

Bushland Newsletter

WINTER 20

On the go with Dan



It's certainly been a bizarre 2020 so far, for bushcare, Australia and the world as a whole. The horrible fires seem like a distant memory, given all that has occurred since. When we first heard of the coronavirus outbreak, no one could have predicted the impact it would have on our lives. There have been numerous examples of people helping one another in times of need and displaying their creativity and hidden talents through music, singing, art, dance and much more.

Time in lockdown is certainly a challenge, however it also allows us to slow down and be a little more mindful.

Once all the madness subsides, hopefully we can all look out for one another a little bit more, enjoy catching up with friends and family, exercising together and doing all the simple things that are so easy to take for granted. We are very fortunate to live in a part of the world that has contained the virus well and where we have access to world class healthcare facilities and practitioners. We owe all our healthcare workers and frontline staff a huge debt of gratitude.

**Dan Randwick City Council
Bushcare Officer**

Looking After Your Mental Health

During this time of physical distancing and heightened anxiety in our community, it is imperative to look after your mental health. Remember to eat well, sleep well, exercise and try creative ways to engage socially. Most importantly be kind to yourself and to others. It might seem hard to focus on wellbeing and mental health at this time, but prioritising this is more important than ever. Here are five suggestions to get you started:

1. Stay active – Exercise increases wellbeing and helps reduce symptoms of common mental health concerns. Yoga, Pilates, high-intensity interval training (HIIT) routines and much more can be done at home in a relatively small space and with no equipment. Have a search on the internet for free workout videos and guides or join a live class.

2. Eat well – Eating a nutritious diet is great for both physical and mental health. As much as possible, try and stick to a healthy diet despite changes to routine and environment.

3. Connect with others – Physical distancing is crucial right now, but social connection is more important than ever. Use technology to talk to friends and family, using video chats to talk face-to-face where possible. Reach out to your neighbours and community. Share how you're feeling, and invite others to share with you.

4. Limit coronavirus media consumption – Choose how often you engage with news and social media and be sure to find trustworthy and factual news sources. It might help to add in some content that makes you laugh and feel comfortable.

5. Try to keep to a routine – Keep to a regular routine as much as possible, including exercise, sleep, daily chores, work, recreational activities

and connecting with others. Make it fun where you can and remember that together we will get through this!

It's also important to remember that if you need help there are services out there and it's okay to ask for help. If you or someone you care for is in need of immediate support please contact one of the National Crisis Counselling Services below:

- **Lifeline 13 11 14** – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Lifeline Text 0477 13 11 14** – 6pm to midnight (AEDT), 7 nights a week
- **Beyond Blue 1300 224 636** – www.beyondblue.org.au
- **Carer Support 1800 242 636** or **1300 554 660**
- **Suicide Call Back Service** – **1300 659 467**

A list of further services can be found at mhaustralia.org/need-help



Birdwatching provides a great excuse to enjoy wildlife and the outdoors.

Twitchers guide to Randwick

Did you know that a keen bird watcher is actually called a twitcher?



It's no wonder that birdwatching has taken flight during the coronavirus pandemic. It's a relaxing hobby that anyone can do and it doesn't have to cost a thing. You can do it from your backyard, balcony, street verge or while out walking at your local park. We are extremely lucky to have a diverse range of bird species within Randwick.

Over the following pages we investigate some tips and tricks to maximise your chances and learn about some bird species to keep an eye out for. A big thank you to Michael Hooper, one of our regular volunteers at Prince Henry bushcare, for his stunning bird photos in this feature.

Benefits of Birding

- It gives you a reason to explore and learn about the natural environment. In many ways, birding is a logical extension of hobbies such as bushwalking and kayaking which also get you outdoors.
- It's a form of mindfulness. In a busy world birding can act as a release and a way to switch off and enjoy the present moment. It empowers you to focus on every sight, sound and smell while feeling gratitude for our beautiful environment.



