back from Wagga and didn't meet us until later in the morning.

We began the walk past the old quarry which was full to the brim after the winter rains of the past month. Not only that all of the dams were full to overflowing and water was seeping down the hillside so everything had been thoroughly saturated.



We walked up the hill track towards Andrew's lookout and on the way found several outcrops of Dwarf Greenhoods beside the track. We didn't encounter too many birds until almost at the top where we found **Red-capped** and **Eastern Yellow Robins**, **Jacky Winter** and **Grey Shrike-Thrush** as well as several species of thornbills.

At the top we surveyed Andrew's recent 'summer house' construction and appreciated the view across the area marvelling at the lushness of the area after the long dry summer. The view towards Leeton showed the extent of the water in Fivebough Wetlands after the rains.

The group then headed down the track towards Andrew's house and met up with him part of the way. We stayed around the house for a while



admiring the garden and birds before half of us went back to the vehicles via the lower road and the others went with Andrew in search of a **Tawny Frogmouth** that he had located a few days before – unfortunately, it wasn't where he had seen it so the group hiked back over the hill to meet the others.

After a belated brunch we made a half-hearted attempt at looking further up the hill for birds but in the end most of us returned to the cars and by 3pm we called it a day.

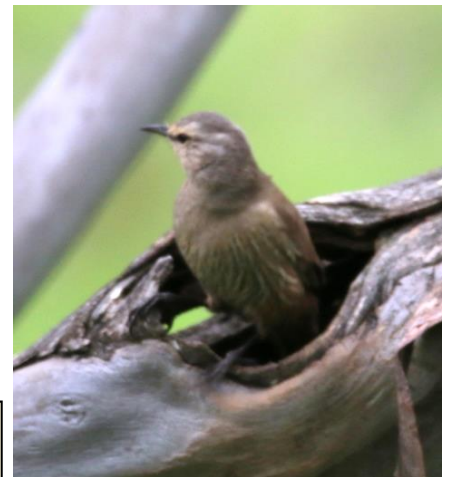
Thanks to Andrew for hosting us on his property and, in all, we recorded over 40 bird species (see list below).

Max O'Sullivan

Bird List

Little Pied Cormorant
Wedge-tailed Eagle
Mallee Ringneck
Laughing Kookaburra
Red-capped Robin
Rufous Whistler
Grey Fantail
Grey-crowned Babbler
Weebill
Inland Thornbill
Brown-headed Honeyeater
Striated Pardalote
Apostlebird
Magpie

Wood Duck
Common Bronzewing
Eastern Rosella
Welcome Swallow
Easter Yellow Robin
Golden Whistler (fem.)
Willie Wagtail
Yellow Thornbill
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Brown Treecreeper
White-plumed Honeyeater
Double-barred Finch
Pied Butcherbird
Australian Raven



MFN group at the lookout, Brown Treecreeper, Hill She-oak by Kathy & Phil Tenison

Black Duck
Galah
Red-rumped Parrot
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Jacky Winter
Grey Shrike-Thrush
White-browed Babbler
Buff-rumped Thornbill
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill
Yellow-throated Miner
Striped Honeyeater (H)
Pee Wee
Grey Butcherbird

Galore Hill Nature Reserve 30 July 2016

After seeing a **Crested Shrike-tit** on one of the posters that Kerri Keely left at the June meeting, Phil (Tenison) was desperate to see one to photograph. The only ones that I have seen in the area were always at Galore Hill so Kathy, Phil and I decided to go in search of them on Saturday (30 July).

I must confess but, I didn't tell Phil this, I didn't give us much chance to see one as I hadn't seen one there in the last 12 months. We walked from the eremophila plantings up to the play area and just before we got there Kathy spied one in a tree just over the gully beside the road. I quickly got onto it and identified it as a male but, unfortunately, Phil was too slow to get to see it. After looking at every tree in the vicinity we decided to press on to the picnic area where we found a beautiful pair of **Diamond Firetails** feeding on the ground close to the shelter.



I had hoped to see some Scarlet and Flame Robins there but apart from a female **Flame Robin** along the road we only saw several **Eastern Yellow Robins** and numerous **Brown Treecreepers**.

On the walk back we heard a call that I certainly didn't recognise and we eventually found it to be coming from a female shrike-tit. So, relief for Phil, and he was able to get a couple of shots at reasonably close range.



