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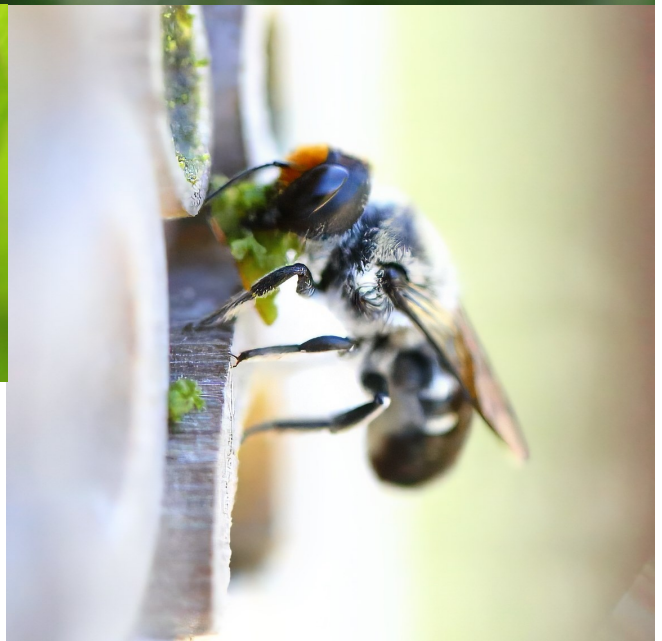


Cape Chatter

Life goes on ... well sort of!

'Expect the unexpected!' A front of wild storms and a very brief period of hot weather in our neck of the woods threw a 'spanner into the works' recently. No power, no communications! But the natural world went about it's daily business without disruption, seemingly unaffected and unaware by what was going on in our 'ecosystem', continuing to do the important work of rewilding our environments, pollinating, reproducing and disposing of our waste ... the perfect natural system that hasn't got too smart for itself!

Here's a small sample of what's been working in my garden since the last *Chatter*.



Clockwise from Top Left: A pair of *Eupodes confrater*, mating in flight. This is the second time I have witnessed and photographed this! *Blue-banded Bee* has been great pollinating the tomatoes, *Fire-tail Bee (Megachile)* still at the hotel, *European Honeybee* laden in pollen and a *Hoverfly*, who has helped keep us with a large supply of zucchini (and fritters!).

The bee hotel (see *Chatter No. 106*), now has 14 secured rooms!!

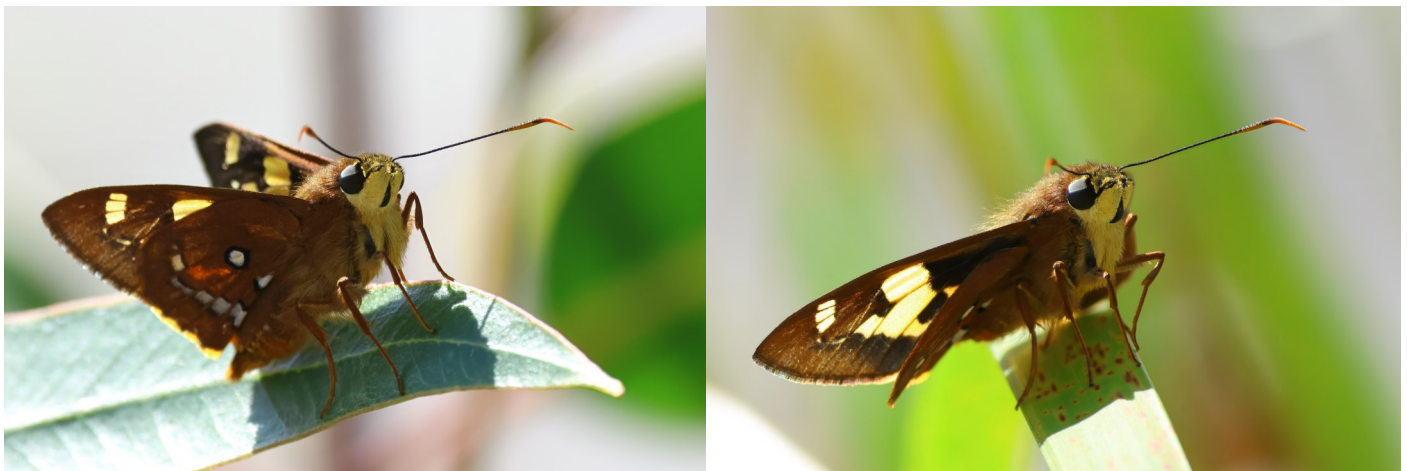
Cabbage Butterflies everywhere ... not quite!

