

A photograph of a red and green parrot perched on a tree branch against a clear blue sky. The parrot is positioned in the center of the frame, facing left. It has a bright red head and neck, a white patch on its cheek, and a green body. The tree branches are bare and brown, creating a complex network of lines across the image. The sky is a solid, clear blue.

GLIMPSES of AUSTRALIAN BIRDLIFE

ALBERT KEMP
and ARTHUR KEMP

INTRODUCTION

I am going for a walk with my aunt. We cross over the road and head towards a cliff. She calls it her “special cliff”. We settle down and suddenly I notice a White-bellied Sea Eagle. Not only that but a seal is present as well. The seal had caught a fish and the eagle was attempting to snatch the fish out of the seals’ grip. The seal continuously plunges down into the depths, and it’s gone. The eagle lingers around for a while and leaves too. The cliff is left for us to enjoy.

When I started going to my current school, Preshil, every Thursday we went on “bush school”. We often went to Blackburn Lake, a park with a large lake, and there were frequently many turtles inhabiting the ponds. I can’t recall seeing many birds there, but I can remember Dusky Moorhens and Eurasian Coots. There were signs everywhere talking about how their babies look sort of “ugly” and I can remember seeing them, bald patch and all, and thinking they were ugly. Now I don’t think the same. Everything seems to look ugly when you first see it, then as you slowly get used to them, they don’t look ugly any more.



I have been interested in birds for quite a long period of time. Maybe I first started watching them around 1 year ago, which is a long time for me. I usually give things up in less than a month. I have seen many birds in many places, as I have just come across them and not had a second thought until now.

When I joined the 8’s & 9’s class at my school (grade 3 and 4), I was gonna go camping for the first time. I was really excited, and I was definitely gonna go. I was so eager to go that I didn’t even get discouraged when I was told I would have to wait 6 weeks. That was a long wait. Finally the time came. My mum dropped me off there at the back gate where the two school buses were waiting. A trailer was attached to the second one, and in it I put my suitcase. I couldn’t wait to get in the bus because I like the backseat and I wanted to get in first so I could take my time to choose a spot.

As soon as everyone was ready, I leapt into the bus, scrambled to the backseat, put my bag on, waved goodbye to my mum and we were off. I called the window seat, and I sat next to Gabriel, a friend of mine. He waved goodbye to his mum, and we started talking about what the possibilities were that the bus would tip over and we would be killed.

A juvenile Nankeen Night heron sleeping, Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne

I don’t know why, but that’s the type of conversation we always get into. I always start it about some crazy topic, and we argue a bit and try to understand how it would happen (me and him are so persistent that we don’t give up something until its done.) Then we started talking about what we’d do when we were there and that kind of stuff. When we were really far away from school, more animals came out, the highway was open, birds flew by. Me and him played a game about who could count the most exciting bird (pretty obviously my type of game, but he agrees to a lot of things I say.) He spotted a Masked Lapwing, and I claimed that it was the most exciting bird we had seen, (it was true. We hadn’t seen anything.) Then we saw a horse working its way up a hill and got into an argument about whether zebras are just horses with stripes. He said that they were just horses, but with stripes, and I said they were probably in the same family, and that zebras were different to horses. He asked how they could be different apart from the stripes, and I guess I didn’t have much to say about that. Then I said that zebras had larger, softer, less formed noses than horses. He said that their noses were the same, and I couldn’t think of any difference. So we just stopped arguing about that.

I am sitting in a bus with my friend, Gabriel, I suggest playing the most exciting bird game again, but he seems interested in some playing cards that Finn was holding. He had brought them from school for entertainment on the bus. Gabriel looks longingly at those cards, then starts playing a game with Finn. I, on the other hand, turn back to my window. There is nothing but the rolling hills behind me. In front, there is the other bus. Always in front.

