

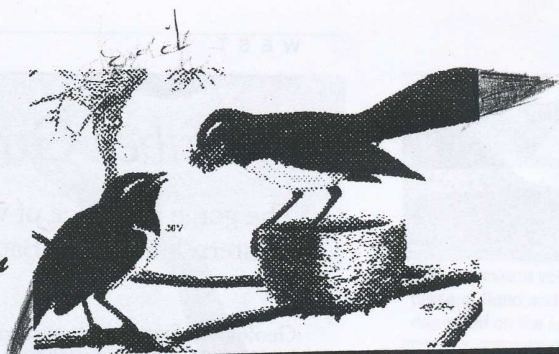
# Werribee Wagtails

June/July/August Newsletter, 1999

Editor Shirley Cameron

Vol. 4 No3

97412997.



Congratulations Rohan Bugg, awarded the first Wyndham Quality Community Plan Platypus Award for the environment. Rohan was described in the Banner June 10 '99 as Wyndham council's flora and fauna expert. Rohan met us at Cobbledick's Ford on June 1<sup>st</sup> and our birding really came alive. We ambled along the river while Rohan described the interesting trees in the area. The rare exotic *Osage Orange*, native to America where its branches were used to make bows and arrows; then the Gippsland escapee, the *Blue Box*, how did it get in the River? There is one *mannan gum*, the tree chosen by koalas, the next nearest is at Toolern Vale. Lots of 'mongrel' weeds! A steep walk up the escarpment revealed the interesting valley once used to quarantine cattle fording the river on the way to and from the Western District. Little<sup>15</sup> left of the Cobbledick family home, some bluestone walls remain and there is evidence of the well, typical of wells built in the Western District. The Cobbledicks are buried in the Werribee Cemetery. Rohan is also a valuable source of Werribee history. Birding was great, Red-browed Firetails were skipping about but the antics of the female and male Flame Robin captured most attention.

## Birds Seen at Cobbledick's Ford June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999

Little Eagle  
Kestrel  
Masked Lapwing  
Spotted Turtle Dove  
Galah  
Corella  
Sulphur-crested cockatoo  
Purple-crowned Lorikeet

Eastern rosella  
Blue winged parrot  
Red-rumped parrot  
Superb Fairy wren  
White-browed Scrubwren  
Yellow-rumped thornbill  
White plumed Honeyeater  
New Holland Honey-eater

Flame Robin  
Golden whistler  
Grey Shrike Thrush  
Magpie-lark  
Willie Wagtail  
Australian Magpie  
Little Raven  
House Sparrow

Mistletoebird  
Welcome Swallow  
Tree martin  
Zebra Finch  
Gold Finch  
Silvereye  
Common Blackbird  
Common Starling

## Newport Lakes, Altona Beach, Cherry Lake May4 1999.

Starting from the usual spot, the convoy of 11 bodies in three cars wended its way along Sneyds Road, Point Cook Rd., Central Avenue and Queen Street then along Altona Beach to Millers Road before turning into Mason Street and finally stopping at Newport Lakes. David and his wife met us there in the carpark. Gil and Val joined the group a short time later. Some of the group left at Altona Beach to go their separate ways while the remainder went to Cherry Lake for lunch and a walk along the lake before returning to Werribee. A total of 50 different species were recorded for the day. The darter, pied oystercatcher, and singing honeyeater were a new species for some. C. Dennis & C. Popham.