The occasional warm day has brought out thousands of white butterflies. The bane of most gardeners, most of the whites were the infamous *Cabbage Butterfly*, but there were also other types among the masses.

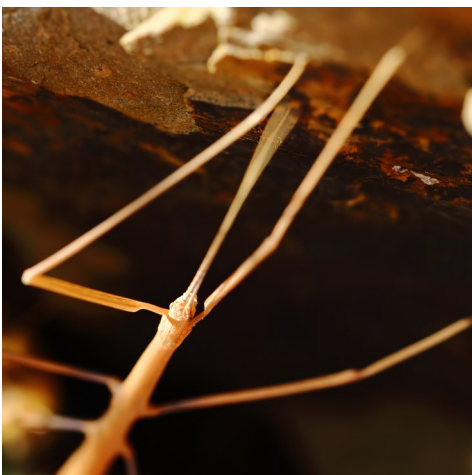


Above Left: *Cabbage Butterfly*, was particularly fond of the *Coastal Rosemary* (*Westringia*) bushes. **Above Right:** Another white butterfly 'stood out' among the crowd!

A Skipper ... not a butterfly nor a moth

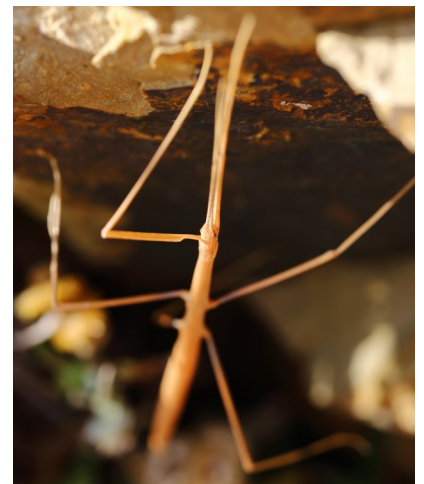


On the same day as all the 'whites', I spotted this insect called a *skipper*. It is not a butterfly nor a moth. *Skippers* are distinguished from butterflies by their jerky or skipping flight, and hooked antenna which are also wider apart at the base.



A stick stuck to a rock!!

An amazing looking *Stick Insect* was found nearby hanging off a large rock in the late afternoon sun (warming up maybe). These unusual creatures usually feed on eucalyptus leaves, and their bodies resemble eucalypt twigs or stems which makes them very well camouflaged against predators. They are very hard to see unless they come out into the open like this.



Skinks ... warming up on the rocks

Mere centimeters from the *Stick Insect*, a couple of species of small skinks were warming up in the late afternoon sun on some large rocks in the garden - a huge heat bank from which they can 'recharge their batteries'! *Skinks* feed on small invertebrates but they were not interested in the *Stick* ... or didn't notice it!



Above Left: *Garden Skink*, about 12 cm long. Most likely a male with the orange/red colouring from the armpit down it's side indicating it is breeding. **Above Right:** *Grass Skink*, around 6 cm long.

Lock up your skinks & fish ... there's predators out there

There has been several reports around the estate of a rogue *White-faced Heron* that has worked out there is some easy pickings in the various 'frog ponds' that are features of some of the home gardens. Fish and skinks have been on the menu. These *herons* are very versatile birds and work many different habitats: rocky platforms and the inter-tidal zones on the coast, wetlands, heath and obviously home gardens. Smart cookies! Here are several snaps I took yesterday on our local beach while *Hooded Plover* monitoring.



White-faced Herons are fascinating to watch: they are contemplative, patient, stealth like and strike fast when they have tracked down their prey.

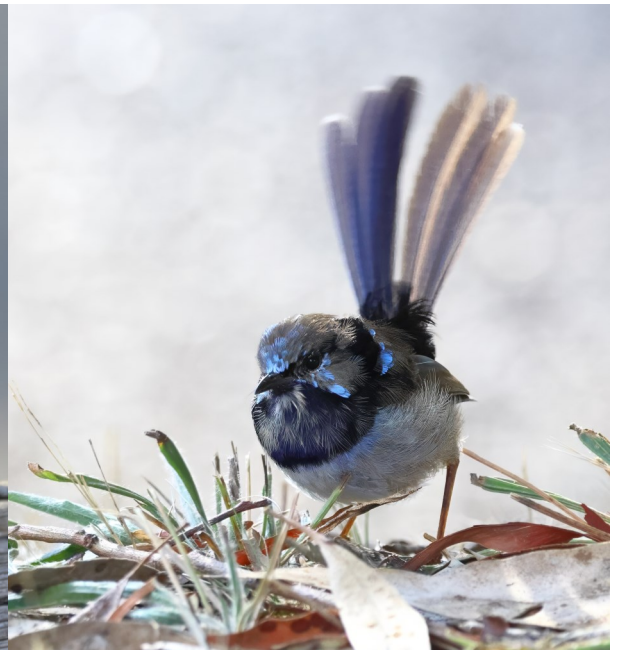
Another stunning predatory bird ...

