



Juvenile Black-shouldered Kite. Photos: Danny Fog.



Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. Photo: Danny Fog.

## Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve bird survey 15 March 2025

To avoid the Labour Day long weekend, our March bird survey was one week later than normal, and due to the late sunrise, we also started later than usual, at 8 am. We had 13 observers, including a couple of new faces.

The night had been unusually warm, so the temperature was already 20 C when we began surveying. The morning was sunny with light cloud in a blue sky and no wind.

Temporary fencing had again been erected alongside the creek and main lake, curbing access on one side. Water under the New Street bridge appeared to be quite stagnant and there was no apparent flow.

We recorded 461 sightings, just 6 more than February, but the distribution was very different as water bird numbers (129) had nearly halved since the unusually high February count (240). This month we found that terrestrial bird numbers had increased, partly due to a large circulating flock of Little Corellas (47 recorded in Area B alone), but there were fewer pest/feral birds than usual (38) and in Areas C and F none were recorded.

The total species count for all 7 survey areas was a fairly average 30. There was a lot of activity at the reserve with most areas having a diversity of bird species with good numbers.

Wetland birds (54) were most abundant and diverse (11 species) in the main lake in Area A. This area also yielded the highest number of species overall (20) but Area B recorded the most sightings (102) due to the large number of birds flying through the reserve, particularly Little Corellas and both Musk and Rainbow Lorikeets.

In Area F, the largest billabong remained dry with only a small puddle left at the southern end, but some of the other ponds (e.g. Pond 7) had been recently filled and Australian Wood Ducks and Pacific Black Ducks had returned. This area had the second highest diversity (17 species, including 6 wetland), but its total of 70 sightings was lower than that of A (90), B (102) and G (72).

A single Black-shouldered Kite was counted in 5 of our 7 survey areas (A, C, D, E, F), and later identified as a juvenile by the rufous colour on its chest, head and nape. Three Sulphur-crested



Australasian Grebes, juvenile at top. Photos: Danny Fog.



Australian Magpie carolling. Photo: Danny Fog.



Juvenile Magpie-lark. Photo: Fran Pfeiffer.

Cockatoos chased it in Area C until it eventually settled on the dead roost tree in Area E.

A pair of Grey Butcherbirds were also circulating, occasionally accompanied by a juvenile, and an additional 3 butcherbirds were heard in Area G but not sighted.

Four Australasian Grebes were in the main lake, including at least one well-grown juvenile with stripes still on the face. Two Little Grassbirds were briefly seen as they flew between clumps of rushes. Fortunately, there were plenty of ducks in the reserve itself (Pacific Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal) since we were only 2 hours before low tide at Point Ormond, which left a sea of mud in the basin below the Glen Huntly Road bridge and several Rock Doves perched above eyeing the expanse with jaundiced expressions.

The very tall and mostly dead cypress in Area B was used as a lookout by 4 Australian Magpies, 4 Magpie-larks, a Grey Butcherbird, 3 Crested Pigeons and 2 Noisy Miners, highlighting the importance of tall dead trees in the landscape. A very young juvenile Magpie was feeding on the ground and was obviously from a very late nest as it was very grey and its beak was quite short. Unfortunately, it also had a damaged right foot with the toes curled tightly. In the same area, we also had 47 Little Corellas making a racket and then splitting into smaller flocks to fly off in several directions.

After a period of several months, when we saw very few Magpie-larks in Area G (Elster Canal), 3-4 pairs have returned to adjacent territories. Three pairs were recorded with an additional adult, but we were delighted to see an immature bird that was moulting into male plumage. Male Magpie-larks have black faces and a horizontal black line through the eye. Female Magpie-larks have white faces and a vertical black line through the eye. Juvenile Magpie-larks have an intermediate plumage with both a horizontal and vertical black line through the eye, a smudgy black breast and white throat. This bird's plumage was transitioning into that of an adult male. The vertical black line through the eye had thickened and moved forward to cover the face and the black breast band had extended up the throat, leaving only a small white patch on the chin.

We were pleased to see pair of Eastern Rosellas circulating around Areas D, E and F (although often resident, these birds had not been



Purple Swamphen. Photo: Danny Fog.



Survey areas excluding Area G, Elster Canal.



Chain of Ponds. Gio Fitzpatrick.

recorded since December) and a pair of Red-rumped Parrots (not recorded in our surveys since August 2024). Sulphur-crested Cockatoo sightings had also increased, with 18 recorded in Area G alone.

Australian Magpies were highly active, and were recorded in every area, sometimes in family groups of 5-6. A pair of Pied Currawongs in Area B was notable, if only because 2 is the maximum recorded in the reserve. A single Red Wattlebird was recorded in Area E (down from a peak of 23 peak sightings in December).

Among the wetland birds, Welcome Swallows were in short supply, with a maximum of 4 in Area A, and only 3 other birds sighted, and Chestnut Teal and Grey Teal numbers had decreased markedly since February. A small number (4-6) Eurasian Coots have only been recorded in Area A this year, but Purple Swamphens remain distributed throughout the reserve in consistent numbers (23 on this occasion). There were fewer cormorants than in February, with only two sightings each of Little Black Cormorant and Little Pied Cormorant.

Although not recorded in the official survey, 2 Masked Lapwings were also observed in Area A.

**Report: Sue Forster and Tania Ireton**

**Photos: Danny Fog and Fran Pfeiffer**

**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 Hayley Pottenger: [hayley.pottenger@gmail.com](mailto:hayley.pottenger@gmail.com) 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 Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve in the filter\*: <https://birddata.birdlife.org.au>

\*Birddata's Explore function is now up to date, reflecting the reserve's name change from Elsternwick Park to Yalukit Willam.

#### **Bird list for 15 March 2025**

**Wetland birds:** Eurasian Coot, Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Australian Wood Duck, Black Pacific Duck, Little Grassbird, Australasian Grebe, Silver Gull, Dusky Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Welcome Swallow.

**Terrestrial birds:** Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Galah, Little Corella, Musk Lorikeet, Rainbow Lorikeet, Red-rumped Parrot, Eastern Rosella, Little Raven, Grey Butcherbird, Pied Currawong, Australian Magpie, Magpie-lark, Red Wattlebird, Crested Pigeon.

**Raptors:** Black-shouldered Kite.

**Pest/feral:** Noisy Miner, Rock Dove, Common Starling.