## Birds seen on route, at Newport Lakes, Altona Beach and Cherry Lake May 4 1999

Black Swan  
Mallard  
Pacific Black Duck  
Grey Teal  
Chestnut Teal  
Australasian Grebe  
Hoary-headed Grebe  
Darter  
Little Pied Cormorant  
Pelican  
White Faced Heron  
Great Egret

Little Egret  
Straw-necked Ibis  
Royal spoonbill  
Marsh Harrier  
Kestrel  
Purple Swamphen  
Dusky Moorhen  
Black-tailed Native hen  
Greenshank  
Black-winged stilt  
Masked Lapwing  
Pacific Gull

Silver Gull  
Rock pigeon  
Spotted Turtle Dove  
Purple-crowned Lorikeet  
Superb Fairy wren  
Spotted Pardalote  
Red wattle bird  
Singing Honeyeater  
White plumed Honeyeater  
New Holland Honeyeater  
Magpie-lark  
Grey fantail

Willie Wagtail  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
Australian Magpie  
Australian Raven  
Tree Sparrow  
House Sparrow  
Welcome Swallow  
Common Blackbird  
Song Thrush  
Common Starling  
Common Myna



## Werribee Gorge State Park

The gorge is a place of wild, rugged beauty, almost within a stone's throw of the Western Freeway at Bacchus Marsh.

Geological features of sandstones, granites, metamorphic rocks and glacial sediment, combined with spectacular flora and fauna and bushwalking opportunities, make the 500-hectare park a rewarding visit.



Heading up the gorge

**History:** Five hundred million years of geological history are on display. The significance of the gorge was established in the 1880s and further confirmed in 1890 when the newly-built Ballarat railway brought groups to study its features. The shales (slates) and sandstones were deposited on the sea bed when the area was part of an inland sea in the Ordovician period 500 to 400 million years ago. The seas retreated and the sediments were uplifted, and, due to lateral pressure, folded, jointed and inclined, as can be seen today.

During the Devonian period, 400-300 million years ago, molten material rose into the earth's crust and crystallised to a coarse-grained granitic rock at least one kilometre below the earth's surface. The molten material "cooked" the surrounding sedimentary rocks, turning them into slates and hornfels. In some places the granite broke the surface and formed dykes, which are pale-grey, hard and dense, with relatively large crystals of quartz and feldspar (crystalline mineral) within the finer-grained mass of quartz and white mica.

Erosion continued until the Permian period 250 million years ago. A remarkable climate change then took place which resulted in the chilling of the Southern Hemisphere and the formation of glaciers and ice sheets. Boulders and rocks in the base of glaciers scraped and polished underlying rocks, forming glacial pavements, and left behind clay and boulders.

But the geological changes didn't end there. During the last 70 million years volcanoes poured out their lava over the low relief surface and filled river valleys: Then, with further land movement along the Rowsley Fault, the Werribee River had its gradient increased and cut a deep gorge down to the underlying Ordovician rocks, exposing the geological history in the cliff face. This gorge is typically V and U shaped and up to 200 metres deep.

The area was reserved for public use in 1907 and became a state park in 1975.

**Attractions:** The Werribee River twists through the sheer rock walls and opens out to provide rock pools and beaches at Needles Beach, Lions Head Beach and Blackwood Pool.

Within the park are eastern grey kangaroos, echidnas, koalas and swamp wallabies. A glimpse of a platypus may be caught in the river pools. Tree include manna gum, red ironbark, golden wattle and white-cypress pine and ground covers include snowy mint-bush, bush peas, groundsls and fern.



### PEREGRINE FALCONS

The peregrine falcon is 38 to 46 centimetres from head to tip of the tail, blue-grey with a black crown and face, buff to rufous below, with black bars on the belly. The female is the same color as the male but slightly larger.

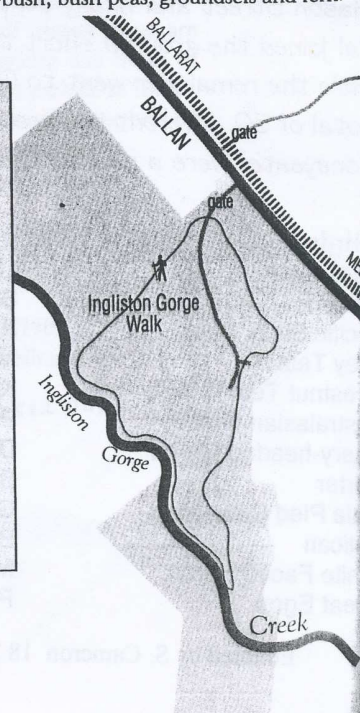
Their call is a loud, repeated "ka-ka-ka", or "kee-kee-kee".