Gabriel has stopped being interested in the cards. He asks me, ‘Did you see any other birds?’ I shake my head. There had been nothing. We look on to see if a bird is present. No luck, I’m not gonna give up. I look on, so does Gabriel. We continue like this for what seems like hours, until it darkens, we can see the blue sea. We stop off at an inland creek to stretch our legs. Then we head for the campsite. While we stretch our legs, I notice a shell. I find another half, do they fit? No. I find yet another half. Gabriel shows me a half. It fits to one of them. I try to fit the other two together, but they don’t fit. At least I had found one matching pair. We arrive at the campsite. It is the middle of the day — time for lunch. Was I dreaming that it was near evening, no, that was that evening, so I went too far. Olive shares her Pumpkin Muffins. They taste good.

At that campsite, (Eumerella Scout Camp, Anglesea) there are many birds. On just my first day I see a Gang-Gang Cockatoo, and a New Holland Honeyeater. On the second day, I see egret tracks, come across a snake, observe a Spotted Pardalote, and watch Nankeen Kestrels soaring up to the lighthouse. The last day, and we’re back at school. The parents are waiting. It feels strange to see them again after being separated for just three days, and I’m happy to see my home.

I am walking across the sand at Altona Dog Beach. I attempt to get a photo of a Black-winged Stilt I walk over to where they are feeding. I can’t get very close, because there is a thick layer of mud and mucky stuff that I would sink into. I stand on the other side of the muck. The stilts don’t seem that disturbed as they are feeding and can’t recognise me as a potential predator. I get the photos I intend to get, and head back to where the rest of my class are standing. Then a swirl of seagulls crowds around. On a sand bar there is an Eastern Great Egret. It stands there calmly while seagulls swirl around. I take some photos from where I am, but an iPad isn’t much good for zoom. I takes a long time for me to realise this. I know that if I want to get the best photo I can, I will have to get to the sand bar. I barrage in splashing on the way. My class see and as they can’t see the egret, think I’m a madman. I keep on going, and call out to them to tell them that I’m just taking a photo of an egret. Then they notice it. I make my way to the sand bar, the iPad on camera, when I set foot on the sand bar, I



A Bell Miner singing in a tree. I like how its bright green body is emphasised in this photo.

I take one final photo as it lands about 20 metres away. Then I retreat back to where my class are standing. I show them the photos. They all seem to approve of them. My shoes are soaked through. I don’t go in the water after that.

The title of this book is inspired by Glimpses of Australian Birdlife, a book by Peter Slater and Sally Elmer, in turn inspired by the book, Glimpses of Australian Birdlife by Read on to see amazing photographs of birds and detailed text.

So as I have had so many good experiences, I hope you will as well when you read this book, Glimpses of Australian Birdlife.

ALBERT KEMP



NANKEEN NIGHT HERON

*a stocky fat bird
drowsily preens its feathers
eyes half closed, it sleeps*

I have always liked Nankeen Night Herons, as they are so fat and still. My aunt also likes them, but she hasn't seen one yet, so she was quite jealous when I came back having seen 4 birds in one day. I only photographed three of them, but the best photos I got were of a female with a juvenile (below and left). The photos shown here were taken at the Royal Botanic Gardens, a pretty good place to see these birds. I was determined to see and photograph a Nankeen Night Heron, so I was excited when my dad said that he thought he saw something like one. I looked through my camera zoom and thought it looked more like a piece of rubbish than a Nankeen Night Heron. I was sure of my theory, so we went to investigate. We were able to get to the island it was on by crossing a bridge, and you weren't supposed to go off the path. My dad said I could probably go quickly, so in I went. I went in and looked around I couldn't see anything, so I came back and asked my dad where it was. When I was pretty sure I knew where it was, I

