

**THE
SANDRINGHAM ENVIRONMENT
SERIES**

**No. 1
COMMON BIRDS**



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When these common birds are mastered, go to the bird books for any others. The first step in identification is to make sure the bird really does occur here. Many birds look alike but live thousands of miles apart.

In alphabetical order but not necessarily in order of preference, we suggest the following short list of books in the Sandringham library as those most useful for identifying suburban birds.

Chapman, Graeme: **Common Birds of Towns and Gardens.**

Gould League of Victoria: **Birds of Victoria — Urban Areas.**

Reader's Digest: **Complete Book of Australian Birds.**

Slater, Peter: **A Field Guide to Australian Birds — Non-Passerines and Passerines (2 volumes)**

We recommend '**Bird Life**' by Ian Rowley for a general understanding of birds.

To be published 1980.

Balmford, Rosemary: **Learning about Australian Birds.** (Collins)

Kloot, Tess & Ellen McCulloch: **Birds of Australian Gardens** (Rigby)

Pizzey, Graham: **Collin's Field Guide to the Birds of Australia.**

(Collins)

The Urban, Garden, Farmland, Waterbird and Seabird Charts produced by the Gould League of Victoria are excellent aids to identification.

Because some bird books use different English names, we have listed the scientific names. These scientific names are the same throughout the world. They are taken from 'Checklist of the Birds of Australia — Part 1 Non-Passerines' by H.T. Condon; and 'Interim List of Australian Songbirds — Passerines' by R. Schodde, both published by and available from the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union.

FIRST EDITION — 1977

REVISED EDITION — 1980

Other booklets in the series

No. 2 — Geology and Landforms of Beach Park

(Text Dr. Eric C.F. Bird)

No. 3 — List of Local Native Plants

(Edited by Dr. J.H. Willis)

INTRODUCTION

Birds are fun to watch, but it's even more fun when they can be recognised and their habits understood. For instance, is that male Blue Wren flitting through the undergrowth really pursued by a harem of twittering females? Or the Cuckoo often heard in Spring - though not saying 'Cuckoo' - is it silent for the rest of the year? The answers are in books, but first the birds need to be identified.

Many older Sandringham residents can remember areas of swampland but these have now disappeared. With them have gone the waterbirds (as distinct from seabirds) - the herons, egrets, ducks and many others. Where we have kept our natural vegetation - heathland or teatree-banksia scrub - native birds of many species are still there. Where we have replaced it with buildings, roads and introduced plants, here most of the birds that thrive are also introduced. They are also the most obvious.

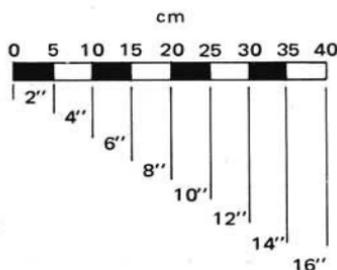
To help with identification, we have listed the most common birds in the places they are most likely to be found, although many of them can be found anywhere in the Sandringham district.

The most important single practice in birdwatching is to write down what is seen **at the time**, not later.

Without binoculars, most birds appear as shapes rather than as the gorgeous illustrations in books. So, look at the shape. Compare the size with any well-known bird. Is the bird alone or with a group? Does it feed in the trees, on the ground, in the sea, in the air? In some species the sexes look alike, but in others the males are more brightly coloured and the young then resemble the female.

Each brief description gives the length (bill to tail tip), colour, distinguishing features, whether or not alone, place of feeding, food and song.

With each description is a silhouette showing main identifying features and a scale divided into blocks each of 5 cm. (2 inches). Use this as a quick means of gauging the size of birds in relation to one-another: the larger the scale size, the smaller the bird.



NATIVE BIRDS IN GARDENS



WHITE-PLUMED HONEYEATER:

Lichenostomus penicillata
(formerly *Meliphaga penicillata*)

16cm - Grey/green with yellowish face and wings, small white line each side of neck; family groups; trees; feeds on nectar and insects; shrill alarm calls and sings 'Chickowee'.



SILVEREYE OR WHITE-EYE:

Zosterops lateralis

11cm - Olive green, pale under with white eye ring; flocks; trees; insects and fruit; whistling call in flight; soft musical song while feeding, pretty warble when breeding.