Peregrine falcons are found throughout Australia and can be observed singly or in pairs hunting over coastal cliffs, and timbered hilly and mountainous country with rocks and cliffs.

Around Werribee Gorge the breeding season is from August to November and visitors should avoid disturbing the birds at this time.

The nest is usually built on a cliff-ledge or in a hollow tree with a high vantage point.

They are extremely fast and usually catch their food on the wing. The prey is overtaken in flight or by swooping or stooping, when a lethal blow is made to its head. The peregrine may 'blind' its prey in mid-air.







The gnarled beauty of Werribee Gorge

Birdlife is prolific. The wedge-tailed eagle and peregrine falcon are worth looking out for. Also common are sulphur-crested cockatoos, eastern rosellas, red-rumped parrots, shining bronze-cockatoos, golden whistlers, flycatchers, red-browed and diamond firetails, Australian magpies and little ravens.

**Activities:** Werribee Gorge has walks of varying difficulty and length. The circuit walk of 10 kilometres leads to the rim and then back through the gorge, following the river. In places it is difficult climbing and requires rock hopping. A less arduous walk follows the river upstream from the picnic ground, across the foot-

bridge and then along the old water-channel into the gorge. Those who find the going too tough can retrace their steps and still will have had a rewarding walk. Tracks may be impassable at times of high water.