went in again. I couldn't find it anywhere until a heron burst out of the bushes, and flew to the other side of the lake. I wanted to see it more so I went to the tree that I thought it had landed in. I couldn't find the tree, and was really upset, and kept wanting to go back to the place I had flushed it from. While I was looking for it, my dad said he had seen something that looked like another Nankeen Night Heron. We went to look for it, and could see it from across the lake. It was obscured by the branches, so I looked for a closer place, and as we were about to leave, having not seen the second heron, we noticed two Nankeen Night Herons, clearly visible — a mother and a juvenile. I took many photos, and have always liked the juvenile, with its dull grey plumage, looking all shaggy and bedraggled. Maybe bedraggled wasn't the right word for this birds' plumage. I haven't seen too many Nankeen Night Herons, my first one at Kew Billabong we called it, I was there with my dad and Arthur, and we heard a loud call, recognisably a Nankeen Night Heron. I noticed a large, brown, fat bird, and immediately recognised it and a Nankeen Night Heron although I hadn't even seen one before. My dad was impressed, and he asked me if I had just identified it without even having a previous experience, and I nodded. My brother found this insect, and I scoffed as I thought the Nankeen Night Heron was way more exciting than a measly old insect. My dad assured Arthur that they were both very interesting, and I was still feeling proud because of identifying that heron. I have also sighted these spectacular herons at Dights Falls and Wilsons Reserve. Arthur has seen something like a a Nankeen Night Heron fly over his old school. But it was light brownish and dark brown.



LAUGHING KOOKABURRA

massive bill — catches snakes

larger than a kingfishers'

makes itself present

I have always liked Laughing Kookaburras for their laugh, although it was for territorial reasons with mates. I have heard that Laughing Kookaburras use their laugh to attract mates, and keep rival males away. Kookaburras generally have a large bill as they can handle lizards and even large snakes. They usually sit in a tree, wait for hours, and when they sense even the tiniest bit of movement, they pounce, and come up a few seconds later with an animal in their beak. I have often seen them around parks where the trees are really high, and provide potential nesting holes. The Laughing Kookaburra pictured right and below is also sighted at the royal botanic gardens after we went into Fern Gully. We came out of Fern Gully, having not seen the Powerful Owls we were looking for, and I spotted this kookaburra perching on a branch, just above some people having a picnic. My guess is that it was waiting for the people to leave so it could eat any crumbs that they left. But before the people left, another rival male came and challenged the kookaburra. They probably were both waiting for the people to leave. The first kookaburra let out a loud laugh that gave them away. I can't believe the people didn't notice that there was a kookaburra right above their heads. The photos right and below are taken when the people noticed the kookaburra right above their heads. The kids running around the "rain garden" were the first to notice the kookaburra after me. I noticed it first of course. I have



seen many Laughing Kookaburras, generally on walks in national parks or by bodies of water. They usually sit by water, and pounce on any animal that comes to drink that they can handle. I remember seeing a Laughing Kookaburra at Kew Billabong. The kookaburra was perching on a branch quite near to the water, and being watched by some other people. We looked, and suddenly it flew down real fast and came back with a small lizard in its beak. Probably a gecko or skink.

I have seen them many times at Kew Billabong, Wattle Park, Fairfield Golf course and Studley Park Boathouse. Usually, my dad hears this ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh noise, and we recognise it as a Laughing Kookaburra. Then he searches the area with the binoculars and I take a photo. With the ones at the Botanics, I saw them first while my dad was still trying to find a Powerful Owl. We didn't see them, and came out to take a break, thus seeing the kookaburra. After that we saw the Nankeen Night Herons. I have also seen many males fighting for a mate and heard their call multiple times. I have heard that Laughing Kookaburras are introduced to Western Australia, where they apparently prey upon smaller birds. I would like to have time to investigate that and if it is really true than I will create something to stop it. It seems surprising, Kookaburras are some of our favourite birds, but yet in Western Australia they are introduced and causing trouble. I think it's right that they should keep the population of small creatures down but I don't want them to wipe them out altogether. I should do some research and see what they actually do. Some signs say they prey on legless lizards, not snakes, and some say their good because they eat snakes. Some say they eat birds young, and some say that they are completely harmless.