Gear

For many of us who engage in casual birdwatching, specialised gear isn't really required. However, if you want to take things a little more seriously, then consider the following equipment.



Binoculars

A good pair of binoculars really helps to increase your chances of seeing birds up close without disturbing their natural behaviour. This can allow you to view them for longer and in more detail than with the naked eye. As such you may get to view different behaviour and you have a better chance of positively identifying the individual species.

There are many styles to choose from, so it's important that they are comfortable and simple to use. A good pair usually costs \$100 to \$200 and should last many years if you take care of them.

Field Guide

A field guide is essential to increase your repertoire of known bird species. They provide detailed illustrations and information on bird plumage, habitat, behaviour, vocalisations and distribution. This information allows you to quickly identify new species as you see them.

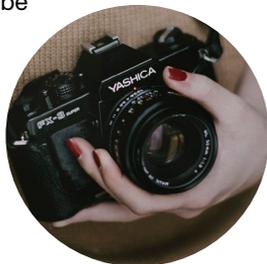
A range of field guides are available depending on your location, with national, state and regional guides offered. You can usually pick them up from local bookshops or op shops. They are an invaluable resource for novice and expert birders alike.

Notepad and Pen

Although not a necessity, taking a notepad and pen is a good way to jot down notes and help to remember the recorded bird species for next time. You can write down a detailed description of the bird, where it was located and what it was doing. This gives you important information for when the bird flies off, allowing you to take your time to go through your field guide and get a positive identification. As you become more experienced, your notes will become a useful resource, providing a good insight into where birds have been spotted and the types of habitats they prefer.

Camera

A camera can be a great way to get some memorable shots which can also be a big help with identification. The camera app on most smartphones can autofocus and even track a subject. But for more precision and power, there are a range of digital cameras to suit your needs and budget. Photographs can be compared with illustrations and photographs in field guides and on the internet.



Tips

Employ these simple ideas to increase your birding success:

Start out small

Try to become familiar with the birds that live in your garden or local park before branching further out. In this way you will soon become aware of the range of common species associated with each site, seasonal changes throughout the year, the breeding residents, regular migrants and occasional visitors. With practice, you will begin to recognise different species, and eventually you will notice that each has its own way of life. By gradually expanding your horizons, and birdwatching in new places, you will slowly but surely expand your repertoire.

Install a bird bath

If you can, consider installing a bird bath. If space is limited, get creative. Place one on your balcony or in your courtyard. Not only will you be helping out our precious birds when water is scarce but you will get so much enjoyment from watching what is going on. Baths can be situated where birds socialise as keeping clean is just as important as drinking. Consider putting a range of baths at different levels around your garden. You don't need a fancy bath, a pot or saucer will do nicely. It can take time for birds to discover your bird bath, but once they know it is an established water source and frequently refreshed, they will come to rely upon it.



As cats are a big risk for birds while bathing, consider elevated or pedestal baths near plants where smaller birds can go for refuge if disturbed. Stones or rocks in the centre of the bath can give smaller birds such as wrens and thornbills a place to perch while bathing.

Like all bathrooms, bird baths need to be cleaned regularly as a dirty bath can spread disease. To clean your bath, scrub it well with disinfectant soap then wash it out to ensure no residue is left behind. Then top it up and place it in direct sunlight, nature's disinfectant!

Be patient

Stay still and keep an eye out for moving branches. Try not to shift your gaze too quickly or too often. Birding takes patience and persistence.

Get out just before dawn and dusk

Timing is everything. In general birds are going to be much more active at the beginning and end of the day. Getting out early allows you to witness birds as they are beginning to forage and feed. It can be extremely peaceful to be out exploring at the quietest time of the day. Just don't expect the birds to keep quiet!



Listen

Part of birding that is often overlooked, especially by beginners, is listening. By actively paying attention to the vocalisations of birds you can learn to identify the presence of birds in the field without actually seeing them. Birds have a vast range of calls and many of them can be extremely distinctive and unique to a given species. A quick search online will let you know what calls our local birds make. By learning even just a few simple calls, you will open up a whole new world of birdwatching.