We then drove up to the towers for lunch and despite the cold we had a quick walk and came across a group of **Red-capped Robins** and **Speckled Warblers** which was a good finale before heading home around 3pm.

Max O'Sullivan

Bird list:

White-plumed Honeyeater
 Red-rumped Parrot
 Red Wattlebird
 Crested Shrike-tit
 Willie Wagtail
 Eastern Yellow Robin
 Grey Shrike-Thrush
 Variegated Wren
 Apostlebird
 Wood Duck

Grey-crowned Babbler
 Eastern Rosella
 Flame Robin [female]
 Restless Flycatcher
 Laughing Kookaburra
 Fantailed Cuckoo (H)
 Grey Fantail
 Brown Treecreeper
 Pied Currawong

Noisy Miner
 Galah
 Speckled Warbler
 Red-capped Robin
 Chestnut-rumped Thornbill
 Jacky Winter
 Diamond Firetail
 White-winged Chough
 Magpie

**Crested Shrike-tit, Gargaloo, Speckled Warbler, along the road with Max & Phil, Hakea with new growth.
 Birds by Phil, others by Kathy Tenison**



Paddock Trees

At our July meeting we were pleased to welcome **Kerri Keely**, Landcare coordinator. She showed a short video on paddock trees which was quite entertaining. The film *Champions of Change: farmers and their paddock trees*, features some of the inspiring work being done by farmers to arrest the decline in paddock trees and nurture future generations and gave an insight to their value for wildlife habitat, erosion and shelter for livestock. How often do we see them under the shade on hot days? It includes footage from across the Murrumbidgee Catchment, and is punctuated by some lighthearted behind-the-scenes bloopers.

The video was funded by the NSW Environmental Trust through a grant to Murrumbidgee Landcare and was produced by Matt Herring at Murray Wildlife and Nathan Smith at NJ Productions.

The humble paddock tree is a familiar sight across the farming landscape. Often hundreds of years in age, these landscape giants provide valuable shelter for livestock, crops, pastures, and wildlife. Unfortunately, the number of paddock trees is declining across Australia, due to age, isolation, fire damage, and other stresses.

While many farmers are seeking to address this decline, by protecting their existing trees, and encouraging the growth of new paddock trees on their properties; there are many who just want to get rid of them and with the proposed biodiversity act they will be able to do so.

There are many not so obvious benefits: they have been shown to enhance water infiltration and soil quality, in addition to providing habitat themselves they also increase the biodiversity value of other nearby habitats, such as tree plantings and small remnant patches. They ensure the flow of genetic material across the landscape and between populations

There needs to be a greater understanding of the value of these old trees which are part of the Australian agricultural landscape.

Our thanks go to Kerri for showing us the film which incited discussion and also informing us of Landcare projects and activities, some of which are on our program.

Rowena Whiting



Have Your Say: Kosciuszko National Park Draft Wild Horse Management Plan

For those of us who have been to the high country will be aware first hand of the damage that the wild horses are doing and also the unpleasantness of having to endure the smell and necessity to avoid the dung, let alone the flies it attracts no doubt you will wish to have your say on the this draft plan.

The following is taken from the National Parks Association news July 2016.

“The much-needed [Draft Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan 2016](#), is currently on public exhibition until 19 August 2016. The plan, developed with input from an Independent Technical Reference Group and after extensive community engagement, is a review of the 2008 Kosciuszko National Parks Horse Management Plan. The original plan proved wholly ineffective at controlling the growing horse population, with numbers doubling in size from an estimated 3,000 in 2008, to 6,000 in 2014. This has caused significant environmental damage and cost taxpayers an estimated \$3.6 million. We support the draft plan in its current form as the minimum that should be implemented to prevent further damage to this fragile park.

[http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies/News of members](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies/News%20of%20members)

New Recovery Plan for the Plains-wanderer

This document constitutes the National Recovery Plan for the Plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*). The plan considers the conservation requirements of the species across its range and identifies the actions to be taken to ensure the species long-term viability in nature, and the parties that will undertake those actions.

The plains-wanderer has recently been upgraded to Critically Endangered on the list of threatened species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). In recent years, significant declines in numbers of plains-wanderers have been recorded in the species core locations. Over longer timeframes the primary threats to the survival of the plains-wanderer have been identified as habitat loss, primarily through the expansion of agriculture, and inappropriate grazing regimes.

