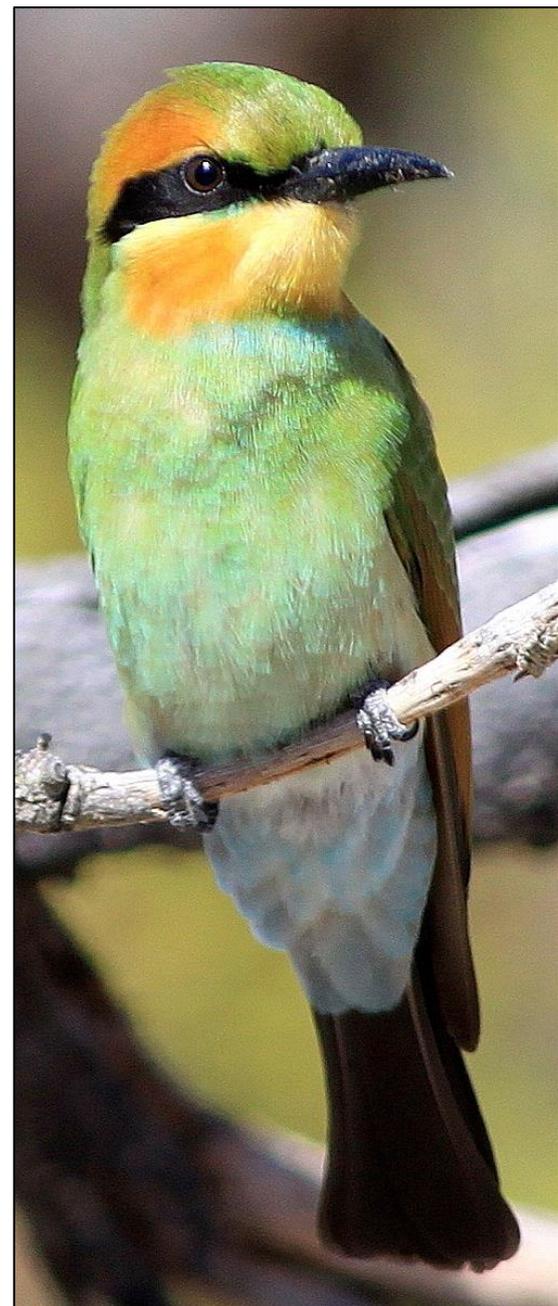


The Bushland Whistler

Friends of Forrestdale Newsletter ♦ 4th Edition ♦ March 2014

RAINBOW BEE-EATER (*Merops ornatus*)

One of the joys of springtime is the first sighting of the Rainbow Bee-eaters as they arrive from their northern haunts to spend the next six months here in the south while the weather is warm and their insect prey abounds. They start to arrive in the Perth area in September, and having paired up and established territories by



November they begin to build their nests. The Rainbow Bee-eater's nest, however, isn't the typical structure one expects a bird to build – this bird has its nest at the end of a tunnel, a metre or more long, that it digs in the soil with its beak. It will take the pair of birds ten to twenty days to dig the tunnel with the nest chamber at the end and when the job is done, their beaks, which are used in much the same way as a pick, may have been shortened with wear by one, perhaps two millimetres. The feet are also used in the tunnelling process, to kick loosened soil from the burrow.

Rainbow Bee-eaters choose banks, slopes or flat ground to dig their nests and in the Forrestdale area where slopes and banks are scarce, nest sites are typically flat patches of sandy ground.

Two to eight (usually four or five) glossy white, almost round, eggs are laid and the male and female take turns to incubate the eggs, which take around 22 days to hatch. The newly hatched chicks are blind and bald, but soon their eyes will open and their feathers will begin to grow. Both parents share the responsibility of feeding the young and when the chicks are about 4 weeks old they are ready to leave the nest. Rainbow Bee-eaters feed on a range of flying insects, including bees as their name suggests, and almost all their prey is caught on the wing.

Having plumage of lustrous shades of green and blue, chestnut, yellow and black, the Rainbow Bee-eater is one of Australia's most eye-catching birds. Pictured is a juvenile which lacks the adult's black gorget and the two, thin, elongated feathers that adorn the adult's tail – these tail streamers, which are thinner and much longer in the males, are a way of telling the sexes apart.

