

**U3A Port Fairy
Science Naturally!
Subject: Common birds of Port Fairy.
Philip Du Guesclin 16 June 2020**

This is the first of a series of common Birds of Port Fairy- get out there and Enjoy!



CHESTNUT TEAL.

This resident breeding species can be observed on the river and any saline wetland area, which it prefers to fresh water. Try Russell Clark Reserve and the saltmarsh for reasonably good views. The adult male has a distinctive glossy green head and neck. The body is brown to chestnut in colour. There is a white patch on the flank. The female is dark in colour.

Similar species to the male are the Hardhead and Shoveler (both have a flank patch), which you are unlikely to see. The Grey Teal is similar to the female but has a white throat. The Chestnut Teal's stronghold is Tasmania.



WHITE-FACED HERON.

Usually seen stalking in shallow water or grassland, the White-faced Heron feeds on a range of prey species. They probably know the location of every outdoor fish pond in the area. The birds usually start breeding in late winter with Norfolk Island Pines appearing to be favoured sites, not necessarily near water. Success seems to be variable as Ravens can take eggs and possibly young chicks. It is found throughout Australia and has established itself in New Zealand (first recorded breeding there in 1941).



RUFOUS NIGHT HERON

Also called Nankeen Night Heron. It could be argued that this heron is not “common” but is can be regularly seen if you know where to look (try the Sheoak about three houses downstream from the Moyne footbridge). It roosts by day and moves out in the evening to feed. They may also be seen foraging during daylight in the shallows of the Moyne River during the breeding season. It is usually a colonial nesting species but the apparent low numbers here, tends to make them solitary nesters, making them an easy target for ravens. As far as I can tell the Night Heron has only established itself in Port Fairy in the last 20 years.



MASKED LAPWING

Probably more commonly called Spur-winged Plover. Sexes similar. They are regularly seen on the nature strips and open grassy areas of reserves and sporting grounds. Breeding commences in mid to late winter with nests usually on the ground but they have also been recorded nesting on buildings with flat roofs. Similar species – Banded Lapwing which is more commonly seen inland.



SILVER GULL

My grandson suggested I include this bird so here goes. The Silver Gull is commonly seen all along the coastline obtaining food from a variety of sources. Adults have red bills and feet, immature birds have dark bills and feet. The largest breeding colony in Victoria is on Mud Islands in Port Phillip Bay where tens of thousands of birds nested to the detriment of other species. Once local councils improved management of tip sites by covering waste, thereby reducing food availability, breeding numbers dropped. In this area breeding has been recorded at the Craggs and Killarney.



RAINBOW LORIKEET

This busy, noisy bird is the most widespread of the six Lorikeet species and the one most likely to be encountered in Port Fairy. They have a rapid, arrow-like flight, screeching continuously. They are predominantly blossom feeders, also enjoying cultivated fruits, particularly apples and pears. They were the first Australian parrot to be illustrated in colour, in 1774.



YELLOW-RUMPED THORNBILL

This “small brown bird” can usually be seen in parkland where shrubby vegetation is present. They usually forage on the ground and can be some distance from trees. The bright yellow rump is best seen in flight. During the breeding season the birds form small groups with one female to several males. All members care for the young but only the female incubates. A couple of places to see these birds are Southcombe Park and the rail trail.



WILLIE WAGTAIL

A familiar bird to most of us, the Willie Wagtail forages from the ground in open areas using trees, fence posts and other raised sites as launching pads to hunt prey. They also take advantage of passing human foot traffic to disturb food items (and you thought they were just being friendly). Their “sweet pretty creature” call is familiar to most of us.



GREY FANTAIL

A similar species, the Grey Fantail, can be found on the rail trail near Regent Street. Grey Fantails obtain most of their food on the wing.



MAGPIE-LARK

Also called Mudlark, Peewee (and Murray Magpie if you are from SA). The sexes are slightly different: the male has a white eyebrow, the female does not. She also has a white forehead and throat. They have adapted well to urban conditions, all they seem to need is grassy areas for feeding, trees for roosting and breeding and water to provide mud for nest construction.



EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH

Occurring in Eurasia and North Africa, this bird was probably first introduced to Australia in 1857/58, near Melbourne. Subsequent releases occurred in 1863/64. By the early 1900s they had spread widely (Colac, 1904; Pine Plains west of Patchewollock, 1906; Genoa, 1915) and by the 1930s had probably established in all suitable areas of Victoria. They occur in grassy and lightly timbered habitats. They primarily feed on seeds of introduced grasses and herbs (e.g. thistles) and probably have little impact on native species. It seems to have declined in parts of its range due to loss of food plants from changed agricultural practices and increased use of herbicides.

A related species, the European Greenfinch, also released in the 1860s can be seen around George Dodds Reserve.



EUROPEAN GREEN FINCH