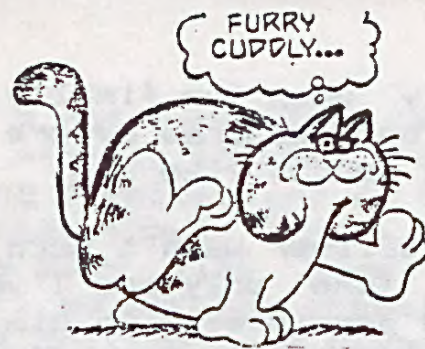


Castlemaine Naturalist

AUGUST 1990

BELLS AND BOWS



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About twelve months ago, I accepted an invitation to take part in a survey, run by Adelaide University, of prey taken by domestic cats. We have two cats, and a few neighbours' cats which intrude occasionally, but I decided to only keep track of our two.

The survey is to continue, but a summary of the results so far, was recently published in the Bird Observer and the South Australian equivalent. The thing that most intrigued me, though it wasn't commented on in the text, was the difference of the effectiveness of bells, which waned in effectiveness from country to city.

My guess that the bells are just the folly bells that are used on most cat collars, and are pretty useless anyway, though the ones used on Excelpet collars seem to be a bit more effective.

After our old cat died, I determined never again to have another cat, but I found that the 'locals' moved on to our property, and set to work demolishing our bird population. I found it impossible to keep them away, especially one well fed, avid hunter from next door (who "never killed birds" - ha!). Finally I decided I would get another cat to take over the old cat's territory and keep the others away, have it belled, and keep it inside at night for the sake of the sugar gliders, which the old cat, who was a ratter, decided were just as good as rats.

To cut a long, complicated story short, we wound up with three cats, mother and two sons, all of which we had desexed. Mitzi received her collar at the age of 10 months, as soon as we let her outside when she'd accepted us. The sons were about four months old.

Both Mitzi and one son lost a couple of collars at first, or put a foot through them and came to be rescued. The other fellow was shaping up to be a hunter, so I tied a brass shim bell on to his collar, and that worked very well. Not long after he became a road victim.

So we were left with Mitzi who prefers mice, rats and young rabbits, but occasionally has taken a bird until she had a brass bell put on her collar, and Gulliver, who just loves to catch anything that moves, and mangles it. Mitzi brings her victims in on the verandah or the library to eat, so she's easy to keep track of, espec-

ially when she finally got the idea to bring them to me to be measured before eating them - not a tall story, just sounds like one!

If Gulliver wasn't such a good natured and companionable cat (the only one I've ever known who was) I mightn't have persisted with him as Mitzi was doing a good job of hunting the strays off her territory. However, I got him a fairly large brass bell, and that put an end to bird catching for quite a while, and he stuck with grasshoppers and butterflies, and the occasional skink, which he brought in live. I always rescue them while he looks on with an expression of resigned disgust.

The bell worked well until the honeyeater 'silly season' when the grevilleas are in flower. The first time I just kept him inside for most of the day, but last year I had read that tinsel was very good for keeping birds out of fruit trees. I decided to try that, as his method was to sit under the grevilleas until the birds came along. I didn't tie the tinsel to the grevilleas, I tied it to his collar, and it has worked like a dream. These days he sports a brass bell and a gold tinsel bow, and the only birds he has brought in in 10 months have been a nestling blackbird and a thornbill, which I suspect had been injured by our multitude of wattle-birds. There were no other signs of injury other than a leg that was broken and twisted up under it.

People often think that it is cruel to bell a cat. Ours have taken to them without any problems, only being bothered by the first ones for the first 24 hours or so. I never take them off, as the only cat I know whose owner takes his off every night took a long time to adjust to his. When I put the bigger bells on I found I had to fit them to the collar while the collar was still on the cat. When I did it the other way, Gulliver got quite distressed, trying to hop over the sound, and I had to remove it again, and tried it the other way around a couple of days alter. He then settled to it in very short time. Mitzi was the same. In fact, on the couple of occasions that she has lost her collar she has been quite fidgetty until the new one is in place. Gulliver just enjoys being able to sneak around quietly, but submits to the new one with resignation. And yes, he does recognise that the tinsel spoils his fun, and if he's been without it for a few days because it's been raining or somesuch, he tries every trick he can think of to get rid of it.

