

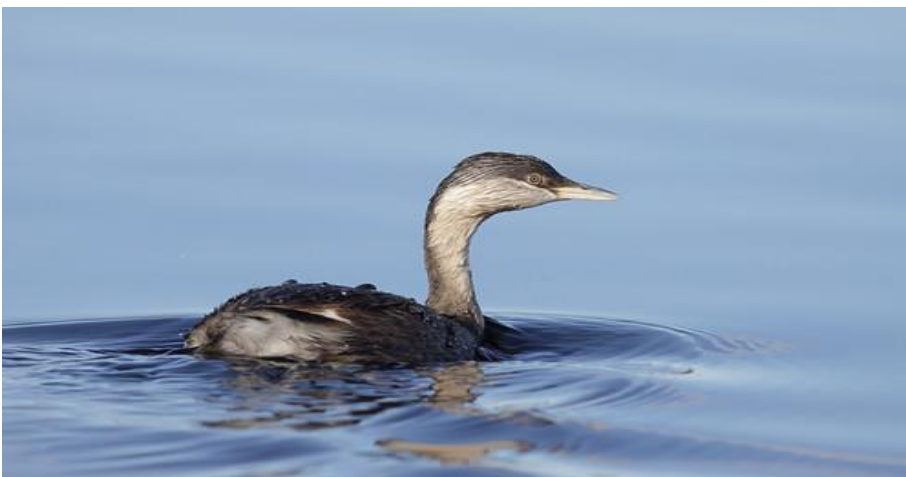
U3A Port Fairy
Science Naturally!
Common Birds of Port Fairy – Part 2.
Philip Du Guesclin July 14 2020

This is the second in the series of Common Birds of Port Fairy- get out there and Enjoy!



LITTLE PIED CORMORANT.

Regularly seen along the Moyne River and Belfast Lough, this species can be found in saline and freshwater habitats. Similar species are the Pied Cormorant (much larger and rarer), Black-faced Cormorant (occurs offshore, breeds on Middle Is Warrnambool) and Little Black Cormorant. Cormorants are not “waterproof” so after feeding they need to perch with wings out to dry off.



HOARY-HEADED GREBE.

This species is usually found in open fresh and saline water (unlike the similar Little Grebe which is found in fresh water). Often seen on the Moyne River either singly or in groups, they dive for their food, usually invertebrates and the occasional crustacean. Despite their weak wings they can fly long distances, usually at night.



BLACK SWAN

The Black Swan was first recorded by Europeans on the Swan River in WA in 1697. It occurs over most of Australia if conditions are suitable and can be found in fresh and saline waters. Sexes are similar; the male is larger than the female and his neck is slightly longer and thicker. They can be regularly seen on Belfast Lough and the wetlands in George Dodds and Russell Clark Reserves. They also breed on these wetlands and the Saltmarsh Reserve. A pair currently has a nest on the latter reserve. The usual clutch size is about five eggs but up to 14 have been recorded. The diet is mainly of submerged aquatic plants, but they will also eat grasses.



EURASIAN COOT

The Coot has a worldwide distribution and occurs over much of Australia. It is easily recognised by its white frontal shield (head) and bill. A similar species, the Dusky Moorhen has a red frontal shield and bill. Coots are primarily vegetarians. Large flocks can occur on open waters. Note the white lobed feet.



STRAW-NECKED IBIS and WHITE (SACRED) IBIS

Who called them “bin chickens”? Shame on you! Both species feed in shallow wetlands and pastures and can consume large numbers of agricultural invertebrate pests (binder twine is not the only farmer’s friend). Both breed in colonies, often with other water birds. In SW Victoria they have been recorded breeding in cypress plantations. White Ibis are the dominant breeding species in these locations. The closest cypress plantations to Port Fairy where I have recorded breeding are on the Princes Hwy about 3 km East of Yambuk.



AUSTRALIAN KESTREL

A work colleague once told me that there were three types of ‘awks – sittin’, flyin’ and ‘overin’ ‘awks. I think he operated with a 24 - letter alphabet. I guess the Kestrel fits into the ‘overin’ category. It is the smallest of the diurnal (daytime) raptors (birds of prey) and hovers to locate and capture prey. Insects form a large part of their diet, but small rodents, reptiles and birds are taken. A regular breeding site is the customs shed on the wharf. Norfolk Island pines are also used.



LONG-BILLED CORELLA

The Long-billed Corella is a bit like Collingwood – you either love them or hate them. This noisy conspicuous bird can be identified by its call, elongated upper mandible and scarlet band in the throat region. Most of their food is obtained by digging up corms and bulbs from the ground (hence the elongated mandible). The introduced onion grass is a favoured food. They also dig up germinating cereal crops, particularly oats. Most of their traditional foods have disappeared with the vanishing of native grasslands.



SINGING HONEYEATER

For an unknown reason, the Singing Honeyeater is seldom seen in urban areas except for suburban Perth. It is Australia's most widespread honeyeater and has a varied diet from nectar to invertebrates and fruits. It has also been recorded taking the eggs and chicks of finches. They don't get it all their own way as their nests are parasitised by Pallid Cuckoos. Despite their name they are not great singers. The best places to find them in Port Fairy are in the coastal heaths along Ocean Drive.



WELCOME SWALLOW

So named because they were a welcome sight to early mariners after weeks at sea. These birds indicated that land was not far away. The Welcome Swallow has a deeply forked tail whereas Tree and Fairy Martins do not. Swallows construct nests from mud so they need to be close to water. Man-made structures have replaced large trees as nesting sites. Several nest sites can be found along Sackville and Bank streets and can be used in subsequent years. In winter there is a partial migration North (no COVID restrictions for them). They forage on the wing seeking small flying insects.



RICHARDS PIPIT



SKYLARK



BROWN SONGLARK

These species could be classified as SBBs (small brown birds) or LBJs (little brown jobs). They are about but usually the only time you (or me) notice (or can identify) them is in Spring/Summer, when particularly the Skylark and Songlark males are indulging in song-flights during the breeding season.

The Skylark was introduced from Europe in the 1850s. The Pipit is a wide-ranging species occurring from Africa and Eurasia to New Zealand. The Brown Songlark is a nomadic Aussie. All feed, roost and breed on the ground.

Where can one find them? On the Rail Trail towards the highway is a possibility. All prefer open treeless areas. The Pipit's outer tail feathers are white, the Brown Songlark male cocks its tail (see picture). The Skylark? I am still working that out.