

Annual Challenge Bird Count – 2025 results

By Chris Timewell

Once again, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club contributed to the Annual Challenge Bird Count. This event, conducted under the auspices of BirdLife Australia, involves teams from across Australia attempting to detect as many birds as possible from within their local area, during a single day near to 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.

Due to unforeseen circumstances necessitating some late withdrawals, there were only two main groups representing Castlemaine in 2025. The 'Harris' group – comprising Geraldine and Geoff Harris, and Lawrie Conole - visited many of the Harris's standard sites from previous years in the Muckleford forest area, as well as new sites in Muckleford, Castlemaine and Barkers Creek. Sue Boekel – a member of BirdLife Castlemaine and a regular contributor to the Challenge Count over recent years – led a team of three across at least 11 sites including Malmsbury, Elphinstone, Railway dam, Newstead Cemetery and forested areas near Welshmans Reef and the Nuggetts.

Lisa Minchin and I visited the Castlemaine Sewerage Ponds as our small contribution to the count – not being aware that the Harris group also visited this site. Therefore, for the results at the sewerage ponds, the count for each bird species was taken as being the highest tally recorded by either the Timewell or Harris group.

You can see a comprehensive list of the birds detected in the Castlemaine area in 2025 in the Table below.. All results are also lodged with BirdLife Australia.

Our combined contribution in 2025 involved the detection of 1422 individual birds from 110 different species. Given the small number of groups involved in 2025, this compares very favourably with the 2024 results (1572 individual birds from 110 different species) and the 2023 results (1574 individual birds from 108 species). The newly added bird hide at the Castlemaine sewerage ponds was a significant contributor to the overall total (33 species and 295 individual birds).

Some of the highlights from 2025 included Spotted Quail-thrush and White-winged Triller near Sawmill Rd; Black-tailed Native-hen at the Castlemaine sewerage ponds; two Musk Duck in golf course ponds, Southern Whiteface at the Newstead Cemetery, Purple-crowned Lorikeets in Elphinstone, and Satin Flycatcher near Green Gully. Evidence of breeding was noted for the Eurasian Coot, Australasian Grebe and Wedge-tailed Eagle.

Most of the expected bird species for our local area were detected by one or more of the groups. Some of the species considered to be notable omissions include Rock Dove, Great Cormorant, Brown Falcon, White-naped Honeyeater, Yellow Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Varied Sittella, Golden Whistler, Silvereye, and Common Starling.

Keep this event in your diary for early December 2026. We'd love to have you involved. All abilities and experience levels are welcomed.

Table 1: Number of birds detected in the Castlemaine area as part of the 2025 Annual Challenge Bird Count, listed in taxonomic order.

B = evidence of breeding * = introduced species

Survey Group	Harris	Castlemaine Sewerage Ponds (Harris & Timewell)	Boekel	Overall total
Number of sites visited	7	1	11	19
Number of team members	3	3 + 2	3	8
Species Name	Number of Birds Detected			
Hardhead	3			3
Pacific Black Duck	4	19	3	26
Grey Teal	2	95		97
Chestnut Teal		6	1	7
Musk Duck	2			2
Australian Wood Duck	7	4	25	36
*Domestic Duck			1	1
Australasian Grebe	2	4	2 B	8
Hoary-headed Grebe	10			10
Common Bronzewing	8		2	10
Crested Pigeon	10		1	11
Peaceful Dove			2	2
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	1		1	2
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	2		2	4
Pallid Cuckoo			1	1
Purple Swamphen		31		31
Dusky Moorhen		59	8	67
Black-tailed Native-hen		5		5
Eurasian Coot	70	10	2 B	82
Pied (Black-winged) Stilt		4		4
Black-fronted Dotterel	3	3	1	7
Masked Lapwing	4	14		18
Whiskered Tern			1	1
Australian Pelican			5	5
White-necked Heron		1		1
White-faced Heron	1	2	2	5
Australian White Ibis		2		2
Yellow-billed Spoonbill		1		1
Little Pied Cormorant	1		21	22
Little Black Cormorant			1	1
Australasian Darter			1	1
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2 B			2
Little Eagle			1	1
Brown Goshawk	1		1	2
Whistling Kite			1	1
Black Kite	1		1	2

Survey Group	Harris	Castlemaine Sewerage Ponds (Harris & Timewell)	Boekel	Overall total
Rainbow Bee-eater	1		4	5
Sacred Kingfisher	1		5	6
Laughing Kookaburra	2	1	3	6
Yellow-tailed Black- Cockatoo		2		2
Galah	9	2	22	33
Long-billed Corella	32		10	42
Little Corella			10	10
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	3		10	13
Red-rumped Parrot	4		9	13
Crimson Rosella	4		23	27
Eastern Rosella	17		6	23
Musk Lorikeet	20		8	28
Purple-crowned Lorikeet			2	2
Rainbow Lorikeet	2		2	4
White-throated Treecreeper			6	6
Brown Treecreeper	2		3	5
Superb Fairy-wren	18	2	29	49
New Holland Honeyeater		1	1	2
White-eared Honeyeater	1	1		2
Blue-faced Honeyeater	1			1
Brown-headed Honeyeater	1		9	10
Eastern Spinebill	1			1
Red Wattlebird	5	1	7	13
Fuscous Honeyeater	20		37	57
White-plumed Honeyeater	10	1	1	12
Yellow-faced Honeyeater			6	6
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	1		6	7
Noisy Miner	6			6
Spotted Pardalote			13	13
Striated Pardalote	9	1	20	30
Weebill	8		8	16
White-browed Scrubwren	1		2	3
Southern Whiteface			2	2
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	5		7	12
Brown Thornbill	4		4	8
Buff-rumped Thornbill	1			1
White-browed Babbler	5			5
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	4		8	12
White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	1			1
White-winged Triller	2			2
Spotted Quail-thrush	1			1

Survey Group	Harris	Castlemaine Sewerage Ponds (Harris & Timewell)	Boekel	Overall total
Rufous Whistler	4		18	22
Grey Shrike-thrush	13		11	24
Crested Shrike-tit			2	2
Olive-backed Oriole	2		3	5
Pied Currawong	1		1	2
Grey Currawong			1	1
Australian Magpie	34	9	59	102
Masked Woodswallow	3			3
White-browed Woodswallow	55			55
Dusky Woodswallow	8		6	14
Willie Wagtail	9	1	7	17
Grey Fantail	1		6	7
Little Raven	13	4	4	21
Australian Raven	4		5	9
Satin Flycatcher			1	1
Magpie-lark	8		3	11
White-winged Chough	23		14	37
Scarlet Robin			1	1
Jacky Winter	2		4	6
Eastern Yellow Robin	3		8	11
Mistletoebird	1		3	4
Red-browed Finch	2	2	1	5
*House Sparrow	5		15	20
Australasian Pipit	2			2
*European Goldfinch	2			2
Rufous Songlark	4			4
Little Grassbird		1		1
Australian Reed-Warbler		1		1
Fairy Martin	2		4	6
Tree Martin	10			10
Welcome Swallow	8	4	8	20
*Common Myna	6		1	7
*Common Blackbird		1	10	11