Friends of Pallisters Reserve Inc.

Pallisters Reserve is a 254 ha wetland reserve at 457 Masons Road, Orford, owned by Trust for Nature, and managed by the Friends of Pallisters Reserve Inc. Established January 1990

Dec. 2023

TRUST FOR NATURE

No December meeting; next meeting Sunday, January 21, 2024

November Report

- A new laptop computer and and external 4 TB hard drive have been procured. These will be used for recording bird sightings, processing images and videos, and other purposes.
- In 2024 Adam Merrick's position at Trust for Nature will change, however this will not affect Pallisters Reserve.
- Funding: $550 was received from the Glenelg-Hopkins CMA & Landcare Administration Fund.
- Six koalas including 1 young were seen during the November 26 count.
- Peter Bolte observed 37 species during his November bird count including 5 honeyeater species. One of the honeyeaters was the handsome White-naped species pictured on page 2 of this newsletter. Brolgas, still present during the bird count, may now have departed following their breeding season.
- With regard to the remote monitoring station at the water tank, Trevor Kennedy reports that, following expert advice, the bird tentatively identified as a Buff-banded Rail in the November newsletter is more likely to be a Painted Button-Quail. Last seen at Pallisters in 2012, the return visit of this quail confirms the value of the Reserve as a refuge for both permanent and temporary species.
- Compared to October, vastly more birds, mammals, and reptiles visited the tank in November.
- Thank you to Leddin family for the bookcase which will allow our library to be protected. Thanks also to Peter Carrucan for transporting the bookcase.
- Fire breaks were scheduled to be slashed during the first week of December.
- In case of the need for an emergency evacuation, Leon Davey suggested that a wind-sock be installed at a cleared area adjacent to the Pallisters woolshed. Applicable regulations will be checked.
- Bore readings taken on November 11 were Bore 1: 6.08 m, Bore 2: 5.30 m, and Bore 3: 4.30 m. On December 2 the corresponding levels were 6.16 m, dry, and 4.40 m. These readings are consistent within the ranges observed in recent years.

Friends of Pallisters Recently Observed

Photographs: Baby Sugar Glider and Tiger Snake – Peter Bolte; Chocolate Lily (Wendy Black).

Pallisters Reserve lies in the traditional Country of the Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar peoples, who never ceded their sovereignty of the Land. We are indebted for their past and ongoing custodianship.

Meetings are held at the Reserve; usually every fourth Sunday except July and December.

Co-leaders: Julia Schlapp 0427 778 265 & Anthony Leddin 0408 333 046 Sec./Treasurer: Trevor Kennedy 5565 8692; Minute Sec.: Nick Glover; Newsletter Editor: Ross Hicks (pallisters_newsletter@proton.me).

nc No. A0033814P ABN 360 787 792 http://www.apswarrnambool.org.au/pallisters/ http://www.facebook.com/pallisters

Honeyeaters

"… *life in Australian bush or more settled areas would be a good deal less joyous without the presence of the Honey-Birds. They are the most characteristic, not to say novel, and largest family of birds found in this continent. … something like 90 of these belong to Australia itself. A happy arrangement, this! It is as though Mother Nature, having decided upon eucalypts and other myrtaceous trees as the chief feature of Australian vegetation, evolved these birds as kin-spirits of the blossoms, giving them long bills with which to explore the flowers, and sensitive, brush-tipped tongues with which to sweep up the nectar, not to speak of a score of cheery attributes calculated to win the approval of the august lords of creation."*

— A.H. Chisholm, from "*Mateship with Birds*", first published in 1922.

White-naped Honeyeater (ebird.org)

In total, 191 bird species are identified as honeyeaters, members of the large and diverse Meliphagidae family of oscine passerines – perching songbirds. Perching songbirds they may be, but these hyperactive birds are normally observed on the move, ceaselessly questing through the foliage and branches of trees. Rarely do they appear passively perched on a twig!