A pair of *Black-shouldered Kite* have been hanging about the estate recently. These are wonderful birds to watch as they skillfully hover with fast wing flaps and then dive quickly, talons spread, to pounce on their prey.



The pair appear to have made a nest in a dead tree beyond 'Green Beach' behind the central wetlands. Normally, it is a bit late to be breeding for these birds but if conditions are good, they will extend beyond the usual spring breeding period. I will keep an eye on proceedings.

Changing seasons ... change of plumage!



The breeding season for the local *Superb Fairy-wren* is coming to a close. The female (**left**) remains in this livery all the time, but the male, which is noticeable in the breeding season by its brilliant blue plumage, may start to moult and lose the brilliant blue colours. We can see this happening in the male pictured (**right**). The male will eventually look similar in appearance to the female (but slightly darker) but they can be distinguished by the bill colour (female = reddish-brown and male = black) and the eye ring (the male has no red-brown patch). Just to add more confusion, not all males lose this blue colouring, and some will not moult and retain the 'blue look' throughout the whole year.

Growing up ...

Nice to see some of our smaller bush birds developing from the breeding season. Two of the more common species: *Eastern Yellow Robin* and *Grey Fantail* are looking quite cute and fluffy.



Environmental challenges ...

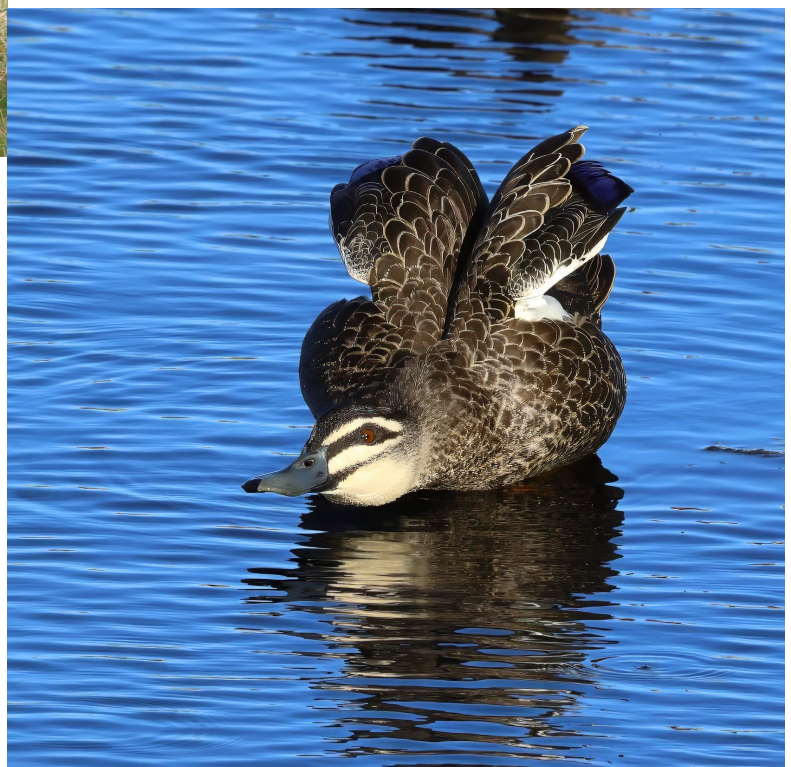


I try not to be political in *Cape Chatter*, but the recent decision by the Victorian Government to allow the continuation of duck hunting defies belief. I was even more gob-smacked when I read that one government MP wrote in a submission on the matter where they urged the government to continue to allow duck hunting saying: “*the sport was shown to improve mental health outcomes for participants*”. Also a report that “*powerful construction unions had threatened to walk off the job if hunting was banned*”.

What hope is there for our environment and our native wildlife with such attitudes!

Right: One of our lucky *Pacific Black Ducks* at **The Cape**. It would not want to stray too far!

