

BirdCalls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

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Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

BIRDING AUSTRALIA: CONTINENT OF WONDERS

By Eleonora di Liscia

I go on vacation to see wonderful things. And by wonderful, I don't mean in the sense of "Gee, isn't that neat!" I mean things that inspire wonder, a sort of childlike awe.

In that respect, Australia does not disappoint. What can you say about a continent where Rainbow Lorikeets are practically junk birds, and Masked Lapwings hold council meetings in the streets of Darwin's city center?

Below are highlights:

Sydney: My first step outside our downtown hotel nets the Welcome Swallow, a sign of good things to come. I quickly pick up several lifers including Rainbow Lorikeet and Kookaburra at the Sydney Royal Botanic Garden.

My husband and I want to see the Grey-headed Flying-foxes, which emerge at dusk. Among the world's largest bats, a colony of 22,000 had been removed from the Garden, where they damaged trees and dropped unfortunate substances on people's heads. They could now be found in Centennial Park.

Our day starts sunny, but turns cold and rainy. We walk several miles in the rain before spotting a small building at one end of the park. Unfortunately, a private function is taking place, and we don't look like wedding guests. Fortunately, we can take shelter in a kiosk round the back.

The minutes tick by slowly. Darkness falls.

My husband opines unhelpfully that the bats might not come out. I wander from the kiosk to get a better look throughout the park when I spot a stream of dark objects flying a half mile away. I run back for husband when the bats begin streaming over our heads.

Blue Mountains: We stay in Katoomba at the Crimson Villa, <http://crimsonvilla.com.au/>, named for the Crimson Rosellas that forage on the lawn. The owners are so thoughtful that they greet us one night with a flashlight because we neglected to leave on an outside light.

Because I travel with my non-birder husband, I hire my own guides. This works really well because I don't have to share. The guide or the scope. It's like being Queen for a Day.

For the Blue Mountains, the excellent and dedicated Carol Probets, <http://www.bmbirding.com.au/>, starts our morning with the Superb Lyrebird, a pheasant-like bird. The male sports three kinds of tail feathers. Four of these amazing birds bound across the park.

Next stop is a small haystack surrounded by several plastic blue objects like bottle rings. The bower of the Satin Bowerbird advertises the male's resourcefulness. We wait for the shiny blue-black bird to appear. After a few minutes, he strolls in and begins "painting" his bower with a mixture of chewed up plants.



Rainbow Lorikeet

photo by Eleonora DiLiscia

Melbourne: Husband wants to go to Hanging Rock. He loves the movie ("Picnic at Hanging Rock"), in part because it petrifies wife. But who can worry about a creepy movie when birding?

Our guide, John Harris of Wildlife Experience, <http://wildlifeexperiences.com.au/>, is superlative. Besides the honeyeaters and pardalotes, he bequeaths us a koala, hugging the top of a tall tree. A group of 20 Gray Kangaroos wander by a stream.

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The next day, John takes me to the Southern Ocean for Shy Albatross and Rufous Bristlebird, followed by the Western Treatment Plant in Werribee, a prime birding area featuring lagoons filled with "waders," ducks, crakes and Brolga, a large gray and red crane.

Returning to Melbourne, John says, "Let's see if we can find an owl." We cruise the fences at night along the road. We drive. We stop and look. We drive, stop and look some more. Just as we are about to return to the highway, John stops: "There's an owl," he says. And on the fence is an Eastern Barn Owl, bobbing its head, intently scouring the ground for prey.

St. Kilda: Just outside Melbourne, the rocky breakwater houses hundreds of Little Penguins. The young nest inside the rocks while the adults forage the Southern Ocean, returning after sundown. We arrive early. I wait for two hours on a boardwalk overlooking a narrow beach. As night falls, a crowd gathers. The penguin volunteers arrive. We wait. Someone cries: "There!" I turn to look but it is an endangered water rat that also lives in the breakwater. I turn back just in time to see four Little Penguins popping out of the water and scurrying across the sand.

Using red flashlights, the penguin volunteers illuminate the penguins who are now standing beside their young between the rocks.

Darwin River: Denise Goodfellow, our ENSBC Australian-sister member and author of Quiet Snake Dreaming, along with her eminently congenial husband, Michael, live on 20 acres in the bush at the end of the power grid. As a result, nothing works all the time. But morning



(Top) **Eastern Barn Owl** photo by John Harris

(Right) **Crimson Rosella** photo by Eleonora DiLiscia

(Bottom) **Three Masked Lapwings** photo by Eleonora DiLiscia



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Rainbow Pitta photo by Eleonora DiLiscia

in the bush is a beautiful time. The light is soft. The heat hasn't set in. A Great Bowerbird visits the bird bath. Agile wallabies hop past the window, one with a joey's head peeking from her pouch. Two black and white Radjah Ducks stroll about as though they own the place, which they do.

At night, we walk the bush with flashlights seeking frogs and snakes. A large shorebird, the Bush Stone Curlew, wails, "Curleeeee." And Denise finds us a group wandering like ghosts through the night.

