



Early morning mist over Area A lake. Photo: Sue Forster.



Brown Quail, sheltering near Pond 2. Photos: Danny Fog.



Gang-gang Cockatoos in flight over Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve. Photo: Danny Fog.

Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 13 May 2023

The weather was cold and foggy, and the air was still, when 17 enthusiastic observers met by St Kilda Street bridge at 7.30 am. With a temperature of only 9° C, it felt wintery, and water levels were high due to recent rain.

We recorded a total of 29 species, one less than in April. However, it was an interesting result as 3 species—Brown Quail, Cattle Egret and European Goldfinch—were previously unlisted in monthly surveys and a fourth, Gang-gang Cockatoos, had only been recorded once (2 in Area C, August 2019).

Also of note, our data is confirming that new birds are acclimatising to revegetated wetland habitat in Chain of Ponds areas E (north-east) and F (south-west), with a potential shift in distribution and an increase in bird populations in these sections. Congratulations to all those dedicated volunteers who laboured over propagating, planting and protecting the vegetation to get it to this stage of maturity. A highlight in Area E was a whole group sighting of a Brown Quail sheltering among the sedges by Pond 2. Although it was previously photographed for Yalukit Willam Association Facebook, this was its first survey record.

For the second month running the highest number of species (18) and largest number of birds (89) were recorded in Area F. The second highest species count (16) was in E. Fourteen species were recorded in Area A containing the original lake. The lowest species counts were in Areas B (7) and C (6), which combine grassy slopes with stands of mature eucalypts and exotic trees. Even the Elster Canal section (Area G) had a low species count (8) and abundance on this occasion.

Tania Ireton, who led observers in Areas A, B, C and G, noted that bird activity was generally down due to the cold and fog, although flowering eucalypts attracted Rainbow Lorikeets in Areas B and C. Five Gang-gang Cockatoos flew through Area A and landed in a large eucalypt on the St Kilda Street fenceline. When they were tracked down later, the Gang-gangs were being harassed by Pied Currawongs (not recorded in this survey). Gang-gang Cockatoos are now listed as Endangered under the EPBC Act. Facebook entries show that these birds had been roosting and feeding over several days in eucalypts along the New Street side of the reserve.



Gang-gang Cockatoo(female). Photo: Danny Fog.



Australian Wood Duck. Photo: Danny Fog.



Australian Wood Ducks in Area E. Photo: Sue Forster.



Little Pied Cormorant in Area E. Photo: Danny Fog.

Seven Cattle Egrets flew overhead in a southerly direction in Area B and may have been heading for the island in the lake on the other side of Bent Avenue. They were also recorded over Area F. Gio Fitzpatrick drew the group's attention to their stockiness and more pronounced wing flap compared to that of the larger Great Egret, which is more commonly seen in Yalukit Willam.

Area A had 5 Australasian Grebes: one pair were on the main part of the lake, and another were with an immature Grebe further east; another 6 were recorded in Area F. The total count suggests that Yalukit Willam's Grebe population is growing steadily and broadening its distribution.

Later, 9 Australian Wood Ducks also flew through from east to west and then appeared to circle back towards the Chain of Ponds. They mostly settled around Area F, where 31 were recorded. Pacific Black Ducks were recorded in every area except B, with a total count of 19.

Due to a high tide at Point Ormond at 7.33 am, 15 Chestnut Teal and 2 Grey Teal were roosting on the east side of the Glen Huntly Road bridge (Area G). The presence of 4 Eastern Rosellas along Elster Creek was a welcome bonus. Only 2 Eastern Rosellas were observed inside Yalukit Willam on this occasion, in Area F, and there were no Grey Teal. Among the remaining parrots, just 5 Musk Lorikeets were recorded in A and B (the highest count was 82 in January), and a pair of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos was seen in E and F, and a single bird in G.

Of the water hens, Purple Swamphens were found in areas A, C, D, E and F and their total count (20) had nearly doubled since April, while Dusky Moorhens (14) and Eurasian Coots (13) were recorded in A, E and F and their numbers had dropped by one third. White-faced Herons (2), Little Pied Cormorants (4), Welcome Swallows (8) and Silver Gulls (2) made up the balance of the wetland birds. No Masked Lapwings were recorded.