So, if you don't want stray cats on your property, you might find you are better off with your own neutered, belled, well-handled and disciplined (yes, it is possible up to a point, but it means establishing yourself as boss from the start) cat. I have found that this is definitely been the best way of protecting the birds on the property, and the numbers are slowly building up again - when

the wattlebirds aren't around. I'm not sure that bells would be as effective with native mammals though. Mitzi still catches mice, rats and young rabbits, and I think that lizards would still fall victim, though I have only rescued two, and fished a couple more flat ones from under the mat over the last summer, so perhaps tinsel is even more effective there, or else Gulliver has given up in disgust.

Rita Mills.

ROSELLAS and REAL ESTATE

In the wake of Shiela Box's tragedy with Eastern Rosellas last year, it seemed insensitive to publicly record our delight in the activities of a pair who chose as a nesting site, a stump just a few metres from our kitchen window.

The anticipation of another spring, made memorable by the constant visits of the male rosella to his mate, was dampened however by the activity of the Crimson Rosellas. They are a far less gentle type altogether. (We have numerous Crimson in this area and probably show them less appreciation than they deserve).

As soon as last year's young Easterns hatched we knew because there were visits from Magpies, who showed only a cursory interest, and from the far more curious Crimson. It seemed from their activities both then, and more recently this year, that they'd decided this stump would make a good nest for the future, and we feared their more aggressive natures would win the day.

But yesterday the pair of Easterns (and I presume that they are the same pair) returned. They commenced the same tentative explorations as last year; waiting on a nearby branch to make sure all was clear, then the female descends while her handsome and always attentive mate keeps a lookout for invaders. She walks around the top of the stump, appearing to peck at it, and perhaps smearing it with saliva. Eventually she descends into its depths, and re-appears at the side entrance before flying up to her mate. But yesterday her activities were interrupted by the appearance of two bold Crimson Rosellas. This I thought, was just what we were expecting - where will the Easterns go now?

I was wrong. Spring must be in the air and in the blood of our Easterns, because they put up quite a fight. I was on the 'phone to Beri at the time and she could hear the squawking - so unlike the gentle whistling and twittering that characterises the Eastern males usual call to his mate. After five minutes the Crimson flew off, but not for long. They returned with reinforcements in the form of two immature Crimson, presumably their own offspring. And the battle was on again.

I am heartened to record the story because the current state of affairs is looking reasonably optimistic. The Easterns appeared to win the day, and they were there again this morning, performing their now customary home-making activities. The post-script is that the Crimson did appear again, and were strutting about the base of the stump with their breasts puffed out. The female Eastern was inside and her poor mate left on his own to defend their territory. I wonder what would have happened if I had not opened the window at that point, thereby frightening off those cowardly Crimson.

If the birds are anything to judge by, spring cannot be far off. Beri tells me that the plovers have already laid three eggs on the edge of the driveway again. And my neighbour swears that the swallows' sudden disappearance heralds their impending return to start nest-building.

And we are hoping for another season of family meals constantly interrupted by exclamations of "Look! there's Mister back again".

Clodagh Norwood.



NOTES FOR JULY

GOLDEN BRONZE CUCKOO was found dead, killed as a result of flying into a window pane at McKenzies Hill, Castlemaine. (I & E. Pellas)

PIED CURRAWONGS have been seen at Elphinstone, travelling east during the day and returning at nightfall. (P Starr)

BOTANIC GARDENS BIRD LIST. Birds seen on a walk through the Castlemaine Botanic gardens on July 18 included a flock of Dusky Woodswallows, a Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike, a pair of Black-shouldered Kites and Yellow and Brown Thornbills. The robins were represented by a male Scarlet Robin. Dusky Woodswallow and Little Thornbills are additional area records for the Club's bird list. (EP)

FLESHY MISTLETOE has been seen, parasitic on Box Mistletoe, which in turn, was parasitic on a Yellow Gum, between the Inglewood Botanic Gardens and Inglewood Reservoir. It is an uncommon Mistletoe, and is distinguished by its rather fleshy leaves. (EP)

SCARLET-FLOWERED CORREA REFLEXA has been seen in flower between Ben Major and Lexton (IH)

EUROPEAN WASP. A wasp collected at McKenzies hill has been identified to be a European Wasp. European Wasps are reputed to be killed by very cold weather - the lack of heavy frosts this year may account for them being found in mid-winter.