In order to avoid the winter when insect prey is scant, our Rainbow Bee-eaters will start to congregate in flocks in March to begin their migration north. They will fly to the northern regions of Australia or to Papua New Guinea or perhaps to islands in eastern Indonesia to spend the other half of their yearly cycle before their return journey in spring. Then once more the air will ring with their fluty, purring calls as they wheel over the treetops, bringing joy to those of us

lucky enough to have these gorgeous birds in our midst. ✧

The Rainbow Bee-eater occurs Australia-wide and is this country's only bee-eater. Being a migratory species, it is listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. There are twenty-five species of bee-eaters in the world, most occurring in Africa, a few in southern and South-east Asia and two in Eurasia. Closely related to kingfishers, all bee-eaters have brilliant plumage with every hue of the colour wheel represented. All bee-eaters tunnel in soil to nest.

SAND BOTTLEBRUSH (*Beaufortia squarrosa*)

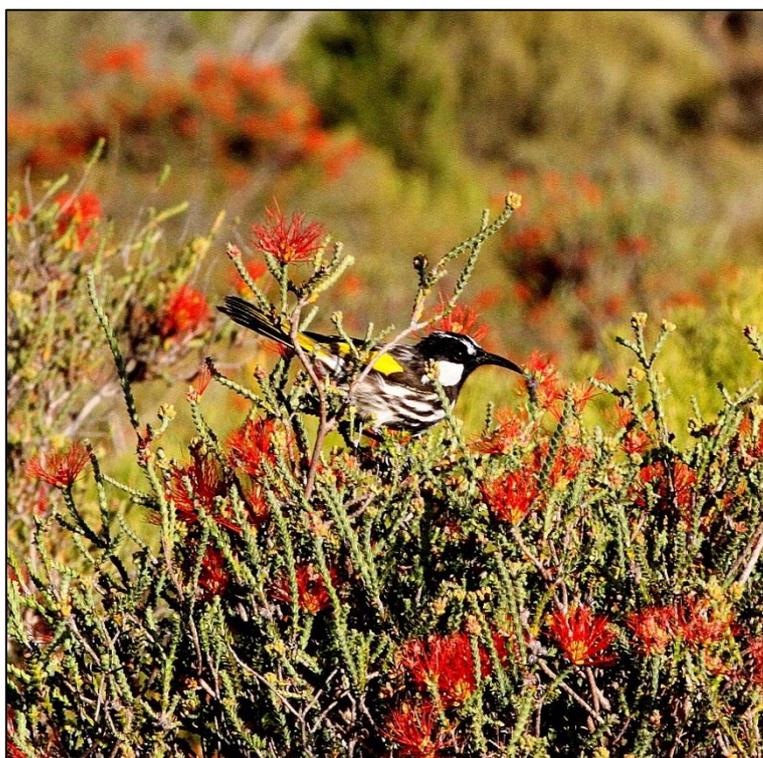


Sand Bottlebrush – Anstey-Keane Dampland

During some of the hottest, driest weeks of the year, when little else is flowering, the heathland at Anstey-Keane Dampland bursts into a blaze of scarlet. The source of this dazzling display is Sand Bottlebrush, a hardy Western Australian native plant which occurs roughly between Kalbarri and Busselton.

The first flowers at Anstey-Keane usually start to appear at the beginning of February and the flowering period, which peaks here around mid-February, continues into March.

Anstey-Keane is one of the most important conservation sites in the metropolitan area for this species, which



White-cheeked Honeyeater feeding on Sand Bottlebrush flowers

grows abundantly on the sand/clay flats in the reserve and produces a massed display covering a hectare or more.

While all the Sand Bottlebrush flowers in Anstey-Keane are scarlet, elsewhere in the plant's range other colours can occur, such as cream, yellow and orange.

Sand Bottlebrush is beneficial to wildlife as the flowers produce nectar that attracts birds such as White-cheeked Honeyeaters. Early in the morning these vivacious birds gather in flocks of thirty or more individuals and they chatter noisily as they flit from flower to flower. Other nectar-eating birds such as Tawny-crowned and New Holland Honeyeaters also visit the flowers, and the dense shrubs provide shelter for insectivorous birds such as Splendid Fairy-wrens. Kangaroos often rest by day in the shade of the bushes which also provide shelter for bandicoots, whose diggings can be seen all through the area. ✧

BATHING BEAUTIES

Birds are avid bathers. They bathe to rid their feathers of dust picked up from the air and from foliage. In hot dry conditions when a lot more dust is in the air, bathing is especially important. Bathing helps to keep a bird's feathers in top condition – clean, sleek plumage makes for optimal agility in flight and this in turn boosts the bird's ability to dodge predators.

