

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Scarlet Robin

Photo – Noel Young

An influx of brood parasites – and a request for observations By Chris Timewell

There seems to be a very high number of cuckoo individuals that have migrated into the region this Spring, particularly the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) and Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx basalis*), and to a lesser extent the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cuculus flabelliformis*) and Shining Bronze-cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*). I've only been living in central Victoria since mid-2008, and so I don't have many other years to make a decent comparison. However, other longer term residents that I've spoken to have also noted the current cuckoo influx this year.

I suspect most people who are not associated with field naturalist clubs or bird-watching clubs are unaware that Australia has true cuckoo species. They've all seen cuckoos having their eggs hatched and chick's raised by other bird species on an Attenborough documentary, but assume that this a Northern Hemisphere phenomena. They are often shocked to learn behaviour such as this could be occurring in the bush reserve down the end of their road, or even in their backyard!

I'm very interested to know which bird species are being parasitized by the cuckoos in our local area. If you see another bird species raising a cuckoo chick this season within the Mount Alexander shire, could you send me an email to let me know which species is the suffering parent (c_timewell@hotmail.com). And, if you can work it out, could you also let me know the species' identity of cuckoo chick? Cuckoo chicks can be difficult to tell apart between species, particularly when not long out of the nest, but most field guides provide useful identifying features. I'll compile all the results at the completion of the breeding season, and provide them in a future Castlemaine Naturalist newsletter. Any local observations that you can send me of cuckoos being raised by other birds in previous years would also be very welcome.

According to the Slater field guide, the nests of following native birds are most likely to be parasitized by these cuckoos.

Pallid Cuckoo – mainly parasitizes cup-shaped nests of honeyeaters, flycatchers, orioles, magpie-larks, etc.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo – mainly parasitizes dome-shaped nests of scrubwrens, warblers and wrens

Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo – parasitizes both dome-shaped and cup-shaped nests, particularly wrens, thornbills and robins

Shining Bronze-cuckoo – parasitizes mainly dome-shaped nests of warblers, thornbills and scrubwrens.



One of the many invaders – a Pallid Cuckoo
- photo Noel Young

There's also a possibility that you might see a Black-eared Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx osculans*) in the local area on rare occasions. Surprisingly, another type of cuckoo called the Common Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) was heard calling near the Castlemaine Train Station earlier this year – but to the best of my knowledge it has not been recorded in the area before or since. The Koel typically occurs much further north in the forests of eastern and northern Australia, although there have been a small but increasing number of Victorian records in recent years.

Wednesday Wildflower Wander #3

Railway Crossing, Sinclair's Lane 3/10

Rita Mills

Again this year this spot has been a mass of wildflowers. The dominating ones this year were Rabbit-ears *Thelymitra antennifera*, and Wax-lip Orchids *Glossodia major* were a close second.

This year we drove down to the crossing and concentrated on the area each side of the railway line. The following is the list of plants in flower – (I have used common names only for plants listed in the two previous WWWs.)

Musk Caladenia *Caladenia gracilis*, Hooded Caladenia *C. cucullata*, Pink Fingers *C. carnea*, Wax-lip Orchid, **Rabbit-ears *Thelymitra antennifera*, Crimson Sun-orchid *T. x macmillanii***, Scented Sun-orchid *T. megalyptra*, Bearded Greenhood *Pterostylis* sp. affin *plumosa*, Purplish Beard-orchid *Calochilus robertsonii*, Slender Rice-flower, Small Veronica *Veronica* sp., Golden Moths, Downy Grevillea, **Small-flowered Grevillea *G. micrantha* (this species is a special one, only being found in this particular form here and near Wedderburn)**, Common Everlasting *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* sp.agg., Pink Bells, Rough, and Gold-dust Wattles, Gorse Bitter-pea, Common Beard-heath *Leucopogon virgatus*, Tall Sundew, Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata*, Fairy Wax, Billy Buttons, Many-flowered Mat-rush *Lomandra multiflorus*, Common Fringe-myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*, Yam Daisy, Tangled Guinea-flower *Hibbertia exutiacies*, Purple Coral-pea.



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