The overall goal of this recovery plan is to achieve a viable, self-sustaining wild population capable of persisting through extended poor breeding seasons, and to put in place long-term management arrangements that ensure key plains-wanderer habitat is appropriately managed. To achieve this goal a range of strategies will be employed, including the development and implementation of a robust, targeted conservation breeding program and projects to facilitate management of grazing and burning regimes to maintain suitable habitat.

You can download a copy of the *National Recovery Plan for the Plains-wanderer* (*Pedionomus torquatus*) from <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/recovery-plans/plains-wanderer-2016>



Image by David Parker

Our Country In Bygone Times Murrumbidgee River History - Part 2

'Ol' man river, he just keeps rollin' along'

Geomorphological work has revealed four very distinct channel systems for the Murrumbidgee River below Narrandera where the river flows through a gap in the hills.

The earliest channel, the Coleambally System, has been dated to be more than 100,000 years old. The river then flowed roughly alongside the line of Yanco Creek down to Morundah then westwards. An older arm parallels the present Yanco Creek as the Bundure Arm. It has been dated at 100,000 years ago. From 80,000 years ago the river changed and flowed westwards from Morundah to south of the Coleambally Irrigation Area and on to Booorooban, as the Yamma Arm.

After a dry period (interglacial) the Murrumbidgee took a different route south of the present river as the Waddi Reach of the Kerarbury System. This System prevailed from 55,000 to 35,000 years ago. Initially it flowed past the Tombullen area towards Gum Creek as the Oolambeyan Arm and on to Booorooban to finally use the old Coleambally System channels on past Moulamein. Distributary channels formed from time to time over the life of the Kerarbury System. The oldest, the Romani Arm, dated at 47,800 years left the main channel north of Booorooban to flow westerly towards the Murray-Murrumbidgee junction. Another arm, the Hay Arm, dating from 46,000 years split off from the Oolambeyan Reach to flow north-westwards to past Hay then bend back south-westwards to Maude. 37,000 years ago the Benerambah Arm branched off and headed past Darlington Point to spectacularly split into several ever smaller channels west of Griffith.

At 35,000 years ago the general course of the Murrumbidgee changed again to one that the present river now largely uses. However the meanders were less twisty and broader, indicating that river flow was five times greater than at present. This system is known as the Gum Creek System and operated to 25,000 years ago. Ana branches formed downstream from Yarrada Lagoon. One arm, the Oolambeyan Reach roughly sets the line of Gum Creek. Another branch can be traced on the north side of the present river as the Carrathool Arm. A third branch can now be traced along the present Uara Creek from Maude to Balranald.

The fourth system, the Yanco System, operated from 20,000 years ago to 13,000 years ago, that is in the period following the Last Glacial Maximum. It is marked today as the present Yanco and Billabong Creeks, but has the hallmarks of much greater flows.

