

THE BIRDOBSERVER

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*The Mystery of Bird Art
Precious Pinkerton
Yongergnow comes to life
Far North Queensland*

Bird Observers
Club of Australia

Helping today's birds survive tomorrow



PRECIOUS PLACES

Our Remnant Woodlands *by Daryl Akers*

Pinkerton Forest and Bush's Paddock are two small remnants of woodland near Melton, at Mount Cottrell in Victoria. Pinkerton Forest is an old growth Grey Box grassy woodland of 35 hectares, owned by Western Water. Nearby is Bush's Paddock, comprising 15 hectares, owned by the Shire of Melton. Part of Bush's Paddock is Grey Box grassy woodland, while the remainder is native grassland. These are managed jointly by Pinkerton Landcare and Environment Group, Western Water and Melton Shire to protect and

enhance their environmental integrity. Both these areas may only be visited by obtaining prior permission. BOCA conduct quarterly bird surveys at Pinkerton and Bush's, expertly led by Dave Torr (of the Werribee Wagtails) who compile, and constantly add to, an impressive list of birds observed. One hundred and four bird species have been recorded to date.

← Saving grassy woodland is not just a matter of saving and replanting the trees. When protecting the whole environment, it is just as important

to protect and regenerate the native grassland beneath the trees. Many species are dependent upon woodland for their survival. Unfortunately these, once so widespread west of Melbourne, are now greatly diminished and the remnants are fast disappearing. Consequently, the wildlife species that depend upon these habitats are also threatened and endangered.

One species depending upon grassy woodlands for its survival is the Diamond Firetail. This is a strikingly

The dry woodland landscape of Pinkerton and a photography opportunity for Alex Maisey (Photo S. Rochford)



beautiful bird that is unfortunately threatened (as is its habitat). We are fortunate in having numbers of Diamond Firetails (among many other species) in Pinkerton and Bush's Paddock. Other threatened birds found here include Brown Treecreepers and Jacky Winters. It is imperative that the few surviving remnants of woodland and grassy woodland be protected.

Many other birds make their homes in Pinkerton and Bush's Paddock. Some live here permanently, while others migrate from other places at various times of the year. Among these migrants are robins. These present a spectacular sight, especially as they visit during the darker months of autumn and winter. The male Scarlet Robin is unmistakable, with its bright scarlet breast contrasting boldly with its back of velvety black, usually seen accompanied by several brown coloured female partners. They are a common sight here during the colder months. Its rarer relative, the Flame Robin is also seen here. Unfortunately, robins are declining in numbers, probably due to habitat loss. The beautiful Superb Fairy-wren, well known and loved by everyone, is common here all year round, as is the similar sized Yellow-rumped Thornbill (with a more subdued brownish plumage and bright yellow rump). Many of the smaller birds such as these depend on low bushes (not just large trees) in which to find shelter for nesting and protection.

Parrots are a prominent feature of the woodlands, finding nesting sites in the many hollow trees, squabbling noisily with each other over nest sites. Eastern Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots are commonly seen, and Galahs are also a common sight, with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Corellas often seen flying overhead. The abundance of these parrots often causes us to overlook their brilliant colours.

Flying overhead are the majestic Wedge-tailed Eagles, searching the ground below for rabbits, their main source of food. Whistling Kites and Little Eagles similarly soar above the grasslands and woodlands, also on the hunt for rabbits. Other hawks, large and small, fly among and above the trees, hunting for prey. Kestrels and Black-shouldered Kites hover over the grassland looking for insects and small birds, while falcons course the skies at great speed with long pointed wings, hunting larger birds. The occasional White bellied Sea-eagle is sometimes seen flying



over the adjacent Western Water treatment plant, and the nearby Melton Reservoir.

A proud event recently was the nesting of a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles in Pinkerton in 2006, with the successful rearing of a nestling. The young bird achieved almost celebrity status, as bird lovers came from afar to take a photo of it. This was not always easy, as the young bird learned to keep about a hundred metres ahead of photographers, once it could fly. It is amazing how such a large bird can hide unseen in open woodland. However, it would fly into the air, calling loudly, whenever a parent bird appeared carrying a rabbit. A media release by Western Water celebrating the event was quickly followed by articles and colour photos in both local newspapers.

The range of habitats in and around Pinkerton and Bush's Paddock ensures a healthy population of native birds. The grassy woodland itself adjoins a



The celebrity Wedge-tailed eagle at left and in the banner. Below: A Diamond Firetail in the only green place in the whole area. Both birds were photographed at Pinkerton. Above: The Superb Fairy-wren found at Pinkerton. (Photos: S Rochford)



sizeable remnant of restored native grassland, while itself surrounded by farming and grazing land. The nearby Werribee River corridor and Eynesbury Forest, separated from the woodlands by the Western Water treatment plants (with a large collection of treatment ponds) also ensures a healthy diversity of bird life in and around these two precious reserves.

Daryl Akers is the Secretary of the Pinkerton Landcare & Environmental Group. Check out the group's web page at <http://www.pinkertonforest.com>