



River Red Gum Woodland. Photo: DuncanTurnbull

# Education

ANNETTE COOK

## BIRD WEEK 2011 - BIRDS NEED TREES INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FORESTS

There are eight major forest types in Australia, mostly named for the dominant tree species. They are eucalyptus, acacia, callitris, casuarina, mangrove, melaleuca, plantation and rainforest.

“In Australia, a forest is defined as an area, incorporating all living and non-living components, that is dominated by trees having usually a single stem and mature or potentially mature stand height exceeding two metres and with existing crown cover of overstorey strata about equal to or greater than 20%.” (*Australian Forest Profiles: Australia's Forests*, Bureau of Rural Science, Australian Government, 2008.)

This definition includes mallee, tropical savanna and woodland, all of which cover large areas of Australia. Tall, closely spaced trees that are traditionally called forests only form a small part of Australia's total forest.

With this range of habitats in mind, birders can start to mentally list a huge number of Australian birds, perhaps even most of them. In planning for Bird Week 2011 activities or displays we will be spoilt for choice. The challenge may be to narrow down which birds to include.



Family Fun Day, Olinda Rhododendron Gardens. Photo: Annette Cook

Woodlands deserve special attention. Many of Australia's threatened bird species rely on woodlands where there is sparse crown cover (20-50%) but the height of trees may vary from less than 10m to greater than 30m. Woodlands are among the most threatened ecosystems in Australia, largely due to the impacts of human activity. Clearing for mining and farming since European settlement has left Australian woodlands depleted and what remains, fragmented.

There are some good news stories too. The declaration of Barmah-Millewa National Park last year to protect River Red Gum woodlands is one example which not only helps traditional woodland species but many waterbirds as well. There has been some improved protection of Tasmanian forests, though more action is needed to help the Swift Parrot. Revegetation projects at Lurg, Vic and Capertee Valley, NSW help to improve habitat corridors and extend remnant vegetation for birds like the Regent Honeyeater.

Whatever your location or chosen focus, BOCA will be contacting Branches and Affiliated Groups soon to see what resources you need to help the community to understand that *Birds Need Trees*.

## FAMILY FUN DAY

During the April school holidays I was supported by three MELBOCA members at the National Rhododendron Garden Family Fun Day. The gardens are managed by Parks Victoria and this is the second year they have held the free activity day. BOCA had a stand next to the junior Victorian Field Naturalists. As usual, the skins on display were popular, with both adults and children asking questions and identifying birds they had seen in their backyards. Many people who came through the gates visited the BOCA stand to make an owl kite. A short bird walk was held in the early afternoon with the highlight being a flock of Silveryeyes that seemed to follow us around.



Bird Tally, Point Cook College P-9. Photo: Robyn Cairns

## BIRDWATCHING HELPS TO TEACH MATHS

Described below are two examples of birdwatching being used to explore maths concepts and to develop language skills.

### POINT COOK COLLEGE P-9

*Robyn Cairns*

Students in year Prep and Grade 1 at Point Cook College P-9 have been outside weekly in Term 2 – birdwatching.

The sessions began with children learning to walk quietly while looking and listening for birds in the school yard. There was lots of follow up discussion on features and behaviour of birds seen and we began listing the birds we saw.

We focussed on bird behaviour in week one – tallying on small whiteboards. Later we had A4 charts with photos of all the birds we had identified. These were our tallying charts for about three weeks.

Children worked in pairs to record the data and each week we discussed what “accurate observations” meant. The development of maths and language around birdwatching was amazing. The children used much more detail in their description of birds as the weeks went on and became very adept at identifying birds. They represented their tallies in the form of bar graphs using pebbles and were able to discuss their findings.

### TAFE EXPERIENCES

*Annette Cook*

In my role as a TAFE lecturer I have been exploring birdwatching and birds to inspire maths activities for young adults in TAFE, including some English as a Second Language students. A birdwatching walk was used as an introduction to data collection and then a graphing exercise. This was not a lot different to the work done by the Preps and Year 1 students at Point Cook College but involved formal graphing techniques to present the data collected.

Migratory shorebirds inspired an activity sheet that explored ratio and scale. Students were asked to use ratio to compare the different invertebrates in shorebird diets, measure and compare

distances travelled and to draw a scale diagram of a bird hide. These students are also studying Biology, including Ecology, so the bird exercise provided an interesting context.

## TOWNSVILLE EDUCATION NEWS

Gloria Zaverdinos became the TRBOC education officer in late January 2011. Since then an education sub-committee has been formed. TRBOC have ten education volunteers; all with blue cards (police clearance to work with children) and experience to conduct school presentations.

The *Improving Wetland Protection through Community* has been keeping the education volunteers busy. Around 16 school presentations have been given this year. Most of these have been part of the wetland project. Over 600 students have been involved in these presentations, many of which include a bird walk. Copies of *Wetland Birds of Townsville* have been presented to school libraries.

## TRAINING SESSION FOR EDUCATORS, DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE, HASTINGS, VIC

The Dolphin Research Institute is a sustainable not-for-profit conservation organisation employing biologists and educators to work with volunteers and students in research and education activities. It is located in Hastings on the coast of Western Port, a Ramsar listed wetland and home to many waterbirds including migratory shorebirds. Staff were keen to include more stories about birds in their programs.

A two hour workshop aimed to introduce staff to some inspiring birds and explore some bird stories was held and included a brief outline of BOCA education activities. A discussion of available resources and provision of resource folders completed the morning.



Australian Pelican near the Dolphin Research Institute, Hastings. Photo: Duncan Turnbull