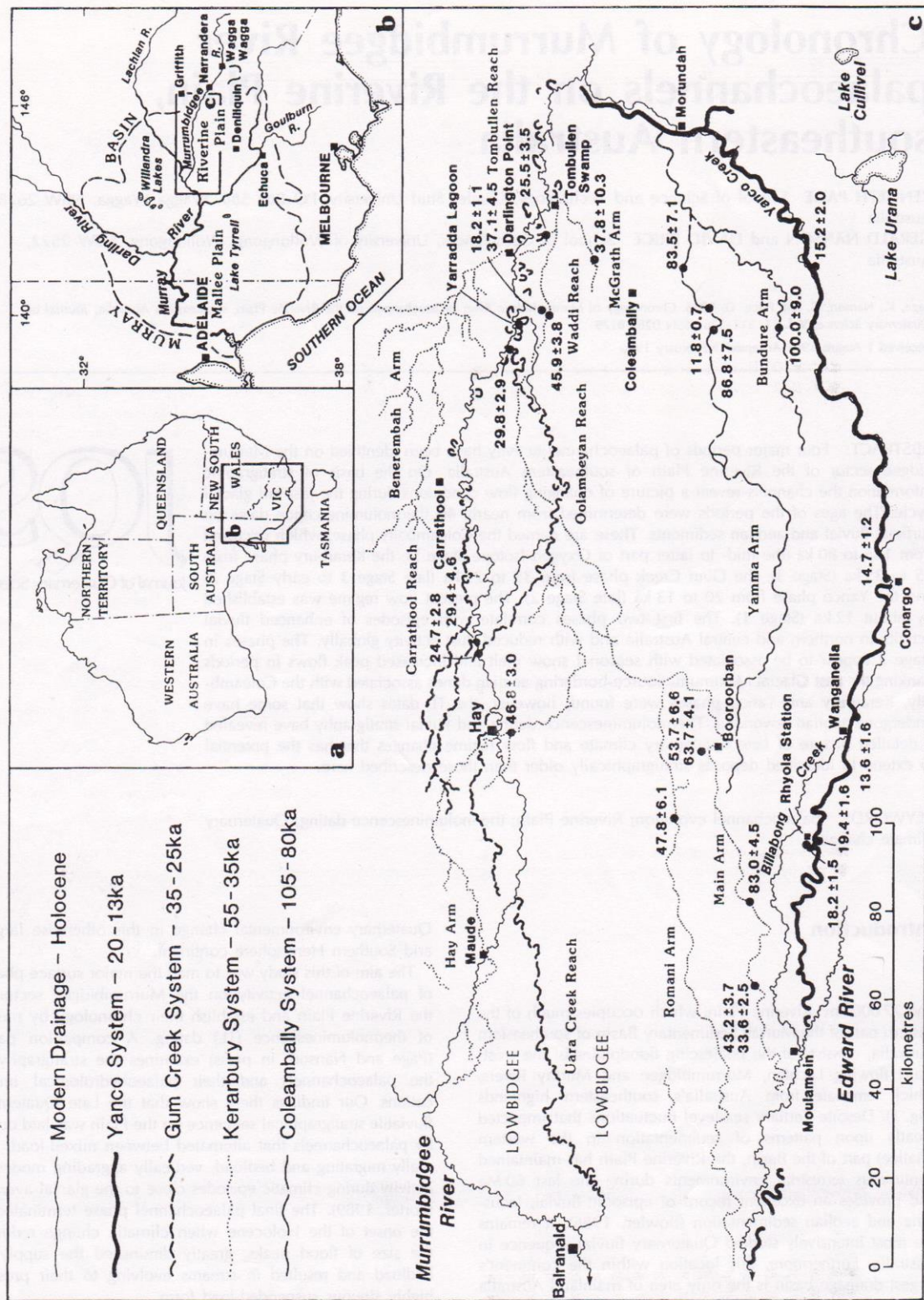


Figure 1 Map of Murrumbidgee palaeochannel systems and TL dating sites on the Riverine Plain.

What event caused the Murrumbidgee to largely abandon the Yanco Creek System to take its present course is unknown. Sudden changes of course of floodplain rivers have occurred in living memory. The Yangste River in China altered its course by over 50Kkm during a large flood. Due to the levee effect floodplain rivers can be higher than the surrounding plains. Any breach of the levee can lead to a change of course. Fortunately for us our controlled river system limits the flood surges, so our Murrumbidgee seems set to keep rolling on – at least for the foreseeable future.

Map source: Journal of Quaternary Science (1996) 11(4) 311-326

Eric Whiting

Remember the **Brown Snake** we incorrectly identified, well it should be a **King Brown Snake** – our thanks to a Canberra reader for pointing this out.

Rain does not stop play for Field Naturalists

This winter has been pretty wet and we have seen restricted access to many of our popular field-natting areas. Also it is predicted that the rest of winter will see above average rainfall.

The effect has been quite a limitation on our field activities. Should it also limit our personal activity? How about thinking locally – I mean really local, starting with your own garden. Surprisingly it is the urban environment that is least recorded in the natural world.

So how about doing your own biodiversity survey? Just keep a record of all the nature you see in your garden. You will be surprised at the number and diversity so close to you. Try to include behaviour as well. There is so much we don't know even about the most commonest species.



A log of the birds that visit is the easiest to do, and if you have a convenient window overlooking the garden can be done from the comfort of being in the warm and dry! Appearances and flowering times of weeds and planted natives is another area that can be enlightening and useful to science generally.

Data that we do have is generally from city environments with totally different climates to ours. Climate change is altering flowering times but we don't have long term studies to prove it. There is no reason why

you can't start your own study now.