Red Wattlebird abundance (total of 7) was still higher than at the start of 2023 but remains low overall. Australian Magpie and Magpie-lark numbers have halved since January (now 8 and 12 respectively) and only one Grey Butcherbird was recorded, in Area A. One pair of Crested Pigeons was recorded crossing between D and E. However, Little Raven numbers had increased (21, seen in all areas except E). After we finished the survey a flock of around 30 Little Ravens landed in D.



Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. Photo: Danny Fog.



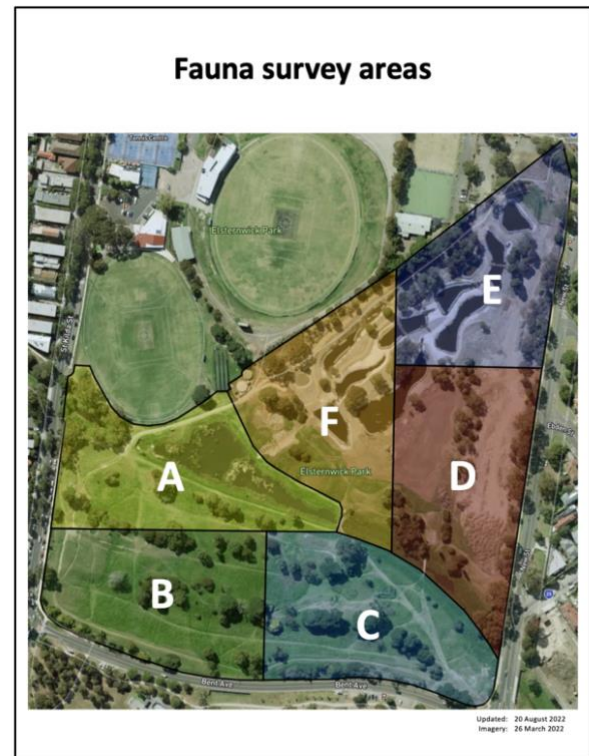
Dusky Moorhen. Photo: Danny Fog.

We recorded one new introduced or feral bird, a European Goldfinch in flight, identified by Gio Fitzpatrick. A photo of a European Goldfinch in Yalukit Willam was posted on Facebook on 23 April. Commonly observed ferals had mostly dispersed: just 2 Common Starlings were seen roosting on the dead tree in Area E and one Rock Dove was recorded in F. Our native pest bird, the Noisy Miner, was as usual recorded in every area, with a fairly average total of 33.

Two other species not yet recorded in our surveys had photos posted on Facebook in early May: Black Swan (4 May) and Australian Pelican (8 and 10 May). The injured Pelican was rescued by volunteers but, sadly, had to be euthanised.

Report: Sue Forster and Tania Ireton

Photos: Danny Fog and Sue Forster



Description of current vegetation and habitat by survey areas:

A: a large pond with well-established reeds around the edge and on small central islands.

B: grassy slopes with stands of mature eucalypts, including winter-flowering ironbarks.

C: grassy areas with stands of mixed native trees with Elster Creek on its northern side.

D: partly fenced area still undergoing landscaping; scattered mixed native trees with a line of mature eucalypts inside the New Street fence; bounded by Elster Creek to its south.

E: newly opened Chain of Ponds with scattered native trees, widescale planting around ponds (currently still under netting) and mature eucalypts inside the New Street fence.

F: grassy slope with scattered eucalypts fringing area A pond, leading to the Chain of Ponds and new beds of ground cover and shrubs adjoining the northern sports field fence.

G: Elster Canal flanked by grassy slopes, mixed plantings and a few mature eucalypts fronting urban housing and a school.

To join a monthly bird survey, please contact Bob Tammick: bob_alyson@aapt.net.au The surveys are led by BirdLife Bayside president Tania Ireton. Start times are between 7.15 and 8.00 am, depending on sunrise. Seven sections (including Elster Canal) are surveyed in two groups, for 20 minutes each; both groups complete Area A together around the main pond. The process generally takes one hour and thirty minutes per group.

To view the survey records for all seven sites, go to Birddata website, select the Shared Sites tab and type Elsternwick Park in the filter: <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au>