CORMORANTS & DARTERS

*as water runs off
their backs in shining pearls
they dive under again*

Cormorants and Darters are quite common birds, found in many wetlands, swamps, artificial lakes, and the sea. They don't have fully waterproof plumage, so they have to hold their wings out to dry as the darter on the right is doing. I find it amazing how the water runs off their backs like they can't get wet. These are both photographed at the botanics when I was looking for the first Nankeen Night Heron. I see these birds quite often — Kew Billabong, Botanics, Yarra River, Merri Creek, etc. I have not seen Darters as much as the Little Pied Cormorant above. I remember the second time seeing a Darter at Studley Park Boathouse, when my mum was having some event there with her college friends. I can remember getting bored of the stuff that they were talking about, so me and my dad and my brother went down to the river to see what we could see. We saw a bees hive in some mud, spotted a kookaburra in the tree above, and finally, a Darter flew over and landed on some vegetation on the other side of the river. Unfortunately, my mum's phone (what I was using to take the pictures) ran out of battery right at that moment. I was really annoyed. The darter began to swim over, and I got my dad's phone and took a video of it swimming, just the snaky neck visible. I kept on watching it for a long time and trying to find out where it had gone next. I kept on trying to see where it was going as it quite frequently dived under and I lost it. It eventually swam away, but not before some random dude was surprised at what he interpreted a feathery snake.



Little Pied Cormorants are numerous in a lot of places, and I can remember seeing them in great numbers by the sea. At Sandridge Beach, I saw one diving for food in the sea, probably feasting on all the fat fish living there. I took some photos, but they were with my mum's phone, so they weren't too sharp. I remember seeing many other species of cormorant at the beach such as the Little Black Cormorant, and the Great Cormorant congregating in large groups. I remember going to Altona Dog Beach (mentioned p1) and when we left the beach, suddenly a large mass of Little Black Cormorants were there. I don't know how they all arrived within the same amount of time to each other. I also remember at Bermagui, New South Wales, I always saw large quantities of Great Cormorants. My aunt asked me what they were, and I said: 'Great Cormorants, we can see them in Melbourne', as if Great Cormorants were the most common birds on earth. Then she kept laughing because it turned out that I *hadn't* seen them before in Melbourne, and she's still laughing about that joke today.

I occasionally see Pied Cormorants in bodies of water, eg Merri Creek, Yarra River, Blackburn Lake, Darebin Parklands, and many other bodies of water where there are often cormorants and other fishing birds such as pelicans, kingfishers, terns, boobies, gannets and tropicbirds. There are many different species of cormorant in Australia including White Faced Cormorant, Pied Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, and Little Black Cormorant.



*small bird forages
the ground for tasty morsels
'Chomp!' insect is gone*

away from me but I used a fair bit of zoom for it. Strangely, it actually seems sharper than the bird on the right — maybe I was more out of practise with focusing when I took it. I can remember both of them being a quick snapshot as I wanted to get a photo before it moved again. I like Passerines slightly better than Non-Passerines — maybe they are smaller and have a better song than Non-Passerines in most cases. Perhaps I am excited because I have photographed more Non-Passerines so when I get a Passerine I am more excited. I can remember keeping a photo of a Brown Thornbill from our garden and even though all of the photo was out of focus, I kept it because I considered it a “Special Bird”. I don’t get what’s so special about them now. Only when I had the “Passerine Day”, did I pluck up the courage to delete that photo. And I’m not recovering it from the “Recently Deleted” folder. I might as well go and delete some now. I don’t like the birds that I consider “common” or “not exciting” — birds such as Indian Myna, Spotted Dove, Magpie Lark, etc. I chose not to include those common birds in the book, they aren’t very beautiful either. I consider birds such as Spotted Harrier beautiful — their spotted plumage appeals to me. I also like colourful birds, not too colourful, but birds that have yellow such as Lemon-bellied Flycatcher. (Yellow is high on my list of favourite bird colours.)