Birds

to look out for



Purple Swamphen
(*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

The purple swamphen is a large rail. It is mainly dusky black above, with a broad dark blue collar, and dark blue to purple below. As the Purple Swamphen walks, it flicks its tail up and down, revealing its white undertail. The bill is red and robust, and the legs and feet orange-red. For such a bulky bird, the Swamphen is an accomplished flier and will readily take to the air to escape danger. In flight, the long legs and elongated toes trail behind or hang underneath the body. Purple Swamphens are proficient swimmers, but prefer to wander on the edges of the water, among reeds and on floating vegetation.

Habitat

The Purple Swamphen is found around freshwater swamps, streams and marshes.



Southern Boobook
(*Ninox novaeseelandiae*)

The southern boobook is the smallest and most common owl in Australia. It is identified by its plumage, which is dark chocolate-brown above and rufous-brown below, heavily streaked and spotted with white. The bill is grey with a darker tip, and the feet are grey or yellow. The facial disc is chocolate brown and the eyes are large and yellowish. Young southern boobooks are almost entirely buff-white below, with conspicuous dark brown facial discs. Like other owl species, the southern boobook is nocturnal. Birds are often observed perched on an open branch or treetop.

Habitat

Southern boobooks are seen in a variety of habitats, from dense forest to open desert.



Nankeen Kestrel
(*Falco cenchroides*)

The Nankeen kestrel is a slender falcon and it is a relatively small raptor. The upper parts are mostly rufous (reddish-brown), with some dark streaking. The wings are tipped with black. The underparts are pale buff, streaked with black, and the under tail is finely barred with black, with a broader black band towards the tip. Females tend to be heavily marked and to be more rufous on the crown and tail. Males have a greyish crown and tail, although the extent varies between individuals. Females are larger than males. Young Nankeen kestrel closely resemble the adult female, with heavier markings.

Habitat

Preferred habitats are lightly wooded areas and open agricultural regions. The Nankeen kestrel's success as a bird of prey can be largely attributed to its tolerance for a wide variety of habitats and its ability to feed on a variety of foods and nest in a range of sites.



Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*)

The eastern spinebill is most easily recognised by its very long, fine, down-curved beak and energetic flight, during which its white outer tail feathers are prominent. Males have a grey-black crown which extends in a black line on either side of the breast. The breast and throat are white, with a rufous patch in the centre of the throat. The wings and lower back are dark grey and the underparts and upper back are buff. Females are similar to males but have less distinct markings.

Habitat

The eastern spinebill prefers heath, forest and woodland.



Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*)

The general plumage of the tawny frogmouth is silver-grey, slightly paler below, streaked and mottled with black and rufous. A second plumage phase also occurs, with birds being russet-red. The eye is yellow, and the wide, heavy bill is olive-grey to blackish. South-eastern birds are larger than birds from the north. Tawny frogmouths are nocturnal birds. During the day, they perch on tree branches, often low down, camouflaged as part of the tree.

Habitat

The Tawny Frogmouth can be seen in almost any habitat type except denser rainforests and treeless deserts.



Australasian Darter (*Anhinga novaehollandiae*)

The darter is a large, slim water bird with a long snake-like neck, sharp pointed bill, and long, rounded tail. Male birds are dark brownish black with glossy black upper wings, streaked and spotted white, silver-grey and brown. The strongly kinked neck has a white or pale brown stripe from the bill to where the neck kinks and the breast is chestnut brown. Females and immature birds are grey-brown above, pale grey to white below, with a white neck stripe that is less distinct in young birds. The darter is often seen swimming with only the snake-like neck visible above the water, or drying its wings while perched over water. While its gait is clumsy on land, it can soar gracefully to great heights on thermals, gliding from updraft to updraft. It has a cross-shaped silhouette when flying.

