

Annual Challenge Bird Count – 2022 recap

By Chris Timewell

The Annual Challenge Bird Count (ACBC) commenced more than three decades ago as a fun end-of-year activity for amateur birdwatchers and birding/naturalist groups across Australia. The ‘challenge’ is to get groups of people to see how many birds they can collectively detect and count within their local area (25km radius) within a calendar day. The nation-wide event was originally coordinated by the Bird Observers Club of Australia, and since the merger with RAOU in 2012 it has since been taken over by a volunteer representative of BirdLife Australia (currently Adriana Bianchi).

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club have been part of this event from its earliest days – with our team first coordinated by Ern Perkins, then Chris Morris and now by me. During the COVID years of 2020 and 2021, the whole event was cancelled. In 2022, we were led to believe that the event was to be cancelled again – but only weeks beforehand it was reinstated. As noted in an article within the April 2023 edition Castlemaine Naturalist, it was too late to arrange for the CFNC to participate, but Kerrie Jennings and myself (with help from a couple of others) undertook own small search covering part of Baringhup, Maldon and Newstead.

In 2022, there were 18 teams participating from across Australia and its territories, of which exactly half were from country Victoria. Three-hundred and thirty species were recorded in total, comprising 32,893 individual birds. Thirteen of the species detected in 2022 had never been recorded during the ACBC in past years – all of these were from the external territories of Cocos Keeling Island and Christmas Island.

With our small ‘Maldon’ team, our contribution was relatively minor (61 species and 287 individuals) – although our sighting of a White-backed Swallow in Baringhup was notable, as no other team detected this species in 2022. In both 2018 and 2019, the Castlemaine area detected 107 species, with 1840 and 2306 individual birds respectively.

Table 1. Summary of bird sightings by country Victorian ACBC teams in 2022

Location	# of species	# of individual birds
Ballarat	120	3261
Gippsland East	143	8098
Horsham	129	3483
Latrobe Valley	81	1563
Maldon	61	287
Portland	118	5013
Roslynmead (include Echuca-Moama)	75	1006
Warrnambool	36	340
Yea River Trail	40	222
TOTAL	217	23,273

Table 2. Number of individual birds seen across Australia by ACBC teams in 2022

Location	# of teams	# of species	# of individual birds
External Territories	2	58	1510
Greater Melbourne	3	122	3213
Country Victoria	9	217	23,273
NSW	3	80	612
Queensland	1	143	4285
Elsewhere in Aust	0	0	0
TOTAL	18	330	32,893