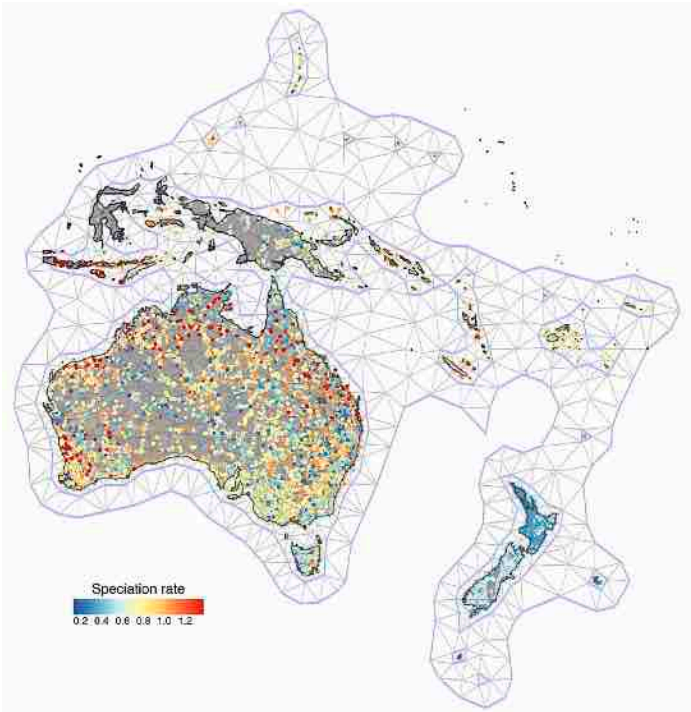
The map at right shows the honeyeater distribution throughout Australasia. Most common in Australia and New Guinea, they are also found in New Zealand, Bali, and Pacific islands.

Of course, our honeyeaters are not the only nectar-feeding passerines. Other nectar-feeding families exist, for example, the hummingbirds of North America and the sunbirds of equatorial rain-forests. But the overlapping diets of these birds are the consequence of convergent evolution: the passerine families are unrelated.

Twelve bird species classified as Honeyeaters have been recorded at Pallisters: the Yellow-faced, White-eared, White-plumed, Brown-headed, White-naped, Crescent, and New-Holland Honeyeaters, as well as the Red and Little Wattlebirds, Noisy Miner, Eastern Spinebill, and White-fronted chat.

Most of these Honeyeaters sip nectar in the Winter months when eucalypts are in blossom. While doing so, they inadvertently also pollinate the trees. When the blossoms fade and the nectar supply dwindles in the Spring, they transition to a diet where insects form the chief source of nutrition. Wikipedia elaborates: *"In general, the honeyeaters with long, fine bills are more nectarivorous, the shorter-billed species less so, but even specialised nectar eaters like the spinebills take extra insects to add protein to their diet when breeding."*

In combination with other factors, the capacity of honeyeaters to seasonally exploit two rich sources of nutrition has made them prodigiously successful: the family history of the Meliphagidae extends back 25 million years, however the passerine ancestors of our honeyeaters are estimated to have originated in Australia about 47 million years ago. (To put this in perspective, non-bird dinosaurs vanished 66 million years ago; the earliest fossil evidence for modern humans – homo sapiens – dates back less than 0.3 million years.) Throughout these mega-annums, Meliphagidae species have come and gone, but the family continues to thrive: they have proven themselves to be robust survivors.



Distribution of honeyeaters, taken from. *"Geographic range size and speciation in honeyeaters,"* by E.M. Hay *et al.*, BMC Ecology and Evolution (2022) 22:86. The coloured dots represent the assessed speciation rates: the rates at which new honeyeater species have arisen. Red dots, mainly spread across northern Australia show areas with the most rapid evolution of new species; blue-coloured dots occur where speciation has been slower. The results – for 254,886 honeyeater point occurrence records – rely upon the analysis of all known DNA sequences for Meliphagidae species.