WHITE-BROWED SCRUBWREN

These aren’t the birds I usually come across in gardens — usually. By the river and similar places where there is dense bush where these birds like to nest. Today I went for a walk with my dad and brother and we saw so many Passerines I could have remarked that it was “Passerine Day”. The birds we saw eg Grey Fantail, Golden Whistler, White-browed Scrubwren, a small bird I failed to identify and Willie Wagtail. Although I saw some Non-passerines — Rainbow Lorikeet, Red-rumped Parrot, Brown Goshawk and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. But the majority of the birds I saw belonged to the category, Passerines. I used to have trouble photographing Passerines as they were always moving around and I had trouble trying to get a photo before they moved on again. I have sometimes found it annoying that they keep moving just when I adjust the camera to focus on where they previously were. On the other hand, birds like pigeons stay still for so long that I feel like they’re too easy to photograph as I like to have a challenge. The bird on the right is photographed on the walk that I mentioned before and the bird below is photographed at the Merri Creek Trail. I recall that the birds at the Merri Creek Trail were nesting, and they were attempting to lead me away from where their fledglings were just hatching out and the photo below is of the presumably female bird who interprets me as a potential predator. Although the bird on the left is bigger than the bird below in the photo, the bird on the right was only a few feet from me and I didn’t use much zoom. The bird on the left was c. 20metres





GOLDEN WHISTLER

this bird is amazing I was really excited when I observed this bird on our “Passerine Walk”. I *it whistles to the wind* I noticed this bird after I saw the Grey Fantail. I was excited and I *the bright lemon flashing* immediately thought it was a whistler. Then I thought it was some honeyeater but settled on it being a Golden Whistler. I was excited because it was the first time I saw a Golden Whistler. The only other occasion when I saw a whistler was at Plenty Gorge, on a cliff ledge overhanging the Blue Lake where I had seen an Azure Kingfisher. That was the place where I saw the most little birds at once. There were Brown Thornbills, Red-browed Firetails, White-browed Scrubwrens, many other various Passerine species and a Rufous Whistler. Of course I was excited about the Rufous Whistler and the Firetails, and I wish I had my camera with me at that moment — a Rufous Whistler could have been on the next page. I have seen many small birds — Passerines, and I have grown a liking for them. Passerines are among my favourite birds. I like Passerines as they are so small and slender and hop around energetically. I remember having a liking for these small birds when I was still using an iPad to take my photos. When I first got my camera, I was fascinated with the Brown Thornbills living in our garden. I kept on being into these Passerines and in fact I was annoyed that ever since I go try camera I hadn’t been seeing many birds, which now seems like a lie to me because I haven’t ever seen a Golden Whistler before. I saw this bird first at this park near the “Pipe Bridge”, so my dad called it, and I didn’t want to go. (I generally don’t like the “Pipe Bridge”.) So my dad said I would have to go and I went hoping I’d

see at least one good bird species, and after a lot of complaining I was convinced that he wasn’t joking. So I dragged along. So one thing I’ve learned after always not wanting to go to places is that the places that I dread going to always turn out being the best, and the places that I beg to go to always turn out being horrible. One example was the Merri Creek Trail vs the “Pipe Bridge”. You can tell that the “Pipe Bridge” place was more successful.

List of Birds in Merri Creek Trail vs "Pipe Bridge" bush

Merri Creek Trail

Eastern Rosella, Chestnut Teal,
Dusky Moorhen, White-browed Scrubwren
Australian Magpie
Silvereye,

Pipe Bridge

Red-rumped Parrot, Rainbow Lorikeet,
Grey Fantail, Golden Whistler,
Brown Goshawk, Willie Wagtail,
White-browed Scrubwren Sulphur-crested
Cockatoo (only exciting species included).