Sad to see, but a welcome addition to the Federal Government’s threatened species list of the migratory wader, *Latham’s Snipe*, (left) which has now been listed as a **vulnerable** species federally. Such a listing hopefully will attract funding for programs to help preserve this once abundant species. **The Cape** has been active in restoring suitable wetland habitat within the estate for these birds who visit from September to late February from their northern hemisphere breeding grounds and we are continually looking at ways for them to prosper here with minimal disturbances. On a good note, the numbers counted here on formal surveys are increasing slowly!



Hoodie happenings ...



While the breeding season is not yet over, the opportunity for further nests and fledged chicks is slowly drifting away from us. It has been a challenging season for the vulnerable *Hooded Plover*, with only **one** fledged bird in Cape Paterson. Here are the stats to date for our local neck of the woods: 7 breeding sites, 16 nests, 32 eggs, 11 chicks and one fledge. **A miserly 3% egg to fledge success rate.** Predation (especially fox), disturbance by human activity, changes to beach morphology and tidal inundation are the key reasons for the result. The long term average egg to fledge success rate is about 10% locally.

The one good bit of news, this fledge is only the second since 2012 at this breeding site and we have had a fledge in successive years! The breeding pair since taking this site in 2018 have had 24 nests, laid 59 eggs, and had 10 chicks for the two fledglings. That's not a great ROI!



Anti-Clockwise from Top Left: The survivor! The little chick at Day 3 of it's life, Day 17 and Day 31 (above). This bird officially fledged at 35 days of age, is now 42 days old and can perform limited flying maneuvers. It is still with its parents and will most likely leave this territory in the next week or so.

Kelp Gull ... bird species No.135



I was a little surprised when I spotted this large *Gull* on a nearby beach rock platform recently while *Hooded Plover* monitoring. It was nearby some *Pacific Gulls*, and I noticed it looked a little different to them. This is a *Kelp Gull*. While very similar to the *Pacific*, there are some key differences which I will explain in the next *Cape Chatter* with some photos.

Kelp Gulls are not uncommon in Australia but are distributed in a patchy range. They are more common in se Tasmania and NSW coasts.

I have updated **The Cape Bird Species List and Brochure**, where the count stands at 135 species.

You can download it here:

<https://capechatter.com/the-cape-bird-species-list-and-brochure/>

I leave you with the Red Fox, the Grey Roo and the Hoodie

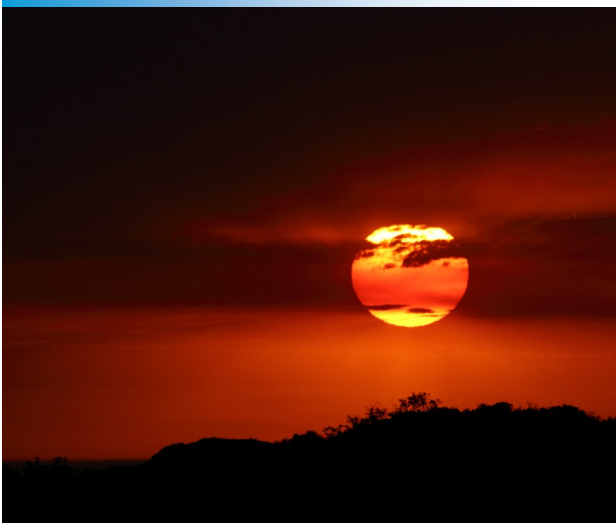


Introduced *Red Fox* are reeking havoc on our native wildlife, and are estimated to kill over 500 million reptiles, birds and mammals each year. (These figures are dwarfed by the 1.5 million native animals killed by feral and stray cats).



While recently doing a distant, quick check of the *Hooded Plover* enclosure at Undertow Bay/Pea Creek, a *Red Fox* was observed in the foredune (right circle) near the chick site, in broad daylight. Interestingly, one of the adult Hoodies (hard to see but within the left circle) faced off with the fox as a way of protecting the chicks. When the fox withdrew, the adult Hoodie flew back to the enclosure where the chicks were hidden. We did lose one chick later to fox here, but some quick work by Ranger Matt from Parks Victoria secured some fox eradication action which may well have got our one fledgling over the line. There are very little resources or funding currently to manage a sustained fox eradication program! Another environmental challenge!

Nature Observations around The Cape



The Cape is on the traditional land of the Bunurong people

The *Cape Chatter* blog is a periodic newsletter produced by resident of **The Cape**, David Hartney. You can subscribe to receive it automatically by email by visiting <https://capechatter.com> and signing up. The website also contains all sorts of nature information and pictures of the ecology, flora and fauna at **The Cape**.

All photos shown in *Cape Chatter* are taken by David Hartney unless otherwise credited.

Feel free to contact David by email or through the website to report any nature observations at **The Cape**.

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