RED WATTLEBIRD:

Anthochaera carunculata

34cm - Large Honeyeater streaked brown and white, yellow abdomen, red wattle (fleshy lobe) sometimes inconspicuous; in pairs; trees; nectar and insects; harsh guttural calls.



LITTLE WATTLEBIRD:

Anthochaera chrysoptera

29cm - Slightly smaller and more heavily streaked than the Red Wattlebird, but with no wattle or yellow on abdomen, chestnut wingpatch in flight; singly or in pairs; trees; nectar and insects; harsh varied call.

(See also Introduced Birds)

NATIVE BIRDS IN TREES AND SCRUB

(and open areas such as the Beach Park and Golf Courses)



WILLIE WAGTAIL:

Rhipidura leucophrys

21cm - Black and white; swings tail; singly or in pairs; ground; insects, worms; sings 'Sweet pretty creature'.



GREY FANTAIL:

Rhipidura fuliginosa

15cm - A small grey version of Willie Wagtail; fans tail; singly or in small flocks; catches insects in the air; silvery song.



BROWN THORNBILL:

Acanthiza pusilla

10cm - Brown with dark band across tail; flocks busily working through scrub searching for insects; chattering call when moving; pretty warble.



YELLOW-RUMPED THORNBILL:

Acanthiza chrysorrhoa

11cm - Brown with yellow rump; small flocks often with Flame Robins; ground; insects; twitters.



FLAME ROBIN:

Petroica phoenicea

13cm - Slate grey, white wingpatch, flame red from chin to abdomen; female brown with white wingpatch; here only in winter in flocks; ground; insects, larvae, worms; sings quietly on arrival and before departure.

NATIVE BIRDS IN TREES AND SCRUB

(and open areas such as the Beach Park and Golf Courses)



YELLOW ROBIN:

Eopsaltria australis

15cm - Grey with yellow under; very young are mottled brown; singly; ground; insects, worms; inquisitive; piping call.



WHITE-BROWED SCRUBWREN:

Sericornis frontalis

12cm - Dark brown, with white brow and small black and white patch on shoulder; in pairs; ground; insects; secretive in thick scrub; buzzing notes, warbling song seldom heard.



SUPERB BLUE WREN:

Malurus cyaneus

14cm - Black and blue, cocked-up tail; female brown; small family parties in thick scrub; insects; buzzing call with trilling song.



GREY SHRIKE-THRUSH:

Colluricincla harmonica

24cm - Grey; singly; ground; insects and other ground prey; single bell-like call and loud melodious song.



EASTERN SPINEBILL:

Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris

16cm - Small dark Honeyeater, dark line from bill to white breast, chestnut collar, long down-curved black bill; singly; probes into blossom for nectar and insects; piping call.

(See also Introduced Birds)

NATIVE BIRDS IN TREES AND SCRUB

(and open areas such as the Beach Park and Golf Courses)



MAGPIE LARK OR PEEWEE:

Grallina cyanoleuca

28cm - Black and white; in pairs; ground; insects and other ground prey; calls 'Peewit'.



MAGPIE:

Gymnorhina tibicen

44cm - Black and white; family groups; ground; wide range of foods from insects to seeds and small animals; loud carolling song.



AUSTRALIAN RAVEN:

Corvus coronoides

52cm - Black; in pairs; ground; insects, grain, carrion; body held horizontal and throat feathers ruffled when calling; slow 'Kar' call sinking to a mournful gargle.



LITTLE RAVEN:

Corvus mellori

50cm - Black; in flocks; ground; insects, grain, little carrion; raises wings when calling; short deep 'Caw' call without the end gargle of the Australian Raven.



SPURWINGED OR MASKED PLOVER:

Vanellus miles (formerly Lobibyx novaehollandiae)

34cm - Brown above, white below, yellow facial wattle; pairs; feeds in damp open ground; insects and other ground prey; often flies at night giving repeated single high-pitched call.

(See also Introduced Birds)

NATIVE BIRDS ON THE COAST



SILVER GULL:

Larus novaehollandiae

41cm - Often called Seagull, inaccurately because many live on inland lakes; white body, grey wings, black tips; red bill, eye rings and legs (dark in juveniles); flocks, mainly scavengers; harsh cries.