Habitat

The darter is found in wetlands and sheltered coastal waters, mainly in the Tropics and Subtropics. It prefers smooth, open waters, for feeding, with tree trunks, branches, stumps or posts fringing the water, for resting and drying its wings. Most often seen inland, around permanent and temporary water bodies at least half a metre deep, but may be seen in calm seas near the shore, fishing.

Information in this article was sourced from Birdlife Australia – visit birdlife.org.au for more information.



Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*)

Peregrine falcons are large, powerfully built raptors (birds of prey), with a black hood, blue-black upper parts and a creamy white chin, throat and underparts, which are finely barred from the breast to the tail. The long tapered wings have a straight trailing edge in flight and the tail is relatively short. The eye-ring is yellow, with the heavy bill also yellow, tipped black. Although widespread throughout the world, it is not a common species.

Habitat

The peregrine falcon is found in most habitats, from rainforests to the arid zone, and at most altitudes, from the coast to alpine areas. It requires abundant prey and secure nest sites, and prefers coastal and inland cliffs or open woodlands near water, and may even be found nesting on high city buildings.



Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus axillaris*)

Black-shouldered kites are small to medium raptors, and are mostly pale grey above, with a pure white head, body and tail and black shoulders. The wings are white underneath, with black wing tips and the wing span is 80cm to 100cm. Females are larger than males. The red eye is marked by a black comma that extends behind it. The nostrils are yellow and the legs and feet are also yellow. The black-shouldered kite has a direct flight with quick shallow wing beats interspersed with glides on upswept wings (like a seagull), and is often seen hovering, with feet dangling.

Habitat

The black-shouldered kite is found in treed grasslands and on farms, along roads, and in vacant wasteland of urban and coastal areas.



From the Nursery

Gardening during a lockdown

Winter gardening tips

So you're tired of being stuck inside, have rearranged your spices, succumbed to the 'sourdough bread' trend and now winter is here? Don't fear, while winter may normally be the time for being indoors with a cup of tea (and some homemade bread, albeit a bit dense), it is also a great time to get outside and garden.

Fortunately, Sydney has relatively mild winters so we are not as limited as you may think; there is still plenty to do in the way of maintenance, admiring winter flowers, planting winter crops and preparing for spring. With the COVID-19 pandemic, high anxiety and uncertainty have been increasingly present in the community. Gardening can provide a creative and therapeutic outlet, a sense of control and security, immense satisfaction and good fun. So don't let winter stop you; here is our winter gardening checklist to see you through the colder season.



Poa annua (winter grass) is a common winter weed in lawns and garden beds.

Weeding

This is a year-round activity. Weeds to look out for in winter are winter grass (*Poa annua*), capeweed (*Arctotheca calendula*), chickweed (*Stellaria media*), cudweed (*Gnaphalium spp.*), oxalis and bindii (*Soliva sessilis*). Try using a forked tool and hand weeding, it can be surprisingly satisfying when you have the time for it. But remember to be careful not to spread the seed further by keeping a bag or bucket nearby and disposing of seed in the general waste. A bag can even be tied around the seed head of larger weeds to minimise the spread of seed while removing. Follow this up with a fresh layer of mulch; this will reduce future weed numbers and help insulate the soil from the cold (make sure to water well before putting down mulch if it hasn't rained in a while).

Remove Fallen Leaves

Tidy up fallen leaves from the lawn or that have buried plants. You may find plants you had forgotten were there, and this also reduces the risk of fungal disease by increasing air flow around the plant. These leaves are carbon rich and can be added to your compost. As a rule of thumb, two thirds should be 'brown' components (leaves, branches, green waste) and the last third should be 'green' components (fruit and vegscraps, weeds without seed), or throw them on garden beds as mulch.