FLAME ROBIN has reported as a road victim along the Castlemaine-Newstead Road.

SILVER EYES Are they more plentiful than usual? Large flocks have been seen in the Botanic Gardens this year, and they are plentiful in gardens and in the bushland.

MUCKLEFORD FOREST EXCURSION

Despite some dull skies, which made picking up of colour difficult, 24 kinds of birds were seen on the Club's excursion to Muckleford Forest on 14/7/90.

Perhaps highlight was sighting on two occasions of Painted Button-quail. They are probably quite common in the forest, but are shy and move quickly away, so it is unusual for them to be seen by a group of people.

Seven kinds of honeyeater were seen. They were Fuscous, Yellow-faced, White-eared, White-plumed, Yellow-tufted and White-naped Honeyeaters, and Red Wattlebirds.

A Little Pied Cormorant was seen near the dam at the Red, White and Blue Mine.

Other birds were Restless Flycatcher, Blue Wren, Silver Eye, Galah, Spotted Pardalote, Magpie, White-winged Chough, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas, Scarlet, Yellow and Hooded Robins, and Little Pied Cormorant.

BIRD WATCHING IN THE MALLEE

[Some notes of a trip to the Mallee in early July.]

DUNOLLY SCHOOL. Not quite the Mallee yet, but an excellent spot for Musk Lorikeets. Many of the Yellow Gums along the fitness trail have hollows, and these are made use of by the lorikeets. The Blue-faced Honeyeaters seen last time were not observed on this trip.

INGLEWOOD BOTANIC GARDENS. Another good place to see birds. The Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters were still present. Others were Brown-headed, White-eared, Yellow-faced, Yellow-tufted and Yellow-winged Honeyeaters - often three varieties on the one branch.

TCHUM LAKES. There are several lakes, about 5 km east of Birchip. Fortunately we had gum boots, and so could reach the new bird hide in comfort. Four kinds of Cormorant could be seen - the big and little pied cormorants, and the big and little black cormorants. The flight of the large and small birds is different, and helped to distinguish between them.

PATCHEWOLLOCK. Between Patchewollock and Wyperfield a small clump of cypress-pine was festooned with Pink Cockatoos. They seemed unconcerned by our presence. A White-backed Swallow was sitting on the road gave two interesting sightings within a few hundred metres.

PINK LAKES. A completely still day, although overcast. The lakes were without even a ripple. The pink-breasted Grey Teal and pink-breasted Lapwings made an unusual sight. At the first lake, flock of Chestnut-crowned Babbler was squabbling over a piece of waste paper. Mulga Parrots and Mallee Ringnecks were abundant, and we also saw a group of Blue Bonnets.

HATTAH. A flock of Apostle Birds seems to live in the vicinity of the information centre. They take little notice of people.

At the edge of Hattah lake, a squabble erupted between a pair of Yellow Rosellas, and a pair of Mallee Ringnecks over ownership of a red-gum hollow.

Weebills were very common on the mallee eucalypts. White-faces were also plentiful, usually feeding on the ground. Striated Pardalotes were also common. We saw only a couple of Yellow-rump Pardalotes. They seem more colourful than the local Spotted Pardalotes. Other ground feeding birds were Chestnut-rumped Thornbills and Splendid Wrens.

The Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters were very common in the mallee bushland. We saw hundreds. The other common honey-

eaters were the Singing Honeyeaters and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters. Along the red-gum and black box areas Noisy Miners were common. In other areas they were replaced by the Yellow-throated Miners. Only a few Blue-faced Honeyeaters were seen.

Both Pied Butcherbirds and Grey Butcherbirds were fairly plentiful. Pied Butcherbirds are close to their southern limit in the Victorian Mallee. Grey Butcherbirds have a widespread distribution, and found in Southern Victoria and Tasmania, as well as to the north. It is curious that they are not seen in the Central Goldfields.

A pair of Fork-tailed Kites was seen at the edge of the Murray River.

