

GARDEN HABITAT FOR BIRDS – NOTES BY BARBARA GARRETT, President of the South West Victoria Bird Observers Club of Australia

Botanical Gardens in Australia and I guess throughout the world, attract many and varied visitors with wide and diverse interests. One of these groups are birdwatchers, who are aware that, as a rule, these gardens grow a mixture of local, countrywide and overseas species. While, like people, birds would prefer their own native habitat in which they have been for centuries, few are able, in some circumstances, to adapt to a changed environment providing it offers suitable needs for their survival. So it is the Warrnambool Botanic Gardens goes some way in providing food and shelter to many native birds permanently, seasonally, and even overnight for those travelling afar.

Many trees are good nesting sites such as the tall pines where, among others, *the white-faced Herons* nest right up in the canopy, the outstretched branches offering good support for their flimsy stick nests that were gathered from the surrounds below, including the willows. Three families were successful this year in rearing young and on the walk day we were fortunate to witness a family of *four* offspring (what a branchful). *Pacific Black Duck* produce a few clutches each year. The islands with their dense cover making ideal conditions for a brooding duck and the *Dusky Moorhens* who also enjoy the protection. Have you noticed how the little chicks of both species hide under the water lily leaves when danger lurks. *Sacred Kingfishers* are swooping low over the ponds catching dragon flies or any other suitable prey even the occasional unsuspecting fish or lizard, perching on an overhanging branch or stick to consume their meal and at times taking a quick dip to finish off. I am looking forward to (hopefully) observing them feeding their young when they are able to leave their nest hollow in one of the many suitable trees. Even the *Yellow-rumped Thornbill* has enjoyed the sanctuary of the gardens and at present are feeding young on insects and larvae infesting some trees and shrubs.

This is but a small example of the visitors and usage of the gardens by native birds, other varieties like *Honeyeaters* at times frequent the flowering plants when the nectar is flowing and there is usually a resident group of *Red Wattle* birds and *New Holland Honeyeaters* which are able to devour insects when nectar is scarce. Fruiteaters come in profusion when the Moreton Bay Figs are at their best – other fruit bearing trees also assist these birds. So at times *Little Ravens*, *Cockatoos*, *Rosellas*, and this year two *Pied Currawongs* were observed in that activity. Let us not forget the wonderful *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos* seen high in the pines feeding on the seeds of the pine cones for their squawking young.

The Botanic Gardens are important to the welfare of many native (and sadly introduced) birds in this area, your continuous care and increased plantings, especially more natives, will ensure their survival. I am sure that while they have a dedicated group of friends all will be well.

(Barbara Garrett, President of Southwest Vic Bird Observers Club of Australia kindly took the Friends on a Guided Bird Walk of the Warrnambool Botanic Gardens on 13 November 2000)

Marie Ziebell