It would appear too that birds bathe not just to keep their feathers clean; their sprightly antics at the birdbath indeed suggest that they bathe also for pleasure.

A birdbath in the garden can provide hours of enjoyment, not only for the birds but also for people who watch them.

Some birds are dainty bathers and take time to muster up courage to jump in. Others arrive in unruly mobs. They chatter shrilly, jostle and spar and plunge headlong into the water. They dunk their heads, flap their wings, splash water about and when thoroughly drenched, flutter to nearby bushes to shake their feathers dry. (All this activity means that the birdbath quickly empties, so it may need to be replenished twice, sometimes three times a day.)

Depending on the location, a minimum of about twelve species of birds should regularly visit a birdbath in a suburban garden that has plenty of shrubs and trees. A greater variety will be present if the garden is near native bushland. Below are photographs of some of the birds that visit a birdbath in a garden near Lake Forrestdale Nature Reserve.



A disagreement between a Silvereye (left) and a Grey Fantail over who has first bath

Birdbaths come in a range of designs and sizes and birds tend to favour some over others. Interestingly, if given a choice, most birds seem to prefer plain terracotta bowls (illustrated) to some of the more expensive, elaborate styles.

The maximum water depth for a birdbath is 5 cm, any deeper and small birds feel vulnerable. Birds also prefer baths that are kept scrupulously clean, so it is a good idea to give the bath a quick scrub daily before filling it with fresh water.

If you decide to install a birdbath in your garden, an important thing to remember is that cats can leap up to two metres into the air to catch birds, so if cats are likely to be a problem, the birdbath needs to be placed well out of their reach. ✧



New Holland Honeyeaters love to bathe communally and they often converge on the birdbath in boisterous flocks of ten birds or more



Clockwise from top left: Australia's smallest bird, the Weebill; White-browed Scrubwren; Rufous Whistler; Red-capped Parrot; Inland Thornbill ; Scarlet Robin; Splendid Fairy-wren

RUBBISH DUMPING

Sunday, March 2 is Clean Up Australia Day, so a word about illegal rubbish dumping that takes place in our bushland and elsewhere is timely.

The practice of dumping rubbish illegally is an enigma. Rubbish dumpers often go to considerable trouble to deposit their rubbish in bushland, on road verges, dead-end tracks and so on. Yet much of the rubbish could be disposed of in household rubbish or recycling bins provided by councils, or the annual bulk rubbish and green waste pickups. Moreover, many items in these deposits are found to be in good condition and could have been donated to op-shops and be recycled.

It makes no sense to dump rubbish illegally when there are so many lawful alternatives and when there is always the risk of being fined hundreds or thousands of dollars.

Rubbish dumped in bushland and other unauthorised sites creates numerous problems: it pollutes the environment, it reduces aesthetic amenity and decreases community pride, it is potentially hazardous to people and wildlife, and it causes degradation in bushland by introducing invasive weeds and smothering native vegetation. Added to this is the significant cost of its removal – a cost that is ultimately carried by ratepayers and taxpayers.

The photos below show some of the rubbish dumped in Anstey-Keane Dampland between 2010 and 2013 (all rubbish illustrated and more has since been removed by Friends of Forrestdale volunteers, Department of Parks and Wildlife or WA Planning Commission).

Friends of Forrestdale members spend many hours throughout the year picking up litter and rubbish that has been dumped around Lake Forrestdale, in the Regional Parks and along roadsides.

For Clean Up Australia Day, we have registered Anstey-Keane Dampland and Anstey Road as the clean-up site for Forrestdale. Anyone can participate in this event. If you would like to come along on the day and help clean up the area, you will be most welcome. We meet at 8.00am on the corner of Anstey and Keane Roads, Forrestdale. Bring a hat, suitable footwear, gloves and water. The finish time is 10.00am. We hope to see there. In the meantime, if you have any queries please contact site coordinator, Rod Giblett on r.giblett@ecu.edu.au.



Friends of Forrestdale members discover rubbish dumped at Anstey-Keane Dampland