EP

ONE TREE HILL PLANT LIST.

This is a list of some of the trees and shrubs to be found along the One Tree Hill walking trail. Tick them off when seen.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| __ Grey Box | __ Box Mistletoe |
| __ Mealy Bundy | __ Coffee Bush |
| __ Red Box | __ Cranberry Heath |
| __ Red Ironbark | __ Daphne Heath |
| __ Red Stringybark | __ Fairy Waxflower |
| __ Yellow Box | __ Grevillea |
| __ Cootamundra Wattle | __ Grey Everlasting |
| __ Gold-dust Wattle | __ Gorse Bitter-pea |
| __ Golden Wattle | __ Honeypots |
| __ Hedge Wattle | __ Pink Bells |
| __ Rough Wattle | __ Native Cherry |
| __ Spreading Wattle | __ Silky Hakea |
| __ Box Mistletoe | __ Stiff Geebung |

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450

COMMITTEE: Ern Perkins (Pres), Chris Norwood (V. Pres), Maggie Oliver (V. Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec), Clodagh Norwood (Treas), Kaye Turner, George Broadway, Rita Mills (Newsletter), Ian Higgins, Robyn Holden.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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|---|------|------------|------|
| Student/Pensioner | \$5 | Single | \$8 |
| Family | \$12 | Supporting | \$15 |
| Newsletter posted: Subscription plus \$5. | | | |

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 10 Aug. GROWING AUSTRALIAN NATIVES FOR CUT FLOWERS.
Talk by Marilyn Sprague. 8 pm at High School.

Sat 11 Aug. ONE-TREE HILL WALKING TRACK. A 2 km walk in
the Kennington State Forest. Turn right, from the back
Harcourt - Bendigo road, 200 m after the Tannery Rd
intersection. Meet at SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 pm sharp.

Sun 19 Aug. TARNAGULLA. Wildflower excursion with
Maryborough FNC. Meet at S.E.C. Mostyn St at 10.00 am
sharp, or Tarnagulla Township (toilet block) at 11 am.

Fri 31 Aug-Sun 2 Sept. WYPERFIELD CAMPOUT. W.V.F.N.C.A.
campout at Wyperfield, organised by Maryborough F.N.C.
(See July Cast Nat. for details of campout).

Fri 14 Sept. WALKING IN THE WILDERNESS - SW TASMANIA with
Pat Bingham. High School at 8.00 pm.

Sat 15 Sept. PINK CLIFFS (HEATHCOTE) and MT IDA. Leave
from 27 Doveton St at 10.00 am sharp. Take lunch.

Sun 16 Sept. FLAX-LEAF BROOM PULL from the Botanic
Gardens, Froomes Road. 10.00 a.m.

Mon 17 Sept. DARGILE FOREST. Excursion with Bird Observers
Club - weekday excursion. Meet Dargile Forest at 10.30

Fri 12 Oct. TREKKING IN THE HIMALAYAS. Jim Nichols and Lob
Sang D Lama. High School at 8.00 p.m.

Sat 13 Oct. BLACK HILL, KYNETON. Leave SEC at 1.30 p.m.

Oct 26-28 GRAMPIANS. WVFNCA campout at Churches of Christ
Centre, Halls Gap

Sat 3 Nov. KALIMNA WALKING TRACK. 9.30 am. (Cast. Festival)

Sat 3 Nov. MUCKLEFORD TOUR. 1.30 pm. (Cast. Festival)

Wed 7 Nov. KAWEKA WALK. 6.30 pm with Kaweka Committee.

Fri 9 Nov. THE PREHISTORY OF DISCOVERY BAY (S.W. Vic).
Speaker is Michael Godfrey. 8 p.m. at High School.

Sat 10 Nov. MUCKLEFORD TOUR. 1.30 pm (Cast. Festival)

Sun 11 Nov. WAVEKA WALK. 3.30 pm with Kaweka Committee.

Meetings on the second Friday of each month at Castlemaine
High School at 8.00 p.m. Business meetings on the fourth
Thursday at 38 Campbell St at 7.30 p.m. All members invit-
ed. Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.

SUPPER ROSTER

Aug: C. Norwood, B. Perry Sept: M. & M. Willis