PACIFIC GULL:

Larus pacificus

63cm - White body, black wings, yellow legs, heavy yellow bill tipped red, black band near tail tip; young are mottled brown taking about four years to reach adult plumage; singly; marine animals and shellfish; single mewing call sounds muted and unexpected from so large a bird.



CORMORANTS:

Phalacrocorax species

79cm - Five species; two are all black, three black and white; two are big, two are smaller and one is in-between; all feed in the sea, diving underwater for fish. Recognise these birds as Cormorants by the way they stand upright on piers and rocks with wings held out, then identify species from books. The Black Cormorant only is illustrated.



CRESTED TERN:

Sterna bergii

47cm - Like a short-legged Silver Gull with an untidy black cap; flocks; shallow dive from the air for fish; rasping call.

NATIVE BIRDS OF THE AIR AND OPEN SPACES



WELCOME SWALLOW

Hirundo neoxena

15cm - Shining blue-black, pale grey under, rusty face and throat, forked tail; flies swiftly in small flocks low over water or cleared places hawking for insects; single high-pitched whistle in flight.

SWIFTS:

Like large Swallows, seen often before a storm, hawking in flocks; never known to land in Australia to which they are summer visitors from Asia where they breed.



FORK-TAILED:

Apus pacificus

17cm - has a white rump and is dark under;

SPINE-TAILED:

Hirundapus caudacutus

20cm - has white on throat and white under blunt tail;

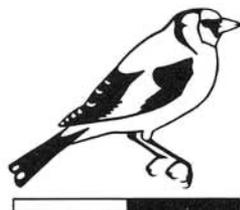
INTRODUCED BIRDS FOUND EVERYWHERE



BLACKBIRD:

Turdus merula

25cm - Male, black with yellow bill and eye ring; female; brown; young, mottled brown; in pairs; ground; insects, fruit, worms; beautiful song.



GOLDFINCH:

Carduelis carduelis

12cm - Light brown, black wing with large yellow patch, head red, white and black; flocks near grassland; ground; thistles and spiders; twitters.



INDIAN OR COMMON MYNA:

Acridotheres tristis

25cm - Chocolate brown; yellow face, bill and legs; large white wing patch in flight; flocks; struts from road accurately judging speed of traffic; ground; insects but most food; raucous notes to chattering song.

INTRODUCED BIRDS FOUND EVERYWHERE



STARLING:

Sturnus vulgaris

20cm - Metallic sheen to black plumage, light tips to feathers after moult; young, light brown; flocks, particularly going to roost; ground and trees; insects, fruit, worms; whistles and chuckles on overhead wires; mimics.



TREE SPARROW:

Passer montanus

14cm - Sexes alike, distinguished from House Sparrow by being shy, less common and by chestnut head and black ear patch; flocks; ground and bushes; insects and seeds; chirps and twitters.



HOUSE SPARROW:

Passer domesticus

15cm - Male, brown/grey/black with grey crown; female, streaked brown; flocks; ground and bushes; insects and seeds; chirps and twitters.



SPOTTED OR TURTLE DOVE:

Streptopelia chinensis

31cm - Grey-brown, pale grey under washed pink, spotted black and white collar; wary; singly or in pairs; ground; seeds; cooing calls.



ROCK DOVE:

Columba livia

34cm - Grey with metallic sheen, though wide variety of colour; often renegade racing pigeons; flocks; ground feeder especially where grain is spilt; cooing calls.

SUPPLEMENTARY LIST

Over 100 bird species appear in the Atlas of Australian Birds (publication expected 1983) for the 10' block which includes the Sandringham Municipality. Those most likely to be seen and recognized are listed below.

- Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
Hoary-headed Grebe *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus*
Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus*
Australasian Gannet *Morus serrator*
White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*
Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus notatus*
Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*
Little Falcon (Aust. Hobby) *Falco longipennis*
Australian Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*
Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla*
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*
Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius*
Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus*
Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*
Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus*
Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae*
Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novae hollandiae*
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala*
White-naped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus*
New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novae hollandiae*
Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus*
European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus*