



# FAUNAL STORIES OF NORTH EAST VICTORIA

A collection of stories showcasing the interactions  
between communities and local faunal species from  
North East Victoria.

Compiled by Sophie Enders



Swamps, Rivers and Ranges (SRR) would like to thank all of those who contributed stories to this booklet. The recognition of the importance of our natural landscapes and the fauna that live within them is a critical step in its appreciation and protection.

SRR is a community-driven landscape restoration group who exists to make positive contributions to enhancing the natural environment of our region, filling strategic gaps and applying a long-term perspective at a broad landscape scale.

SRR aims to initiate, enhance and collaborate with community efforts to conserve and restore healthy landscapes, with benefits for nature conservation, natural resource management and agricultural production.

SRR aims to improve the health of landscapes within the broader North East Victorian region and its borders.

We hope you enjoy reading the stories of the fauna who call the North East Victorian region home.

Photo credits:

SRR - Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

SE - Sophie Enders

RL - Richard Loyn

GB - Geoff Barrow





## Overseas Visitors

I often wonder how many overseas visitors go home without seeing a kangaroo, and I think, what a shame. There are many places to show people kangaroos here in the North East.

We had a good experience in July 2019 with overseas cousins, who were lucky enough to see Eastern Grey Kangaroos bouncing around in snow-covered paddocks next door, quite a rare sight.

Echidnas are the hardest animals to show people. Here in the north-east we are fortunate to see them often, but finding them on demand is quite another thing. We had one overseas friend who was desperate to see one in the three days he had available, and of course we had no luck. Then he returned, having seen one in South Australia, and of course we saw another. And we showed him lots of birds, including our specialities such as Painted Honeyeater, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike and Spotted Quail-thrush. We have better luck with Platypus. When Deb and I got married, a Platypus fed merrily in the creek beside the Whitfield pub where we had our reception. Half the guests had never seen one in the wild before. We haven't yet found the trick in the North East, but I expect we will.

The best experiences are the most unexpected. When my brother Chris and his partner Jacqui visited from Wales, we drove home one day by the scenic route, and a cute little mammal ran across the road in front of us near Beechworth, in broad daylight. It was a Yellow-footed Antechinus, and we stopped and watched it foraging in fallen branches beside the quiet road for half an hour, very special. Chris and Jacqui could not believe that this was a marsupial, capable of carrying many small babies in its pouch, and they were intrigued by its life story with few if any of the males surviving more than one year.

We look forward to sharing our wildlife with more visitors whenever we can.

Every summer we enjoy having visitors from north-east Asia. We never know exactly when they are coming, or how many there will be, but that is not a problem because they don't need transport to or from the airport. They just spend a few hours with us, zooming about enjoying the open space, sometimes talking in their quiet rattling voices, never discussing politics. They don't stay overnight, preferring to sleep together with dozens of their friends, probably in big trees in the forest on top of nearby hills. They are swifts, White-throated Needletails to be exact, the fastest flying birds in the world (in level flight), and they usually come between late December and early April before flying back to northern Japan, Korea or eastern Siberia where they nest in the boreal forests.

We wish them well!

Richard Loyn



## Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

### Blue Tongue Lizards

Bluey (blue tongue lizard) is a regular visitor, wonderful as I live in town on a main road.

He appears from under the house sleepy, slow, skinny and very hungry after his /her hibernation.

He accepts a range of tucker, including hand caught snails! Blueberries and dried dog food!

Once he has fattened and warmed up he is off doing important lizard things and I have very fleeting sightings until it's time to hibernate again.

I look forward to my handsome visitor next season.

Photo credit Blue tongue on right  
Sue Carey



### A Successful Garden

We live on small acreage on the edge of Wangaratta, for several years we have had a resident blue tongue lizard. In our dirt floored car port he would disappear behind some shelving when we went past but lived there with vehicles of many types parking next to the shelves.

We didn't feed him but ensured there was a saucer of water always available. One season we spotted another blue tongue in the front garden. she had chosen a hollow log surrounded by mondo grass for her home. Not long after we spotted 3 babies in different locations around the front garden. Our garden beds are mostly bushy and native and I like to think provide plenty of safe places for the offspring to grow up safely.

Sue Enders

## Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

### Choughs in Every Colour

For the last 3 years we have had a brown chough in a family of choughs visit our farm. His mob wasn't one of the resident ones on our farm but they visited every few months as I recognized his mob because of this brown bird. Anyway this year I noticed that the mob was back again and started to nest high in a tree near the track. I watched the nest as they sat and fed young. After a few weeks I observed a mob with two brown choughs, so incredibly the brown chough must have been able to lay in the nest (although I never saw it sitting) or that mob has the genetics for a brown bird. It is lovely to see the mob around now with two brown choughs. I will be interested to see how long they stay around my farm.

Photo credit: photo to the right.

Later in May we were on a different part of the farm when we nearly stepped on a couple of newly fledged choughs camouflaged in the tangled bark on the ground - amazingly one of these babies was brown! They are very vulnerable when newly fledged as they cannot fly for quite a few days. As you can imagine, the mob was very quietly closely observing us from high in the trees (not their usual rowdy throng) and quickly joined the babies as soon as we were a safe distance away. So now we have a resident 3-brown-chough mob. I will be interested to see if the browns can keep multiplying.

Philippa Noble



### Nest Box Visitors

Some years ago we installed a nest box on a Red Stringybark in our garden. The box was purpose-built for treecreepers as we had observed them foraging on this particular tree. On the face of the box we tacked a piece of thick bark which contained a natural appropriately-sized entrance hollow. Sure enough within a day or so a white-throated treecreeper became quite interested in the box. Then after a couple of days, to our amazement, we observed the treecreeper with a small feather in its beak, dusting all around and over the box, as though it was house-cleaning. Then another treecreeper who was observing this behaviour flew down and inspected the box. A female was observed from time to time over about 3 weeks peering out of the box. Eventually the young fledged and 'flew the coop'. So if you are particularly observant and provide for their requirements you never know what amazing ritualistic behaviours you might see with our local fauna!

Glenda Datson

## Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

We look out on part of the Beechworth Gorge, a valley dominated by long waves of granite, which flow down to a creek. In this space live two magpie families: the Montagues of the northside, numbering six adults, and the southern Capulets, with a team of eight. Attesting to the multi-cultural nature of the magpie world, most of the Capulets are White-backed, and many of the Montagues are Black-backed. Some in each family though are mottled, which makes us wonder - have there been forbidden Romeo and Juliet romances across these families that might account for their current animosity?

From our house, a territorial line (the Maginot/Maggi-not Line) runs from east to west. It follows a crack in the granite, drops down over boulders onto a grassy platform, and finishes at two flat granite expanses near a fence. Each of these spaces has strategic importance, so all are highly disputed.

For most of the day, each family minds its own business: stalking insects in the grass, warbling from the favourite Capulet tree or Montague powerline, and defending territory from the local kookaburra clan. But late in the day a tension arises.

Someone throws out a challenge: a shrieking call to arms as the Maggi-not line is crossed! One battle scenario sees the Capulets gather in their gum tree near the house. The Montague battalion forms on the grassy platform. Vocal insults are exchanged, until a Montague really takes offence. Feathers puffed up, head hunched down, he becomes an arrow, a spear preparing for attack.

Capulets wait their moment – then dive bomb from the gum tree. Bandits at twelve o'clock, they fly out of the sun, wheeling away at the last moment but ruffling Montague feathers. In response, the Montagues borrow tactics from ancient times, and form a Roman V, chief at the head, and younger soldiers guarding the flanks. This is all for show. They rarely cross the line, but look most fearsome.

Sometimes this formula plays out on the granite expanses down the hill, where Capulets make the most of their extra numbers by combining air strikes with ground-based jostling. Again, from the northern side, the Roman V faces the enemy.

It should be noted that as the adults go ten rounds, the season's babies are not allowed to participate. Unconcerned, they stay behind their family team, searching for dinner. When they grow a little bigger however, they are schooled in battle. I once saw an over-excited Capulet fledgling fighter mess up the whole campaign by diving on his own side. He got a good pecking in the melee that followed.