Prune Trees and Shrubs

It's time to prune off any dead or diseased branches, remove spent flowers, and cut back your plants before the burst of growth that spring will



Native grasses can be pruned hard over winter (*Poa labillardieri*)

bring. Pruning now will make the most of the spring growth, allowing you to create bushy and well-shaped plants. There is a common misconception that plants must be pruned after flowering, while this is safe practice for some plants, it is not necessarily best practice for most. Summer flowering plants, non-flowering shrubs, deciduous plants (including deciduous fruit trees), older stems on fruit bushes (like blueberry and gooseberry) and grapevines can all be pruned in winter. Towards the end of winter, prune roses and hedges, and cut back native grasses like Tussock grass (*Poa labillardieri*) that may have browned off through the hot dry summer. Feed with a native fertiliser and keep watered and they will surge back to life in spring.

Plants that shouldn't be pruned in winter are early-spring-flowering plants (as you may remove many or all of the flower buds), stone fruit (as they bleed when cut and can be susceptible to infection) and of course, winter-flowering plants.



Feed Winter-flowering Plants

Feed winter-flowering natives like wattles, correas and banksias, which provide vital pollen and nectar during the colder months. Flowering is a nutrient-demanding process, and winter is the time when plants are less able to access nutrients in the soil due to the drop in temperature. Though it does not become cold enough in Sydney for nutrient uptake to cease all together, the plant will not be able to access nutrients as readily. Therefore it is essential that the plant have ample supply over this time.

However, be careful not to over-fertilise as well. Lower temperatures mean lower micro-organism activity. Micro-organisms are necessary for breaking down ammonium nitrate (the compound most often providing nitrogen in fertilisers) into accessible nitrogen; when it is not broken down, it turns into ammonium gas and can damage the plant roots.

Remove Dead Plants and Move Underperforming Plants

Let them go. If a plant has died, it's time to give it a new life as compost.

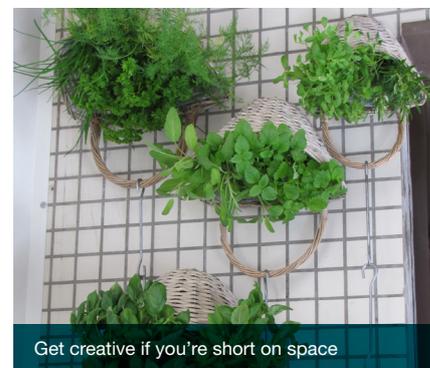
This is also a good time to re-evaluate and look at the bigger picture. Perhaps something isn't performing well in one spot; it may do well in another. The cooler months are great time to transplant plants as they will not be under heat stress, and a bonus, you are at home to make sure they get regular water to better establish.

Plant

Now you have done the groundwork, it's time to plant! Remembering we still need to do our bit to save water, opt for plants that are more drought tolerant. They will require less frequent watering in the future when you may have less time on your hands.

For those thinking more about self-sufficiency, get started on that veggie patch. Growing your own produce can be very rewarding; nurturing something, watching it grow, and then being able to feed people is a joyful experience. Anyone can grow veg, though you may need to be creative depending on your space.

Prepare the soil by mixing through your compost, or some other rich organic matter, and make sure to follow your planting with mulch.



Get creative if you're short on space

Read up on your vegetables and choose ones that will grow in your conditions. Some good options for winter are radishes, turnips, peas/snow peas, spring onions, asparagus, leeks, strawberries and leafy greens. Try growing strawberries in a hanging basket or get creative with a trellis for snow peas if you're short on space. You can also start seeds of tomatoes, eggplant and capsicum on a warm windowsill, ready for planting when the soil warms.

Prepare for Planting

If you are unable to plant at this time, look at preparing your space for planting. Work some compost or rich organic matter into sandy soils, or start breaking up heavy clay soils and mixing through gypsum. Perhaps focus on landscaping before planting and looking at bigger picture items like designing a space for a water tank or a bird bath. You could even try your hand at propagation from cutting, and enjoy the experience of growing plants from their very beginnings; a testament to patience and mindfulness.