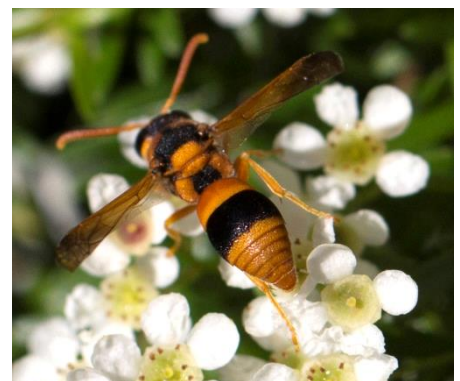
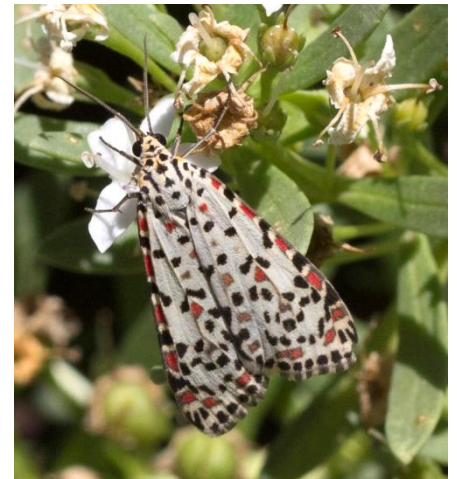
If you want to be really useful, venture into recording all or part of the world of the smaller critters. Scarcely anything is known about this realm in Australia even though there is so much more of it than the furred and feathered. Unfortunately there is a dearth of identification manuals. You may have to resort to recording short descriptions of a species rather than a scientific name. Contacting a museum or finding a body such as an Entomological Society and giving your description (and photo if you can) could come up with a name. You could also try posting a photo on Bowerbird (<http://www.bowerbird.org.au>), someone may reply with an answer. You never know, but you could have discovered a new species.

If your garden is not to your taste or you just want to get out and about try stopping off along a roadside. Make sure you park safely (from passing traffic or not getting bogged) and just walk up and down the verges looking as you go. That's how I started recording – and learning about – native plants of the area. Nobody had done that in our area before!

So wet weather need not put a stop to enjoyment of the bush, just be adaptive. Oh! I should add let everyone else know what you find – put it in an observation or an article to the newsletter.

Eric Whiting

Grey Fantail at bird bath by Penny Williams
Moth – Eric Whiting
Wasp – Rowena Whiting



News of members:

Vale John Hewitt

Members will be sad to hear of the recent death of John. We have fond memories of activities shared with John and Jennifer. We extend our deepest sympathy to Jenny and family. While they moved from Leeton in 2002, retiring to their holiday home in Vincentia, they visited from time to time, as did some of us enjoy their hospitality. A true bush companion.

We are also sorry to hear that **Enid Atkinson** has twisted her ankle so will not be able to return home from visiting her son for another few weeks.

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

These sightings are from members' observations. Please check with the relevant person before quoting any record.

Red-rumped Parrot [Small flock]	Melbourne St Narrandera	01/07/16	Betty Bradney
Grey-crowned Babbler	'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton	05/07/16	Andrew Thompson
Brown Honeyeater	Cypress St, Leeton	07/07/16	Eric Whiting
Glossy Ibis	Jerilderie Golf Course	10/07/16	Graham Russell
Glossy Ibis [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	14/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Spotless Crane [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	14/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Nankeen Night Heron [5]	McCaughy Park, Yanco	15/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Darter [1]	Mc Caughy Park, Yanco	15/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Flame Robin [male]	Fivebough Wetlands	16/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Musk Duck [pr]	Fivebough Wetlands	16/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Magpie Goose [4]	The Basin Dam, Koonadan	16/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Golden Whistler	Store Creek, Cocoparra National Park	17/07/16	Neil Palframan
Black Swan [51 nests]	Fivebough Wetlands	18/07/16	Keith Hutton
Olive-backed Oriole	The Winery site, Binya	20/07/16	Marie Lister
Magpie Goose [3]	Campbell Swamp, Griffith	20/07/16	Marie Lister
Pink-eared Duck [2]	Sale Yard ponds, Griffith	20/07/16	Marie Lister
Magpie Goose [12]	Calabria Winery, Griffith	22/07/16	Neil Palframan
Blue-billed Duck [12]	South Lake Wyangan, Griffith	22/07/16	Neil Palframan
Brown Honeyeater [2]	Pendula St, Leeton	23/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Grey-crowned Babbler	McNabb Cres, Griffith	Daily	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	McNabb Cres, Griffith	Daily	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Mistletoebird	McNabb Cres, Griffith	Regularly	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Cockatiel	McNabb Cres, Griffith	Daily	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Rainbow Lorikeet	McNabb Cres, Griffith	Daily	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Whiskered Tern [1 st for season]	Fivebough Wetlands	24/07/16	Keith Hutton
Whiskered Tern [9]	Fivebough Wetlands	27/07/16	Keith Hutton

Some interesting counts from Keith's quarterly surveys at Fivebough and Tuckerbil.