By some agreed signal, shrieks subside, the tension breaks, and the armies begin to withdraw. They do this with great nonchalance, turning their backs and wandering away to search for grubs. One guard from either army remains close to the Maggi-not line to supervise this temporary peace agreement.

Later, four or five Capulets might be seen in their tree, analysing tactics and telling each other the story of their glorious victory. The Montagues spread out along the granite waves, enjoying a post-battle dinner. Incursions were made, but territory was defended. Insults were flung, but honour was preserved.

And if there is a Romeo and Juliet romance in the air, the lovers are being very closely guarded, under the watchful eyes of the Montagues and Capulets of Beechworth Gorge.

Joy Phillips

## Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

### Kookaburra Good Morning

We call him Fatso, a bit uncomplimentary, for he is really a lovely bird. He is stout and confident. He has the most amazing hairdo, or should we say featherdo!

A fine brown tonsure-like rim around the back of the white head with a lovely little tuft of brown on the top! We see but his back!

He visits in the morning! Very early! Around the time the first light shimmers over Mount Bogong.

He comes to sit on the balcony balustrade, unbeknown to us just yet.... But now: He cackles and laughs at the top of his voice for about 10 seconds, to make sure we are awake, blurry eyed still, but enough to peep out through the curtains and see him setting himself up for grub and worm breakfast from the fresh cut grass!

We decide to go back to sleep, but Fatso will hear nothing of that, as soon as the head hits the pillow again, he cackles and laughs again, and makes sure we really look out!

Oh what a glorious morning! Streaks of sunlight, morning dew, clouds and rain at times, nature in its finest garment every day!

Thank you, Kookaburra! Without you we would have missed it!  
Good, good morning!  
Luise & Ivan Mock



### The Powernap

I am as guilty as anyone of attributing human values to wildlife but some times I wonder.

Last spring a pair of Willy Wagtails were flat out raising a family of four youngsters busting out of a far too small nest, all day long the parents came and went between the nest and the adjacent insect rich native grassland on the western end of my house, the job started at day break and didn't stop until it was too dark to find insects, no doubt an exhausting task.

One morning I was relaxing in the deckchair in the sun at eastern end of the house where the Willy Wagtails rarely came looking for insects. Suddenly to my surprise one of the parent wagtails shot low around the corner of the house and settle down close to the wall in the morning sun. The bird puffed up its chest feathers propped its head back shut its eyes and instantly went off to sleep. A little bemused I watched to see what would happen, two minutes later the eyes came open and after with a quick ruffling of feather the bird shot of back around the corner to continue the task of feeding the hungry and noisy family.

So what was going on? There were plenty of sunny spots around the house this one however was out of site of the hungry youngsters and more importantly the other adult partner. I like to think one of the parents sneaked away for a quick powernap out of sight so avoiding getting in trouble for slacking off, how many of us as parents have hidden way for a few minutes to get a break from a noisy bunch of kids or a bossy partner?

Geoff Barrow

## Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

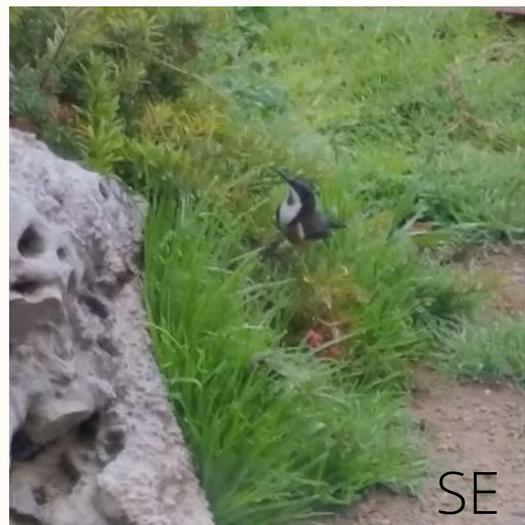
### Nature is close-by

I sit at my computer near a large glass window, looking out on a Red Salvia that has been flowering for many months. I have been seeing many interesting nature interactions - and we are supposed to look away from the computer regularly aren't we!