Bathing in the river is allowed

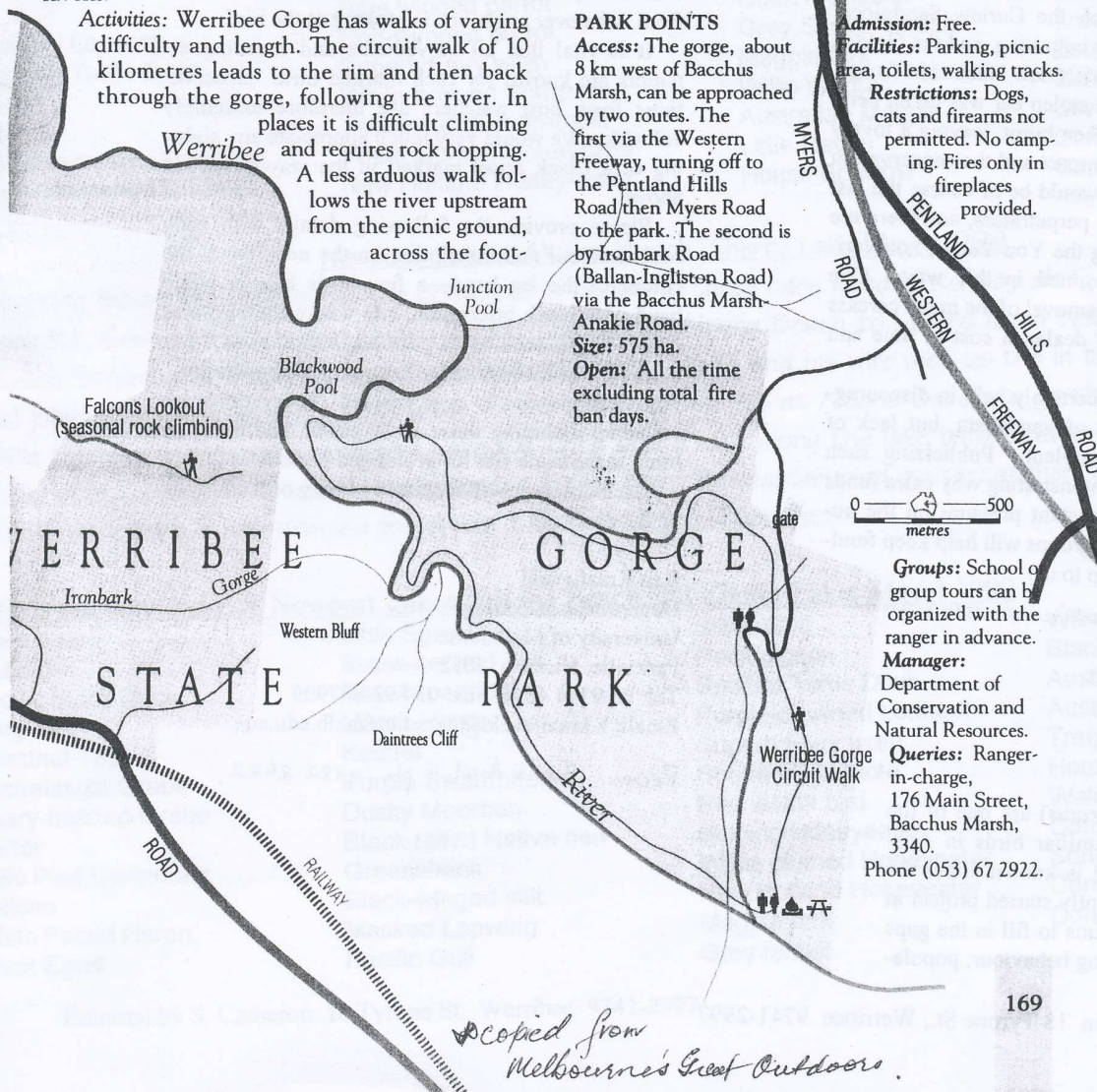
#### PARK POINTS

**Access:** The gorge, about 8 km west of Bacchus Marsh, can be approached by two routes. The first via the Western Freeway, turning off to the Pentland Hills Road then Myers Road to the park. The second is by Ironbark Road (Ballan-Ingliston Road) via the Bacchus Marsh-Anakie Road.  
**Size:** 575 ha.  
**Open:** All the time excluding total fire ban days.

**Admission:** Free.

**Facilities:** Parking, picnic area, toilets, walking tracks.

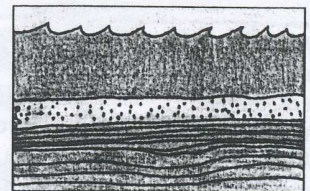
**Restrictions:** Dogs, cats and firearms not permitted. No camping. Fires only in fireplaces provided.



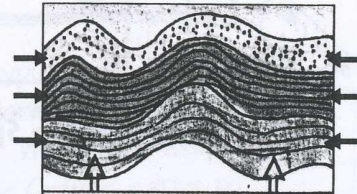
**Groups:** School or group tours can be organized with the ranger in advance.

**Manager:** Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

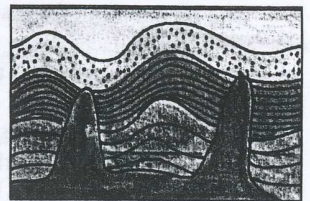
**Queries:** Ranger-in-charge, 176 Main Street, Bacchus Marsh, 3340.  
Phone (053) 67 2922.



500-400 million years before present. Sand and mud deposited on the sea floor



Sediments were uplifted and subject to lateral pressure



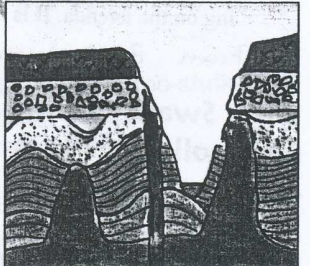
400-300 million years before present. Molten magma (granite) intruded into the sediments and 'cooked' the surrounding rocks



270-250 million years before present. Large ice-sheet covered area and eroded the landscape



70-2 million years before present. Volcanoes erupted through the sediments and glacial deposits. 2-1 million years before present. Lava (basalt) filled the river valleys and spread over the countryside.



The Werribee River cut a deep gorge down to the Ordovician rocks.

