

Variegated Fairy-wren, male. David Free

Male Variegated Fairy-wren Photo David Free

You can read more about the Variegated Fairy-wren on page 2 of this newsletter.

The Lake is looking wonderful for this time of year with many birds still present. I spotted a group of Australian White Ibis and a Yellow-billed Spoonbill on a recent walk round the Lake.

March has been a fairly quiet month for the Friends of Lake Claremont but much is happening behind the scenes in preparation for our next planting season, which promises to be as busy as ever. Our next busy Bee will be held on Sunday April 9. (See the calendar)

There will be no 'Night Chats' session in April as the fourth Tuesday in the month coincides with Anzac Day.

OUR BIRDS

Text and photos by David Free

Variegated Fairy-wren (*Malurus lamberti*)

In the past year or so there have been reports from reliable observers of sightings of Variegated Fairy-wrens in the new plantings north of the lake. It took me several unsuccessful attempts before I finally managed to see them. This beautiful bird tends to stay in dense vegetation, where they forage for insects.

An early ornithologist correctly described this species as a "silent and unobtrusive bird". It is not easy to see but can sometimes be located by its soft, high pitched rasping call.

These birds are territorial; I am hoping that they will successfully breed and decide to stay with us.



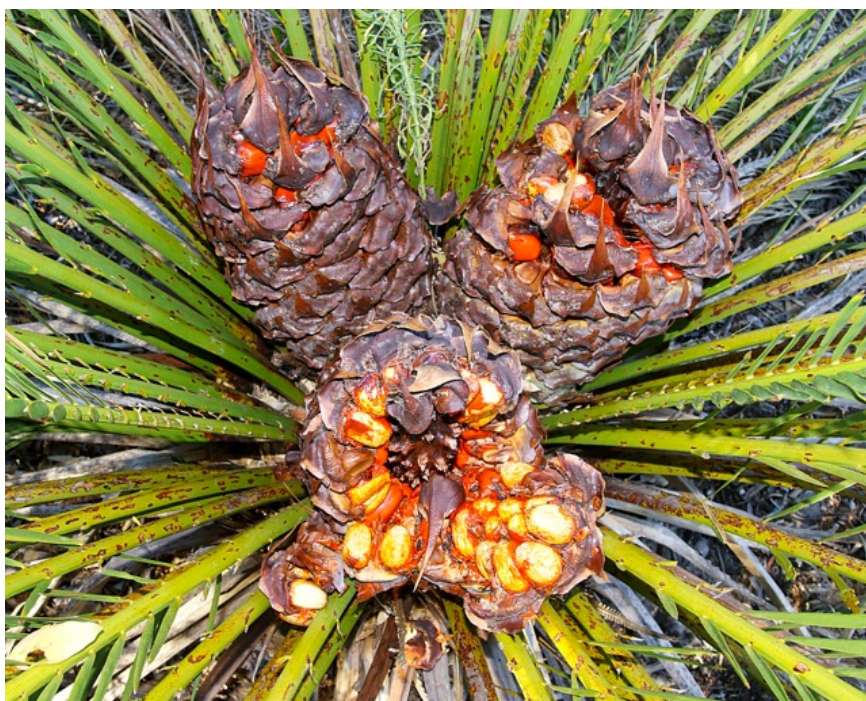
Variegated Fairy-wren, female. David Free

Female Variegated Fairy-wren

IN BLOOM THIS MONTH

Photo by Geoff Ross

Following his photo last month, Geoff has sent another beautiful picture of a zamia palm. This one shows the seed pod fully developed.



LAKE CLAREMONT CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA EVENT

Text by Nick Cook Photos by Heidi Hardisty

FOLC held its annual Clean up Australia event on its monthly busy-bee, a week after the official event due to the WA long weekend. We had a great turn out with 22 volunteers gloved up and keen to get going.

The volunteers were split into groups and given a section of the park to inspect and clean. Many of the volunteers commented that there was much less litter than in previous years. Still we collected about 15 bags of material, mostly plastic and glass. 5 car tyres were hauled out of the lake bed as well as a wooden pallet. As always there were plenty of golf balls collected. All up we estimate over 250kg of rubbish was collected. The material was sorted and recyclables were separated.

A great effort was rewarded with morning tea, prepared by Soozie Ross.



Nick Cook and Jack Logan with bags of collected rubbish



Aernout Boere, Linley Simmons, Soozie Ross and Jack Logan ready for morning tea after all their hard work

EXTINCTION CRISIS FOR OUR BLACK COCKATOOS

Text by Heidi Hardisty Photo by Margaret Owen

Dr Ron Johnstone unveiled startling new findings about Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoos (FRTBC) at the Urban Bushland Council's Annual General Meeting in March. Johnstone, Curator of Ornithology at the Western Australian Museum, revealed that the red-tails have been changing their foraging behaviour, and this may have dire consequences for their breeding success.

Although Red-tailed Black Cockatoos are widely distributed throughout eastern and northern Australia, the Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoos is a subspecies unique to the southwest of WA. As the population of these birds continue to decline, they are at great risk of becoming extinct.



Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoos

Over the past 20 years, the FRTBCs from the northern Darling Range (adjacent to the Perth metro area) have changed their foraging behaviour after discovering new food sources, including the exotic Cape Lilac. Flocks of these birds, once largely sedentary, have now developed regular movements onto the Swan Coastal Plain to access this food. In some cases, they have also established new roosting sites (where birds spend the night). After being absent from the Western Suburbs for decades, they can once again be seen regularly, even at Lake Claremont. According to Margaret Owen, one of the largest known roosting sites, upwards of 300 birds, is now at the Perry Lakes-Underwood Avenue area.