Black Swan [370]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
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There are at present 71 nests occupied by the swans.

Australian Shoveller [22]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Grey Teal [only 6]	This indicates there are plenty of other water bodies for these ducks.		
Hoary-headed Grebe [51]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Eurasian Coot [366]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Black-winged Stilt [313]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Red-necked Avocet [23]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Golden-headed Cisticola [19]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Australian Reed-Warbler [13]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Little Grassbird [18]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Eastern Grey Kangaroo [90]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/07/16	Keith Hutton
Brolga [4]	Tuckerbil Swamp	29/07/16	Keith Hutton
Black-winged Stilt [190]	Tuckerbil Swamp	29/07/16	Keith Hutton
Wedge-tailed Eagle [at nest]	Tuckerbil Swamp	29/07/16	Keith Hutton
Olive-backed Oriole	Pendula St, Leeton	29/07/16	Max O'Sullivan
Flame Robin [fem]	Galore Hill Nature Reserve	30/07/16	Phil Tenison
Crested Shrike-tit [pr]	Galore Hill Nature Reserve	30/07/16	Kathy Tenison
Restless Flycatcher [1]	Galore Hill Nature Reserve	30/07/16	Phil Tenison
Diamond Firetail [2]	Galore Hill Nature Reserve	30/07/16	Phil & Kathy Tenison
Speckled Warbler [6+]	Galore Hill Nature Reserve	30/07/16	Phil & Kathy Tenison

**** COMING EVENTS ****

- 11 August Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: "Fossils from 100 million years ago" - Penny and Phillip Williams
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 14 August Sunday** **Outing: Spring Hill and Falcon Falls**
Meet: at the rail crossing at Binya township and Erigolia Road at 8:30am.
Bring: Morning tea and lunch.
Please contact: Max O'Sullivan on 6953 4726 if intending to come.
Note: Weather conditions may affect access to the Spring Hill Picnic Area so this outing may change.
- 28 August Sunday** **Outing: Galore Hill.**
Meet: Narrandera Tourist Information Centre at 8:30am.
Bring: Morning tea and lunch.
Please contact: Nella Smith on 6959 1210 if intending to come.
- 31 August Wednesday** **Copy for the September newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 11 September Sunday** **Activity: "Hollows as Homes"**
at Cocoparra National Park to celebrate National Tree Day and World Ranger Day
Organised by Irrigation Area Landcare Collective and NSW National Parks & wildlife.
Time: 11 am-followed by a sausage sizzle (free)
Meeting Place: Woolshed Flat Camping Area, BBQ Shelter.
Please confirm by checking with Kerri Keely - kkeely@mli.org.au or 0428 396 826,
- 16 – 18 September** **Spring Camp at Rankins Springs**
Looking at mallee and wattle in the area.
Camping weekend – both the Rankins Springs hotel and motel are now closed.
There is a B&B nearby that can accommodate a few people who don't wish to camp – contact Graham and Dione Russell on 0428536290 so bookings can be made.
It is intended to join the plant id day on the Sunday – see below.
Contact: Graham and Dione Russell on **0428536290**
- 18 September** **WILDFLOWER AND PLANT ID DAY**-Martin Driver will be presenting a plant identification workshop followed by a walk and talk at Cocoparra, from 10-2pm. More details to follow.
- Other events**
- 3 -4 September** **BIGnet Conference in Leeton**
MFN are hosting this event which is by invitation to delegates only. Members are welcome to join the participants for dinner on the Saturday evening. Details will be sent out when available.
- 20 September Tuesday** **Community Tree Planting at Fivebough Wetlands**
There is a large area near the Fivebough Wetlands Education area that has been prepared for planting.
Meet at the wetlands at 10:00, Contact Kelly Tyson at Leeton Shire
RSVP by 5 September. Bush tucker will be provided.
- 26 September onwards** **Yathong - a plant search of the nearby Merrimerrriwa Range**
This will take place over a few days. A reasonable level of fitness is required.
Contact: Nella Smith 69591210
- 7-9 October** **Birds of the Bush Festival at Rankins Springs**
Guest Speaker: Tim Low. A biologist, environmental consultant and writer of numerous books: "The New Nature" "Feral Future" and "Where Song Began".