

Challenge Bird Count
2019 summary and 2020 cancellation
By Chris Timewell

For ~19 years, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club has participated in the Challenge Bird Count. On one day in the first weekend in December each year, groups from across Australia aim to detect as many bird species as possible within a 25km radius of a designated central point. For the Castlemaine area, the Market Building is considered to be our central point.

Unfortunately, the CFNC's twentieth participation will need to wait until the year 2021. This event has been cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic and its associated restrictions and risks.

The findings of the six teams comprising the CFNC group in 2019 were described in detail within the March 2020 issue of the Castlemaine Naturalist. All of the sightings made by Castlemaine teams were entered into Birddata, thereby making an additional significant contribution to bird conservation and knowledge. Birddata is the repository of bird sightings from across Australia.

We recently received the detailed national results of the Challenge Count from 2019. A summary is provided in the table below.

Region	# of groups	# of bird species detected	# of individual birds
Greater Melbourne	3	144	6,526
Country Victoria	11	261	72,011
NSW	4	163	6,351
Queensland	5	249	21,470
External Territories	2	37	2125
TOTAL	25	392	108,483

This is almost certainly the first time that external territories have participated, with results received from Christmas Island and Cocos Keeling Islands. As such, there were 14 birds recorded in 2019 that had never been detected previously during the many decades of the annual challenge bird count (e.g. Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon, Javan Pond Heron).

Most of the bird species detected by Castlemaine were also detected by other groups elsewhere in Victoria or interstate. However, Castlemaine was the only one of the 11 Country Victorian groups to have White-throated Needletail, Black-eared Cuckoo or Powerful Owl on their list, and one of only two groups to have Fuscous Honeyeater and White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike. Indeed, no other group in the country detected Powerful Owl or Black-eared Cuckoo.

Many thanks to the coordinators of this national event: the volunteer representatives from BirdLife Australia (Adriana Bianchi and David Ap-Thomas). Looking forward to having you all involved again in 2021.