While I would much prefer being out there in the garden with the animals, at least I have them close by and can "spy" on them without scaring them. One day I saw a male Superb Fairy-wren pick a red petal from the plant and take it over to 3 females. While we shouldn't really anthropomorphize animals, I can't see any other meaning except he was trying to win their hearts with a flower. I've noticed how agile the Eastern Spinebills are getting nectar and they remind me of hummingbirds I have seen overseas. Two other honeyeaters vie for the nectar- New Hollands and Yellow Tufted's.

I am surprised at how many Blue-banded Bees visit one shrub, and how quickly insects come out after rain. I am also noticing more than other years, the stunning flowers of the hakeas and the butterflies visiting them. I think I often walk under them and not notice, but now I am still and looking out often, they are really grabbing my attention. So, my common red salvia is not only bringing me much joy, I'm learning quite a lot from just being in the one place, still and observing. Gardens can be great places for nature conservation and caring for our small woodland birds (which are in a bit of trouble). So, "on the list" is to grow more of the very common, easy to propagate by cuttings Red Salvia.

Photo credit Red salvia below  
Sue Brunskill



## Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

### EASTERN GREY ROOS

The Killawarra Forest can be a very quiet place. You typically get the sense of creatures that are just out of sight. Small birds stay high in the treetops, a solitary Black Wallaby will noiselessly watch and wait as you pass.

And then, suddenly, things are happening. Walking Selection Track a couple of winters ago, on a misty morning, we could hear a very loud commotion ahead of us. Rounding a bend we stopped when we saw a group of six Eastern Grey Kangaroos - all adolescent males - engaged in a rather ritualised display, repeatedly circling and jumping over the horizontal, snapped trunk of a big, fallen Box tree.

We held back and kept a 20 metre distance, and although we were in plain sight (through the mist) the young roos were completely indifferent to our presence, so intent were they upon racing each other around and over the uprooted tree.

It was quite a performance, too. Each roo was only looking at the roo in front, and as they circled they all made loud grunts and each hop was accompanied by a heavy, crashing return to the ground for seemingly deliberate and dramatic effect. Imagine half a dozen teenagers creating a whirlpool in a 10 x 3 metre above-ground pool and you get the idea. No splashing, but similar energy!

The roos went on like this for five to ten minutes until one peeled away and the others followed - away from us, to our relief. It sounded like a stampede as they took off along a gully.

And soon enough the forest was still and silent again, like nothing had ever happened.

Richard & Cath Watter



## Swamps, Rivers & Ranges

### Encounter With a Krefft's Glider

I was climbing a steep fire trail on Federation Hill, Wodonga, in July 2021 - a walk I'd done thousands of times over the past twenty years. As I rounded a corner, I spotted two currawongs watching a small, furry mound in the middle of the track. Wow, it was a creature I'd never seen on the hill before, a Krefft's glider.

One of his\* eyes was slightly closed. Perhaps he'd been injured? But he wasn't in the least bit afraid as I approached, coming up for a sniff of my shoe, then scampering up a low embankment. Instead of disappearing into the bush, he turned and leapt towards me from the top of the embankment.

"Whoa!" I exclaimed in surprise, retreating backwards.

Moments later he scaled the slender, exposed branches of a eucalyptus sapling. Out of nowhere the currawongs reappeared, almost a dozen this time, swooping and harassing the poor animal. I shouted and clapped loudly, managing to keep the birds at bay and giving the glider an opportunity to race to a lower branch. But without a nearby tree to glide to, he was stuck. I whipped off my zippered top, held it open like a fireman's trampoline and - much to my astonishment - he jumped onto my top before scrambling to the safety of a bushy eucalypt.

What was a glider doing out in broad daylight? Why did he seem to trust me? Local ecologists offered two possible explanations; he was a youngster plucked out of his hollow by the currawongs, or perhaps he was an escaped pet. I'll never know, but one thing's for sure - it's an experience I'll never forget.

\* The glider's sex was unclear (female gliders have a pouch, males do not), but for the purposes of this story I've referred to it as a male.

