

Annual Challenge Bird Count – 2024 results. By Chris Timewell

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club members have been involved in the Annual Challenge Bird Count for more than 20 years, and we continued this tradition in 2024.

This event is overseen by BirdLife Australia, but relies on local coordination. The event involves people from across Australia attempting to detect as many birds as possible during a single day from within their local area, in or around the first weekend in December. For the Castlemaine area, the sightings must be made within a 25km radius of the central township. And for a bird to be a legitimate record, it must be either seen by 2 or more people, or heard by 3 or more people.

Many thanks to the four groups representing Castlemaine in 2024. Kerrie Jennings and I – with two assistants for the first main site - covered areas around Baringhup. Maldon and the Nuggettys. Geraldine and Geoff Harris collected important data from around Barkers Creek, Sawmill Rd and the Muckleford Train Station. Sue Boekel – a member of BirdLife Castlemaine – led a team of three across a range of sites from Malmsbury to the Nuggettys. Peter and Rosemary Turner undertook valuable surveys within the Castlemaine township, and also around Harcourt reservoir.

A detailed list of the birds that were detected in the Castlemaine area, and then lodged with BirdLife Australia, is provided in the table below. In summary, 1572 individual birds were recorded from 110 different species. This was a remarkably similar result to 2023, when we recorded 1574 individual birds from 108 species.

For comparison, the numbers detected in other recent years were 287 individual birds comprising 61 bird species in 2022 (a reduced event due to the legacy of COVID), 2377 individuals comprising 113 species in 2019, 1840 individuals comprising 107 species in 2018, 1723 individuals comprising 107 species in 2017, and 1212 individuals comprising 84 species in 2016. The event was cancelled due to COVID in 2020 and 2021.

Some of the highlights from 2024 included a Spotted Dove in Baringhup township; a Black-tailed Native-hen alongside the Loddon River; Powerful Owls in Castlemaine; Square-tailed Kites, Southern Whiteface and Brown Songlarks to the west of Newstead; a Leaden Flycatcher pair in Maldon; and White-browed Babblers in Barkers Creek. All four survey groups detected multiple bird species that were not detected by other groups.

Keep this event in your diary for early December 2025. We'd love to have you involved. All abilities and experience levels are welcomed.

Table 1: Birds detected in the Castlemaine area as part of the Annual Challenge Bird Count

B = evidence of breeding * = introduced species

Survey group	Turner	Harris	Timewell & Jennings	Boekel	TOTAL
Number of sites visited	3	3	9	13	28
Number of team members	2	2	4	3	11
Species Name	Number of Birds Detected				
Australian Shelduck			3		3
Hardhead			6		6

Survey group	Turner	Harris	Timewell & Jennings	Boekel	TOTAL
Pacific Black Duck	6		3	9	18
Grey Teal			12		12
Chestnut Teal		7	4		11
Australian Wood Duck	40 B	18	37	12	107
*Domestic Duck	3				3
Australasian Grebe		1	4		5
Hoary-headed Grebe			35		35
Common Bronzewing	2	4	4		10
Crested Pigeon			7		7
Peaceful Dove			1		1
*Spotted Dove			1		1
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo				3	3
Fan-tailed Cuckoo				1	1
Dusky Moorhen	8		1	6	15
Eurasian Coot	5	8	23		36
Black-tailed Native-hen			1		1
Black-fronted Dotterel	1	1	1		3
Masked Lapwing			2	2	4
Australian Pelican	2				2
White-faced Heron	2	5	2	3	12
Australian White Ibis				2	2
Straw-necked Ibis		8			8
Little Black Cormorant	2	3			5
Australasian Darter			1	1	2
Black-shouldered Kite				1	1
Square-tailed Kite				1	1
Whistling Kite	1		1	1	3
Black Kite			2	1	3
Powerful Owl	2				2
Southern Boobook			1		1
Tawny Frogmouth			4 B		4
Rainbow Bee-eater			5	5	10
Sacred Kingfisher			3	4	7
Laughing Kookaburra		2	3	1	6
Brown Falcon			1	3	4
Galah		13	15	2	30
Long-billed Corella		48	34	10	92
Little Corella			15	1	16
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	6	5	11	17	39
Red-rumped Parrot			8		8
Crimson Rosella	7	4	4	8	23
Eastern Rosella	0	12	3	6	21
Musk Lorikeet	20	0	2	12	34

Survey group	Turner	Harris	Timewell & Jennings	Boekel	TOTAL
Little Lorikeet	0	0	0	2	2
Rainbow Lorikeet	0	0	0	9	9
White-throated Treecreeper		2	2	7	11
Brown Treecreeper		3	2	4	9
Superb Fairy-wren	4	22	13	34	73
White-fronted Chat			4		4
New Holland Honeyeater	8 B	1	8	2	19
Brown-headed Honeyeater			3	4	7
White-naped Honeyeater				3	3
Black-chinned Honeyeater			1		1
Eastern Spinebill	2	1	2	1	6
Red Wattlebird	7 B	8	10	9	34
Fuscous Honeyeater		10		30	40
White-plumed Honeyeater		14	7	8	29
White-eared Honeyeater			1		1
Yellow-faced Honeyeater		2	2	10	14
Noisy Miner			13	10	23
Spotted Pardalote	1		3	12	16
Striated Pardalote		5		13	18
Weebill	5		12	14	31
White-browed Scrubwren	2	2		6	10
Southern Whiteface				2	2
Yellow-rumped Thornbill				4	4
Yellow Thornbill	2		3		5
Striated Thornbill			2		2
Brown Thornbill	1		3	10	14
Buff-rumped Thornbill			2	3	5
Varied Sittella			2		2
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	4	4	4	4	16
White-winged Triller			1		1
White-browed Babbler		5			5
Crested Shrike-tit		1			1
Rufous Whistler		6	4	9	19
Golden Whistler			1		1
Grey Shrike-thrush		5	4	6	15
Olive-backed Oriole		3		4	7
Pied Currawong	1				1
Grey Currawong			5 B		5
Australian Magpie	7	22	14	19	62
Grey Butcherbird			1		1
Dusky Woodswallow		10		3	13
Willie Wagtail		17	4	6	27
Grey Fantail	2	3	5	14	24

Survey group	Turner	Harris	Timewell & Jennings	Boekel	TOTAL
Little Raven		5	60	4	69
Australian Raven	4	1	2	2	9
Leaden Flycatcher			2		2
Magpie-lark	3	8	2	1	14
White-winged Chough		44	7	14	65
Jacky Winter			2		2
Eastern Yellow Robin				4	4
Mistletoebird				1	1
Red-browed Finch			2	6	8
*House Sparrow	20		31	13	64
Australasian Pipit			4	2	6
*European Goldfinch			2	1	3
Brown Songlark				2	2
Rufous Songlark		2			2
Australian Reed-Warbler			5	2	7
Fairy Martin		5	6		11
Tree Martin	2			2	4
Welcome Swallow		12	7	14	33
Silvereve	8	9	6		23
*Common Starling			3	3	6
*Common Myna		4	5		9
*Common Blackbird	8 B	2	2	6	18