

Birdlife

The survival of so many native birds in the Wollie Creek Valley is remarkable. As an isolated ribbon of bushland in a developed urban area, the Wollie Creek Valley is an attractive haven for birds. It provides food, shelter, a passageway and resting place for migratory species, and a niche for resident birds. Records show that 176 species of birds were recorded in the area between 1940 and 1999.



Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) Photo V. O'Brien
 Grey Butcher Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*) Photo V. O'Brien
 White-plumed Honeyeater (*Lichenostomus penicillatus*) Photo V. O'Brien
 Striated Heron (*Butorides striatus*) Photo G. Gatenby

THE WHIPBIRD RETURNS

In 1893 Alfred North mentioned the Eastern Whipbird as being tolerably common in the scrub undergrowth at Cooks River. However, Neil Rankin never recorded any in his surveys. In 1988, he noted that 'it would have been surprising to record these birds in the area'.

It was with great surprise when, in 2009, a local birdwatcher reported hearing a Whipbird in the valley. Since then it is often heard calling and scratching in the undergrowth.



The Wollie Creek Valley has long been important to Australian ornithological studies. As early as the late 1890s Alfred J North, the Australian Museum's ornithologist, observed birds and collected nests and eggs in the Wollie Creek and Cooks River areas. Other distinguished Australian ornithologists spent many hours studying birds in the valley, including Professor Allen Keast and Arnold McGill. Neil Rankin made his observations and records between 1970 and 1999 and today WCPS members undertake monthly surveys.

Neil Rankin 1923 - 2001

Many people knew Neil Rankin as the '**Birdman of Wollie Creek**'. He was a familiar figure as he carried out his regular birds surveys. His meticulous records proved invaluable evidence in the fight to save the Valley from the construction of the motorway. In 1989

he wrote *Birds of Wollie Creek*, which included his Bird Observation tables from 1970 to 1989 and Arnold McGill's records 1940 to 1969. After Neil's death in 2001, WCPS reprinted his book with additional material and survey results to 1999.



The late Gifford Eardley, a local historian writing in about 1968, was impressed by the variety of birdlife:

'...In and out amongst the reed beds are dab-chicks [grebes], dotterels and water hens, ...Spurwinged plover [Masked Lapwing], egret, heron, ibis, and other waterfowl are all acquainted with the pleasures of this proclaimed bird sanctuary ...Also heard is the plaintive two note call of the shy grass bird which symbolises the spirit and quietude of the Wollie Creek marshland.'

Pioneer Ornithologist

Alfred North (1855-1917), a distinguished ornithologist was Curator of Birds at the Australian Museum from 1890 to 1917. He made the first known records of the Valley's birdlife.

Public outcry in the 1890s over the decline of some species of native birds made the NSW Government introduce new legislation to protect them. North helped lead the charge and the Government requested that he recommend which native species should be protected. These efforts culminated in the *Bird Protection Act*, which was passed in 1901.



Neil Rankin talking to local school children Photo J. Finlason

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*) and Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*) Illustrations G. Gatenby, courtesy NSW NPWS