Lizette Salmon



### The more you see

I wonder how much we don't see when moving through our natural areas. There's that special glimpse of something when walking or driving along which makes you look twice but only when you stop and take time to really watch that we often see the most amazing things. This particular snake could have been easily missed when driving past hiding on the edge of a dirt track. But taking the opportunity to stop for a photo this beauty sat there and let us watch for quiet some time, tasting the air, small movements along its shiny black body, before starting to slide away. We did catch the most uncoordinated movement I've ever seen in a snake as it slid down into the gutter it fell into what I can assume was very cold water. Startling itself it then flipped over several times before very quickly disappearing up the bank to somewhere drier and warmer.

Sophie Enders

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## Brought Together

I love the times when it's quiet at home, everyone is doing their own thing, and then someone looking at their phone says 'pressure is up', or 'flow's good'. Heads turn. Someone says, 'looking good is it?' The conversation and planning continue. 'How about an early session tomorrow?'

The conversation flows to a selection of times and places to go fishing, to what rod to bring, to what line to use, to what lure or fly to select, and which ones to bring in reserve. The treasure boxes of lures and lines emerge, each person holding up their favourites and admiring them for a while.

The crafting of the set-ups is next, everyone with their own theories and methods on what might work for which fish in which waterway. Stories of previous fishing sessions emerge, laughs are had. Some are better at tying knots than others; skilled labour is bought with promises of iced coffee.

The lift in mood and excitement continues up to bed time when everyone sets their alarms to some unearthly hour - 'let's go early', 'it's going to be epic'.

Next morning, the fishers emerge pre-dawn, some needing coffee, others already lively. A few near misses of rod tips in doorways, and then they are off. Mum will text later with stuff that's been forgotten on the kitchen bench.

On arrival at the designated spot, hushed commentary ensues - 'Got any nibbles?', 'How did that get knotted?' 'See that rise?'. The first bite comes and a synchronised response kicks in - someone with their reel, someone with a net, someone to stop the engine or hold the kayak steady or find a safe spot to stand, someone ready to take a photo, someone keeping the dog out of the way, sometimes all the same person! The exhilaration peaks. The fish bring us together, catching them is only a small part of the joy.

Sonya Greenfield



GB



SE



SRR

ERT



All Photos on this page credited to Richard Loyn

## Verandah Visitors

When we moved to the country (Beechworth) we expected to share our land with lots of wildlife, and we were not disappointed. One evening we looked up and saw a big face looking in our lounge window, it was a Koala! It saw us and moved away, climbing up a verandah post before noticing the lack of foliage and moving to a juicy eucalypt instead.

Another day while I was working at the computer, our dogs lying peacefully on the rug, and I looked up and noticed a Koala walking nonchalantly past at midday, using our nice clear path to one of the juiciest eucalypts on the corner of our paddock. One other time

I looked up and there was an Echidna, waddling confidently along the verandah in search of ants nearby.

Our bathroom looks out over the back garden and there is always plenty of bird activity, and quite often some small mammals (mainly House Mice, I regret to say). One day as I emerged from the shower I was delighted to see a beautiful Yellow-footed Antechinus, sitting there quite happily, showing off her orange ears. (We know it was a she, because that was September and the males would have died of heart attacks after ecstatic bouts of sexual activity.) Since then we've seen her quite often, sometimes on the verandah and sometimes climbing up onto the roof or hiding behind hanging mosaics on the wall.

We hope she and her progeny prosper.

Only one native mammal (a small bat, probably a Chocolate Wattled Bat) and a few native reptiles (notably an Eastern Brown Snake) have entered the house itself. Deb swept the snake out with a broom. Deb bought a tiny house to use as a mosaic studio, and I've photographed a Black Wallaby checking it out.

Lots of birds enjoy our garden, and just a few of them like foraging along our verandah and even enter the house itself. When we were renovating, a pair of Willie Wagtails insisted on building nests on the ceiling fan during a short period when we had removed the lounge-room walls. I'm afraid we had to discourage them (non-lethally), much to their annoyance. Now we see three bird species making frequent use of the shady conditions below the verandah. White-browed Scrubwrens love it, and search diligently for insects on the ground: they also hover to catch moths on window-frames that had been attracted to the light the previous evening. Sometimes they fly into the house, and once one landed on my laptop keyboard, but it didn't know the password so it flew on.