It’s pretty obvious that the place I wanted to go to (Merri Creek Trail), supported only a few bird species, whereas the place I didn’t want to go was like the most exciting place on earth. I am a little worried that every time I want to go to a place, it will be horrible, and every time I don’t want to go to a place, it will be the best. I have been wanting to go to Weribee (Western Treatment Plant), which is supposed to be paradise for birdwatchers. The only thing that worries me is that I am really looking forward to go there, but I’ve learnt from past experience that when I look forward to something it ends up bad, so I’m worried that I will be looking forward to it for nothing. So I have been saying that Weribee will be horrible and I would hate to go there and it was so bad that you are making me go and that type of stuff. Anyway, I don’t get the fuss if it ends up good because of my complaining, because to me the only thing that matters is it’s good.



GREY FANTAIL

*its tail constantly
wagging for all it's worth
to attract a mate*

I have seen Grey Fantails uncommonly, maybe once every 4 months starting from the start of this year. The bird photographed right and below are at the same Pipe Bridge walk mentioned on the Golden Whistler page. I first saw these birds at my very own garden and was surprised to see them in such an urban area.

They were accompanied by some Brown Thornbills and were fluttering around. That was the time when I didn't have my camera, so I asked for my mum's phone and took many horrible photos as they were constantly moving. The best photo I could have got with my mum's phone wouldn't be very good. I was annoyed that I didn't get some good photos, and I didn't know that a few months later, I would have great photos of these unique birds. I haven't got good photos of Brown Thornbills, however, but I have got good photos of White-browed Scrubwren. I had trouble taking photos of the fantail — it kept on moving and I was having trouble following it. Finally I got a snapshot when it paused for a second and some better ones when it perched on a tree stump for about 10s. (Below and right). Fantails are among my favourite passerines, along with Finches, Firetails, Whistlers, Scrubwrens and Fairy-wrens. So I've seen these in my garden, the Blue Lake in Plenty Gorge, and the Pipe Bridge bushland walk. I like fantails and Willie Wagtails, however Willie Wagtails are not Wagtails but large Fantails, which to me is surprising as they actually wag their tails. As I like birds so much and can find so many species in just one place, I think as I grow up I will have better photos



of more exotic birds. I don't exactly go on walks to see birds as a main reason, it's because of the recent lockdown and you aren't allowed to walk out of 5k so I am lucky that I've got the Yarra River, Merri Creek, and lots of bushland along the river, all within 5k. My favourite is probably the Pipe Bridge (Passerine Walk place) and my second favourite is the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. There are many birds in many places , and probably the closest place that

has some decent birds is the Rockingham Close reserve that goes through the back of Rockingham Close (only a short walk on average 90 metres. Probably the most exciting thing there is the Eastern Spinebills. It's spectacular at sunset, as the sun goes down, bright orange and pink fill the sky and it's filled with tiny Spinebills. The only problem is that they're real hard to photograph and they fly really fast. The one that stayed still for the longest was one that was really generous and stayed for about 20 seconds while I got out my camera.

Unfortunately, it darted out of it's way and flew up really high to pollinate the gum blossoms.

If I was a bird, it would take 20 seconds to fly to that reserve from my house, but because humans can't just fly, they have to go around. Still, it's pretty convenient when you think about it because if somebody's garden wasn't made into a public strip of land, it wouldn't be worth going to because you'd have to go up a real steep hill, go down to the river, and then get a boat and cross to the other side, then hike through a lot of prickly plants that are sure to give you multiple wounds, no matter how experienced you are. Then finally you're up, and you feel like 'What's the point of hiking up? I was down by the river and there were more birds.'

And then you feel like you sort of don't have the strength to go back to your house which is just behind you but you have to do a huge loop to get to it. You just feel bad. So I think that's one benefit of that little public strip of land.



ROYAL SPOONBILL

Did I say that I didn't want to go to the Western Treatment Plant? It was really fabulous and I did look forward to it unlike I wrote. The