Although the birds have discovered new food sources, the considerable distances they have to travel to reach these sites seems to be having a detrimental effect on their breeding success. From late 2015 and throughout 2016 the red-tails moved from the hills to forage on Cape Lilac and Marri seed on the Swan Coastal Plain. Despite a great abundance of honky nuts last year, almost no red-tails were recorded breeding!

Black cockatoos are under enormous pressures not only from land clearing, but also from vehicle strikes, fire (which can result in direct death and/or the loss of nesting trees), feral bees (which have taken over 26% of known breeding hollows for FRTBC) and ravens (which can harass and sometimes kill juveniles). Much more needs to be done to save these iconic birds!

[The paper entitled: "The distribution, status movements and diet of the Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo in the south-west with emphasis on the greater Perth region, Western Australia" by R.E. Johnstone, T. Kirkby and K. Sarti was published in The Western Australian Naturalist, Vol. 30, 28th Feb. 2017, No.4]

SPUDS, SWAMPS AND STINKS: Western Australia's War on Wetlands

Text and photos by Rose Senior

At our monthly Night Chat on Tuesday 28 March we were pleased to have Dr Sue Graham-Taylor present us with a historical overview of the attitudes and responses to wetlands in the Swan River area from the earliest settlers to people living today. Sue's talk showed how attitudes have shifted over the years and that only recently have we come to nurture and respect our local wetlands, rather than seeking to destroy them (80% having been lost since 1829).

Butler's Swamp was regarded as strange by the early settlers, who found it desolate and devoid of interest. The prevailing theory of health at the time – that diseases such as dysentery were caused by fumes ('miasma') from rotting vegetation rather than germs – led to the draining of wetlands throughout the Colony and even to the appointment of an Inspector of Nuisances in the 1860s to monitor bad smells.



Dr Sue Graham-Taylor

Butler's Swamp - 1921



Picture courtesy of Claremont Museum

Butler's Swamp was used in many ways over the years: for shooting pigeons, kangaroos and ducks in the early days; as a dairy farm supplying fresh milk from a herd of 150 cows in the 1910s; and as a location for market gardens where people could try their hand at growing 'decent spuds' in the 1920s. A rise in the water table in 1932 led to an infestation of mosquitoes, and to the introduction of carp into the lake to eat the larvae.

Unfortunately an invasion of shags in search of a good feed led to a shag-shooting bonanza and to the introduction of Gambusia fish from South America to control the larvae instead – fish that cause a significant problem in the Swan River to this day.

Butler's Swamp underwent a name change in 1946 to improve its image, but further challenges lay in store. In 1945 Claremont started a war on foxes, with a reward given for the scalp and tail of each fox. In 1946 permission was given to bury rubbish in 19 locations around the Swan River, which, as we know, included the tip located in the north-east corner of Lake Claremont (now being re-vegetated following the closure of the golf course),

Sue ended her talk by impressing on us the need to continue to remain alert to threats to our wetlands, which we now understand are groundwater-dependent ecosystems offering us invaluable physical and psychological benefits. She highlighted particularly the menace of developers, who – perhaps in the tradition of the early settlers – see all wetlands as impediments to progress.

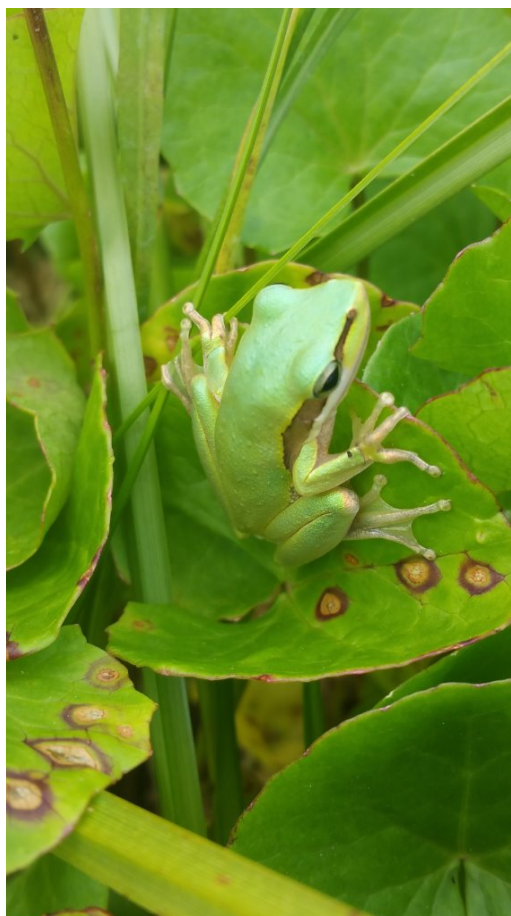
Calendar April 2017

Sunday April 9th	FOLC Busy Bee and Tea Lake Claremont	9:00 – 11:00 am
Saturday April 22nd	Earth Day	
Friday April 28th	Year 10 Community Service Programme	1:30 - 3:00 pm

Check out the yearly calendar on the [FOLC Website](#) to find dates of future events.

Slender Tree Frog (*Litoria adelaidensis*)

Angela Hine, the Town of Claremont Bushcare Officer, took this beautiful photo on one of her weekly inspection rounds at Lake Claremont in March. These frogs are generally nocturnal, sleeping during the day while clinging on to reeds and grasses. They eat small bugs like insects, spiders and worms.



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Friends of Lake Claremont facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Lake-Claremont/159586380873009?ref=hl>

The Friends of Lake Claremont Ltd. (FOLC) is a community organization established and run by local residents all of whom are volunteers.

www.friendsoflakeclaremont.org

Newsletter articles and photos from members are most welcome and should be sent to the editor, Hilary Heptinstall
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Australian White Ibis enjoying the unusually full Lake in March

Photos by Hilary Heptinstall

