

May 2017 BirdWatch report

Our May bird surveys were held on Sunday 7th (7 sites) and 21st (2 sites). A total of 64 species was seen, rather less than the 75 species seen in May last year.

Regular cool-season visitors to the Merri grasslands, Flame Robins were seen at Bababi Djinanang (Fawkner) and Galgi Ngarrk (Craigieburn East).

Silveryeyes are more numerous in winter, including some that come across Bass Strait from Tasmania. Fifty-three were seen across four sites, compared with seventeen across two sites in February.

Native birds seen at every site were Magpie, Rainbow Lorikeet, and Red Wattlebird. The Common (European) Blackbird was also recorded at every site. On the other hand, 18 species were each recorded at only one site. Rainbow Lorikeet was the most numerous species (a count of 186), followed by Silver Gull (135), then Red Wattlebird (132) and Common Myna (113).

Species diversity and numbers of birds were lower at most sites in comparison with May 2016 and February 2017. The site with the highest diversity was Bababi Djinanang (32 species), followed by Galgi Ngarrk with 30 species. Galgi Ngarrk also had the highest count, an estimated total of 375 birds.

The calm conditions that prevailed on our May surveys and have continued through June are ideal for hearing bird calls. An article in the *Australian Birdlife* magazine (June 2017) explains that some familiar calls that sound as though they are given by a single bird are, in fact, sung by two different individuals singing different parts of the same song. This is known as antiphonal singing. At least three of the birds recorded in the May surveys are known to do this: Grey Butcherbirds, Magpie-larks and Noisy Miners. Male Magpie-larks often call “pee” and the female answers instantly with “wee”. They use visual cues to keep in time with each other. Both birds rhythmically open and lift their wings in time with the calls, flicking the tail up and down. The melodious tune of the Grey Butcherbird can involve two, or even three birds responding with particular phrases. So next time you hear a Magpie-lark or Butcherbird, check how many birds are actually calling.

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[Caption to photo:] One or two Little Pied Cormorants were recorded in five of the May surveys.
Photo: Peter Mollison