

Why I do Wollli bird surveys

There are quite a few reasons, but first let me tell you about the general program and where I do my survey. The Wollli Creek Preservation Society has nine small teams of bird surveyors up and down the Wollli valley and into the Bardwell valley. Once a month (at a time of their own choosing) these birders walk a particular route, taking about an hour and note down all the bird species they see and hear and in what numbers. Repeated monthly and eventually recorded on the Atlas of Living Australia, these observations are building up a picture of the changing birdlife of the two valleys. Citizen Science at work.

Not that there haven't been observations before and records go back to at least the 1940s. Many of these records are noted in *The Birds of Wollli Valley*, published by the Society and drawn from the records of Neil Rankin, locally known as the 'Birdman of Wollli Creek'. There have been lots of changes over the years with bird species being lost and gained, no doubt reflecting the changing habitat in the valley and in the surrounding suburbs and, more recently, due to the shift in plant species as bushcare work has proceeded along the valley since 2003 and before.

So there, straightaway is one reason for my involvement. I want to keep up the long-term records so that we can track the changes over time. I'm not a twitcher, running off to far corners to add another species to my list; I'm quite narrowly focussed on the local birdlife, both in my own garden and in the valley, and particularly in the bit patrolled by the team I am in.

This patch runs from the Hartill-Law bridge at Bardwell Park to the footbridge over Paperbark Creek below Bray Avenue. We typically clock up between 20 and 30 species, mainly native birds, in our hour, which is often extended because we will stop and examine plants and pull out weeds as well – we are all bushcarers in the team. Over time though, counting uncommon sightings, we have noted more than 60 species.

I'm not good at birdcalls and I'm glad that our team includes someone who knows lots of them, and that's a second reason for my doing surveys: I like to learn more about birds and build up my identification skills – around 25 regulars forms a manageable base and a novel species sends me scurrying to books to amplify what I have seen through binoculars. I compensate for my limited skills by being our field recorder.

But there's a final reason why I enjoy this form of involvement with the Wollli Valley. It gets me out early in the morning (around 7 am in the summer - though that is our choice) to see the valley when it often looks quite spectacular and different, and I know I would never make the effort if I didn't have an interesting and enjoyable commitment to meet.

Just a few examples of interesting sightings that we have had:

1. Around 50 Cockatoos strutting around the Bray Avenue lawns, digging up the bulbs of Guildford Grass (not really a grass and sometimes known as Plum Puddings!).
2. A small flock of Topknot Pigeons pottering around in the trees where Paperbark Creek emerges from beneath Bray Avenue.
3. A pair of Double-Barred Finches who nested and reared at least one youngster in a patch of bushland created largely by getting Council's agreement to stop mowing a patch of otherwise undistinguished lawn (known to us as Kunzea Patch 2) now a dense patch of native plants.
4. The local disappearance of House Sparrows, quite a common sighting a few years back.