The next day, Denise takes us to Berry Springs to find a much coveted Rainbow Pitta. Denise hears the call and leads us unerringly through the forest. I spot a sky blue patch near a fallen log. And there is the pitta, foraging under the leaves!

One of the most wonderful birds I have ever seen capping off a trip full of wonders.



Superb Fairywren photo by Eleonora DiLiscia

ONE CRANE IN A MILLION

By Lynne Carpenter

My husband and I were driving to our place in Lake Geneva on Friday, September 18, 2015. It had rained heavily the night before, and some of the fields were flooded.

About 5:30 p.m., we approached a cornfield that had recently been cut. As I was driving, I asked my husband to keep his eye out for Sandhill Cranes as the habitat looked perfect. I drove slowly and searched the fields and flooded areas while also keeping my eye on the road. Soon groups of Sandhill Cranes were seen in the foot-high stubble. Shadowy gray figures were strung across the field on the north side of the road, and a solitary Sandhill was seen on the south side of the road. There were perhaps 200 birds in view, but the entire area was in shadow.

As I drove slowly, my eye caught a WHITE bird in with the cranes. I said to my husband "Wait a minute, that might be a Whooping Crane," and we did a fast U-turn. Refreshing my memory, I added "Whooping Cranes have black wingtips," and before I could come to a stop, my husband said "black wingtips!" I was REALLY sorry that we had sent my binoculars in for repair that day, so we had no optical help. Only now as I write this do I realize that my scope was in the trunk of the car. (Darn!) We also observed shorebirds at the waters edges and flying across, but without binoculars or better light, it was impossible for me to identify them.

What to do? What to do? I thought someone ought to know about the Whooping Crane, but I didn't know who to call! I called the one birder I know in Lake Geneva, but she is now "out of the loop", has no computer and didn't seem to know anyone active in the birding community. I used my phone to go online to the ABA site, Wisconsin Bird News by Date, and searched the posts for a name I might recognize. I found many posts by William Mueller, and I sent him an email. Now I realize, I might have reached him more quickly by sending him a text, but he replied almost immediately and told me how to contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That agency has a form to use for sightings, so I did just that. I had to confess that without binoculars I might have missed a juvenile Whooping Crane.

How about that for an exciting afternoon? It just about equals the time I saw a Marabou Stork land in the Jockey International plant in Kenosha in the early 70's. That time, I had no idea what I was looking at. At least this time, I had a clue!

ENSBC REMEMBERS MARGO MILDE:

The bird club was saddened by the death of long-time member Margo Milde on September 26, 2015.

Born in Chicago, Margo was remembered as the only child in second grade to ask for an Ant Farm for Christmas. Although well-intentioned but misguided advice from parents and school counselors had steered her toward a business profession, Margo discovered what she really wanted to do during an extended camping vacation to the western National Parks during 1981-1982. Following her passion, she worked on a number of professional botanical and bird surveys, most recently for the Waukegan Harbor Citizens Advisory Group, which used her plant seed mixes in restoration work.

In a 1995 article for the Friends of Volo Bog, Bog Log, Margo wrote that her small stature – being less likely to sink in treacherous areas of the bog, and affording her ease of crawling through thick brush – as well as owning a functional washer and drier at home were essential attributes to her success in bog field surveys. Almost 300 of Margo's plant specimens, many documenting locally rare species whose existence in the Chicago area was previously unknown, are permanently housed at the Morton Arboretum Herbarium in Lisle, Illinois.

Margo was particularly gifted in recognizing bird song, a skill she attributed to the many years of arduous classical piano lessons she was forced to

endure when a child. She was especially proud of her summer-long 2008 breeding bird survey at Chain O' Lakes State Park, in which she documented 139 species of birds, including verifying a large number of nesting species, during a summer-long adventure of paddling, wading, slogging, and just plain walking her way through the park.

Margo also volunteered yearly on Spring and Christmas bird counts, and contributed her breeding bird data of over 20 years for a local Illinois forest preserve, Glenview (Harms) Woods, to the online database of the Bird Conservation Network.

Margo frequently told her friends that she was the luckiest person in the world for being able to find employment doing the work she loved in high quality natural areas that, due to remoteness, difficult terrain, and lack of accessibility, very few people ever get to see.



Margo Milde Photo courtesy of Donna Yates

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT TIME AGAIN!

To help protect birds, we have to know how they're doing. Christmas Bird Counts help determine whether a given species is thriving or plummeting. Such information led to the discovery that DDT was damaging raptors' eggshells, causing their decline. Here are the upcoming Counts where you can make a difference:

Sunday, December 20, 2015: 50th Chicago Urban Christmas Count. Compiler Jeff Sanders, 847-657-6431.

Friday, December 25, 2015: Chicago Lakefront Christmas Count. Compiler Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.

Saturday, December 26, 2015: Chicago North Shore Count. A potluck dinner follows the Count at 4 p.m. at Libby Hill's home, 2715 Woodland Road. Compiler: Tim Wallace, 847-548-2654. Feeder Count compiler: Eleonora di Liscia, 847-568-0160.

Friday, January 1, 2016: Waukegan Christmas Count. Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.