Perhaps it knew a better way to communicate. They leave quite peacefully when we open the right doors.

Grey Shrike-thrushes love to forage along the shady verandah and occasionally enter the house, though they like best to catch small frogs that we have rescued from the swimming pool. The third species is Superb Fairy-wren, which is one of the commonest species in our garden (along with New Holland Honeyeater and sometimes Satin Bowerbird). Superb Fairy-wrens often forage below the verandah, but they spend a far greater proportion of their time in sunnier locations such as the lawn.

Once I was doing a Zoom meeting and looked out to see a beautiful female Rose Robin flitting in a Protea shrub outside my study window. You never know what you will see.

Richard Loyn

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## 'Squatters' given notice to Vacate

Sadly, the 12 square tin shed we made to live in while we built our house, had a terminal diagnosis due to white ant damage to parts of its timber framework. Fortunately, nearly 30 years on, we are rebuilding the frame in steel and can recycle the old tin. Interestingly however, three brush tailed possums who moved in many years ago, didn't believe they were given sufficient notice re our plans, and there was talk that they might be entitled to squatters' rights if we asked them to leave?

Needing to move on, my partner Phil tentatively started removing the lining boards from the ceiling, and of course, possums started to rain down on him from above, shocked at our cheek.

As undisturbed areas to hide in slowly diminished, we found them curling up wherever they could find a spot. They were obviously not keen to move out on their own.

Their comfortable homes, between the lining boards and the tin had been nicely insulated, but access to the 'new', unlined shed was going to be limited. Wary of a long and protracted court case, we carefully considered our options. We felt bad due to the short notice, and given their tenacity, the poor rental market, and the very wet and cold weather, we offered to assist them to relocate.

Quickly constructed nesting boxes were installed in the last remaining part of the shed, and amazingly, all three possums moved in!

Termination/moving date finally arrived, the last part of the roof was coming off and all three boxes were to be relocated to close by trees. We weren't surprised to see that one was empty, one possum had decided the temporary situation was just not acceptable.

Our other two 'tenants' however, were up for the transition. We carefully moved the boxes, advising the possums that we would try and upgrade them as soon as possible, particularly the one in the box most likely to leak.

Now we are waiting to see if they come knocking on the new shed door, with a notice of possession, or looking for compensation!

Photos credit: 2 images of the Brushtail below

Chris Robinson



## Where Eagles Dare

One of the best places to watch the largest eagles in the world is the ridge overlooking the Murrumbidgee Basin, where I'm lucky to live. Here we often have the privilege of seeing Wedge-tailed Eagles sailing below us, looking for prey or just enjoying the breeze. There is something topsy-turvy and wonderful about looking down on these masters of the skies. I first had that experience a few years ago in an aerochute (like a go-cart with a parachute) when we circled in a thermal, and were joined by a Wedge-tailed Eagle below us in the same thermal. But here it is possible to get the same experience with your feet firmly on the ground. Sometimes the eagles soar high (wings raised in a shallow V) or show their skills in other ways, pairs playing synchronised roller-coaster to display their agility to each other. For a couple of years we saw our eagles less often than before, and that followed the carnage when a criminal in east Gippsland illegally poisoned large numbers of these birds. We are happy to say that we are now seeing them more often again, and hope the population is recovering. Wedge-tailed Eagles eat large birds and medium-sized mammals, and will take sick or dead sheep or lambs and placenta, but do little if any damage to sheep flocks.

We are also lucky to have a resident population of a less common species of eagle, the Little Eagle. They are very beautiful birds, soaring on flat wings and showing a distinct pattern of dark and white under the wing, and orange about the head. In courtship display they fly upwards and then plunge steeply downwards, continuing like a yoyo and giving a sweet rhythmic call which sounds completely out of character. When I first heard it I thought it was a small bird in the treetops (perhaps a pardalote), but now I know it is a big bird high in the sky. Little Eagles cause mass panic among big birds such as Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Galahs, Pied Currawongs and Australian Ravens, and I'm sure they often take them as prey (probably by ambush). But every time I see a Little Eagle with prey, it has taken a rabbit. Little Eagles have declined in Victoria and NSW and are now listed as Vulnerable in those states. They favour landscapes with mosaics of woodland and open country, just

like ours. At least 16 species of diurnal bird of prey inhabit north-east Victoria, including one other large eagle, the White-bellied Sea-Eagle. Despite its name, this species is quite common along the Murray River and on inland waters where it can find large fish and waterbirds as prey. I once saw one at Lake Sambell in Beechworth, and expect they call in occasionally: they are very exciting to see.