*Copied from Melbourne's Great Outdoors.*



| July  | August   | September  | October   | November  |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Friday 16 <sup>th</sup><br>Community Bus<br>Depart 8-30am<br>From Centenary Hall<br>To Werribee Gorge.<br>Contact S. Cameron<br>97412997. | Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup><br>Depart 8-30am<br>From Centenary Hall<br>To Hovell's Creek near<br>the You Yangs.<br>Leader Rohan Bugg?<br>Contact Shirley Cameron<br>97412997 | Tuesday 7 <sup>th</sup><br>Depart 8-30am<br>From Centenary Hall<br>To Williamstown,<br>Jawbone Reserve.<br>Merrett/Crofton Drive.<br>Friends of Wetlands:<br>R. Leppitt 93976415<br>Contact: C. Popham<br>97415006 | Friday 8 <sup>th</sup> Community<br>Bus<br>Depart 8-30am<br>From Centenary Hall<br>To Organ Pipe N. P.<br>Fiona Smith re video.<br>93901082.<br>Contact S.Cameron.<br>97412997. | Tuesday 9 <sup>th</sup><br>Depart 8-30am<br>From Centenary Hall<br>To Western Treatment<br>Leader. Martin Hulzeboch<br>Contact Shirley Cameron<br>97412997. |

## A Beautiful Place Spoilt

The sewage farm at Werribee is not everybody's favorite place to visit, but there is a wild beauty about the place, and for birders it is one of the best places close to the city to spend a day looking for interesting, and occasionally very rare birds.

There are many places of interest such as The Spit and Lake Borrie, but Kirk Point which, if the tide is right, is a great place to have lunch. The rocks and the adjacent beach are home to many species of waders, terns, cormorants and other aquatic species. Out to sea, jaegers and shearwaters are occasionally seen, and the distinctive yapping of the Fairy Penguin can be heard. On the rocks the larger birds rest as Red-necked Stints and Ruddy Turnstones continually forage, and in March the Curlew Sandpipers assume their rich chestnut colouring, and the Golden Plover looks striking with its new black shirt front.

Sometime in March, a stolen car was taken here, completely stripped and then burnt, leaving a lovely place spoilt. The visual impact and the conservation aspect of this vandalism would be of course the last thing in the minds of the perpetrators, and there are so many places including the You Yangs, and various State Parks being ruined in this way. One problem is of course the removal of the metal carcass to a tip or a scrap metal dealer, a cost in time and money.

More rangers would certainly help in discouraging this and other kinds of vandalism, but lack of funding is a constant problem. Publicizing such actions is one way of demonstrating why extra funds are so necessary, and constant pressure on the authorities by conservation groups will help keep funding on the agenda. It is up to us!

\* From Birrels Australia ph. 9832 2622

## Black Swans with neck collars, call for sightings

Black Swans (*Cygnus atratus*) are one of the most prominent and familiar birds in Australia. Remarkably, very little is known about the biology of the species. A recently started project at the University of Melbourne aims to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the breeding behaviour, popula-

tion structure, movements and habitat requirements of this species. As the Black Swan is a key species in many wetland areas, this information will be of great value in the future protection of these fragile habitats.

Over the course of this three year project, an estimated 600 swans will be individually marked at various wetlands around Port Phillip Bay, mainly at the Werribee Sewage Farm. The markings will consist of a blue plastic neck collar with a white inscription that is unique to each bird (a letter and two numbers), a corresponding leg band and a metal band from the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme. The inscriptions on the neck collars can be read in the field with a telescope at a long range (over 100 metres). They are inscribed four times on each band, so that the complete code can be read from whatever angle one is looking at the bird.

It is vital that all movements and breeding attempts are known for each marked bird. Observations from bird watchers are therefore extremely valuable. We would very much appreciate any sighting of a Black Swan marked in the way described above.

Please provide the following details with each report: colour and inscription on the neck band, the colour of the leg band—a few birds have a white band with black inscription, site where the bird was observed (as detailed as possible), number of other swans it was associating with and breeding activity.

It is important to note that all observations are valuable, including those at Werribee and those of birds at the same site for prolonged periods of time.

Each observer will receive a history of the bird he or she observed.

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