Correa reflexa, Correa alba and Acacia longifolia all flower over winter

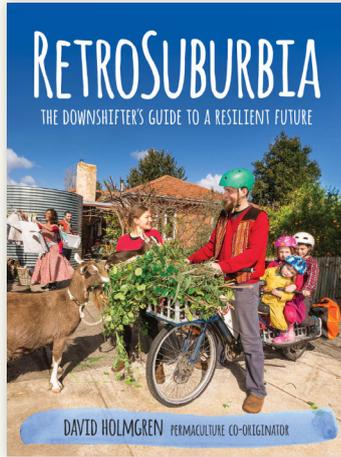
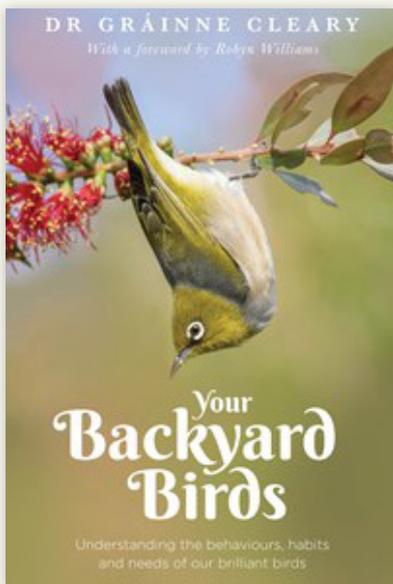
Your Backyard Birds

By Grainne Cleary

The remarkable relationships between our often cheeky birds and humans in Australian backyards all over the country are revealed with humour and charm in this inspiring book.

Do you ever wonder what birds are talking about as they fly by? The sounds and songs of birds constantly surround us as we go about our lives. But what are they talking about? Are they even talking or just mindlessly squawking and chirping? Why are so many urban birds so loud? Is there a message in what the birds are telling each other?

Your Backyard Birds provides a fresh and lively perspective on human interactions with birds, written by a wildlife ecologist who is passionate about the vital role of citizen scientists.

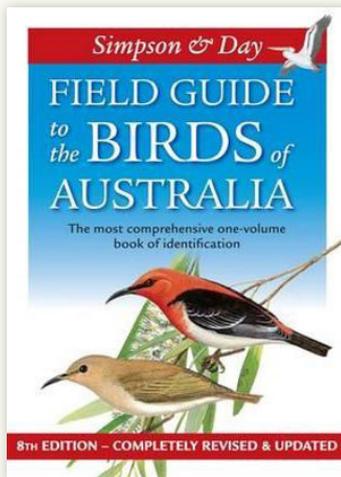


Retrosuburbia - The Downshifter's Guide to a Resilient Future

By David Holmgren

This 592-page manual promises to show how Australians can downshift and retrofit their homes, gardens, communities and, above all, themselves to be more organised, sustainable and resilient into an uncertain future. It promises a challenging but exciting mix of satisfying work, a more meaningful way of living and hope for the next generation.

RetroSuburbia is divided into three main sections: the Built, the Biological and the Behavioural along with the introductory section 'Setting the Scene'.



Field Guide to the Birds of Australia (8th Edition)

By Nicholas Day and Ken Simpson

Since it was first published in 1984 this field guide has been one of the most respected bird guides in the country. It contains all Australian bird species; key points of identification using the latest classification systems; distribution maps for all species; more than 900 illustrations; breeding information; vocalisations and much more.



Phone App - Morecombe and Stewart Guide

By Michael Morecombe & David Stewart

This handy phone app negates the need to carry a physical field guide. It provides comprehensive information including hi-res images of more than 790 bird species, distribution maps, detailed descriptions of calls, measurements and breeding behaviour, as well as sound recordings of 600 species.

Nursery Update

Randwick City Council Community Nursery premises have been closed to the public until further notice.

The decision was made in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We understand the inconvenience caused and

will re-open as normal as soon as possible. Stay updated via the council website. In the meantime we are offering contact-free pick-up. Please check out our stock list on the council website and contact us via email for sales inquiries.
nursery@randwick.nsw.gov.au