Richard Loyn



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## Pelican sailing

There's a certain elegance and grace to how birds move in a group. On this particular day I had been excited to see a group of Pelicans with multiple youngsters amongst them on our farm dam. Whilst Two adults watched on the teenagers were vigorously splashing their wings in the shallows- I can only assume to loosen and remove their young downy feathers as the adult feathers moved in. But the real show came in watching the group of adults fishing in the deeper water. Sailing along as a single group, forming into a circle around the intended prey then in a uniform movement that would make synchronised swimmers jealous, wings up and head down diving to catch a feed. Without hesitation the group then resurfaces and returns to their sailing formation.

Sophie Enders



## Stepping stones for Apostle birds

How to keep rabbits and hares off newly planted seedlings - that was the aim of a trial I was involved in. We had a number of interesting treatments involving coating the seedlings with various substances including canola oil, chilli and grit. The trial was set up along a road where there were lots of hares, and I planted tasty river sheoaks- fully expecting them all to be eaten eventually. In the end most of them survived and have now grown into large trees. Little did I know how valuable they would be as they have been the stepping stone for the movement of apostle birds along a roadside of scattered box trees. Apostle birds tend to prefer native pine and sheoak ecosystems, and these trial trees had linked a patch of remnant Murray pine to the river sheoaks on our farm. The birds could often be observed jumping around in these trees as I drove along the road. Last year we had a group of 5 very noisy and cheeky apostlebirds often visiting us. This year they have expanded to 9, so I hope in future they can live up to their name and get to 12. The larger the group - the more successful they are in raising their young cooperatively. The plains of the north east have lost many of their casuarina trees, and this has highlighted to me the need to include them in all our revegetation areas.

Philippa Noble

## Kangaroos

There's a mob of kangaroos that occasionally visit the open paddock behind our house. They're unpredictable in their habits, but every now and then as you look down towards the Wetlands, there they are, grazing peacefully at the base of the grassed slope. We haven't seen them as much this year, possibly due to the increased growth of grass thanks to the wetter conditions, and I miss watching them lollop along with their stylized insouciance from one patch to the next while the boss of the mob reclines and gazes out over everyone and everything.

We had Japanese exchange students here in 2018, and I mentioned to them that sometimes we see kangaroos "but no promises." Incredibly, and after months of not seeing them, on the first morning of the girls' stay I looked out at the frost and there they were. Cue two very excited Japanese girls standing by the back fence with kangaroos in the mist behind them. Mary Grant Bruce described wallabies as 'nice people', and the phrase always comes to mind whenever I see my kangaroo friends.

Heather Campbell



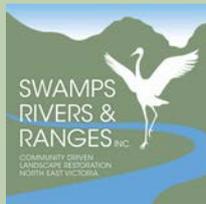
## Unexpected sighting

A few years ago I was driving home from Wangaratta on a beautiful summer's evening. It was the time of night when the sun had well and truly set but there was still a small glow on the horizon - prime time for critters crossing the road.

I was keeping an eye for kangaroos when something strange walked across the road ahead of me. After mentally sifting through the usual suspects of wallaby, fox, hare, or cat, I slowly realised it must have been a koala! Fairly unexpected being a good couple of kilometres from the river with large cropping paddocks in between.

I pulled up, managed to find a torch, and jumped out to find where the koala had gone. She had quickly made her way up a grey box on the side of the road and as I juggled the torch and my phone trying to get a half decent photo I noticed something very special. This koala was a mum and had a baby cuddled up on her back!

Penny Raleigh



# SWAMPS, RIVERS & RANGES INC.

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