



Left: Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, photographer John French.

Above: White-browed Scrubwren, frequently bathes in Christine's birdbath.

MEDLOW BATH: What bird is that?

On our gentle ramble this week, Christine and I stopped for a breather and sat on some conveniently placed logs. We were enjoying the quiet of the bush, punctuated by the occasional bird call and our queries of: 'What bird is that?'.

Then I noticed a bit of activity on the slope opposite us and a small bird hopped up onto a tree stump and remained long enough for me to focus my binoculars. It had a jaunty, cocked tail, very wren like, do scrubwrens have cocked tails? It hopped down to forage on the ground and turned around - hmm, do scrubwrens have such a chestnut brown rump?

Its breast was streaked - do scrubwrens have streaked breasts? Ok, so check for a white brow, only a faint one. Wing marks? No. I think, 'This can't be a White-browed Scrubwren. There is a CHESTNUT-RUMPED HEATHWREN. Have to check when I get home'.

The bird moved on and so did we, feeling rewarded that sitting still and quiet for ten minutes had brought this bird to us. At home my ID is confirmed so now I feel elated. Why so? I have only seen this bird once before. It's not very common. These little bush experiences are good for the spirits during lockdown. (Sue)

Full moon at Virginia Beach



VIRGINIA BEACH, USA: a future virtual bushwalk

I arrived back in Virginia Beach in March 2020 to be close to family during knee surgery. This timing also corresponded with the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic. Virginia Beach is located in the south-eastern corner of Virginia, bordering the Atlantic Ocean. The average elevation of 12 feet above sea level supports a humid subtropical climate.

Cape Henry, where the English first landed in 1607, and First Landing State Park are only a stone's throw from where I live. The park has 20 miles of trails, 1.5 miles of sandy Chesapeake Bay beach frontage and many interesting habitats including bald cypress swamps, lagoons and maritime forest.

Initially I only walked with my trusty hiking poles to a bench on the sand's edge. Currently I've gleefully been cleared to walk on the sand and get my feet in the surf and will soon get back out to the trails in First Landing State Park. I'll invite TING walkers to come on a virtual walk with me there. (Huldah)

Photo left: Part of First Landing State Park's 2,888 acres and 1.5 miles of oceanfront

MEDLOW: Things we saw in the bush



On our gentle ramble this week, we were both a bit lethargic, maybe lockdown is getting to us, but being in the bush energised and inspired us.

Greenhood orchids. We spotted some orchids which Sue identified as *Pterostylis* species, probably *Pterostylis chocolatina*.

Sawflies. Black sawfly larvae huddled together on a small eucalypt and waved their tails in the air when we got too close. They had almost denuded the little tree. You never see them moving - do they feed at night? There are about 200 species of sawfly in Australia. This one feeds exclusively on Eucalyptus leaves. They are not caterpillars and sawflies are not flies – they are within the order Hymenoptera alongside ants, bees and wasps.

Baby bird. We heard the loud cry of a baby bird followed by a gurgle as it swallowed. It was in a eucalypt which had a broken

branch and obviously a hollow. Christine got a glimpse of a broad grey tail, straight across the end. It was a large bird.

A uncommon bird sighting. When we rested on a convenient log, there were suddenly birds all around us, individuals of one unidentified species were calling and answering one another. Sue was delighted with her sighting of a little bird she had seen only once before.

Praying mantid's oothecal. On the way back to the cars (we have to travel in two cars because of Covid restrictions), we found the egg sack of a praying mantid attached to a shrub. The oothecal (egg case) is soft foam which hardens after a few days. The babies emerge as miniature versions of the adults. There are about 118 species of praying mantid in Australia. They are ambush predators with lightning-fast moves. They spent a lot of their time motionless with forelegs outstretched awaiting prey, a posture which inspired the name. They are amazing - read <https://www.treehugger.com/wondrous-facts-about-praying-mantises-4858807>

(Sue and Christine)



KANIMBLA VALLEY: a wombat story

Meet Ernie and Candy, two orphaned wombats raised by my neighbour Anna. Anna is a registered wildlife carer and WIRES volunteer. Cathy Cavanagh's article in Blue Mountains Conservation Society's Hut News (September 2020), which she wrote after meeting Anna, gives a bit of background to Anna's work.

I saw Anna while on my morning walk. She was walking in their front paddock with Ernie and Candy trotting along behind just like dogs. Ernie is apparently a bit of a bully.

Some of the wombats Anna has raised are happily living in the neighbourhood on about 30 hectares of good wombat country. They often visit here at night – one can tell as they are compulsive diggers.

(Rosemary)

WENTWORTH FALLS PICNIC AREA: Silence is Golden

I had Jamison lookout to myself, peaceful and quiet. Similar to around twenty-five, thirty, years ago. Then they built a car park, got rid of the wood barbecues. The hordes arrived. Walkers, tourist coaches, day trippers. Some came for five, possibly ten minutes, photo and gone. Maybe longer if I should start up a conversation.

Found a table close to this shelter. How long has it been here I wondered. Who has sat in it. Weary bushwalkers, soaked, young lovers. Sign pointing to Den Fenella.

Had made my lunch, cheese and Tasmanian pickle sandwiches, sausage, cake, grapes and iced green tea. Nobody came along in the hour I was there. Apart from the buzzing of the flies, Sulphur Crested Cockatoo and Red Wattle bird, so very quiet, peaceful on my own with my thoughts.

Then the Pied Currawong dropped in, or should one say down. Looking for a morsel, he was out of luck and told him so. Strutting around watching me with those 'beady eyes', not my term. That's what a neighbour told me once. He would disappear briefly and come back again. The eyes are lovely, searching for some sort of response. The Australian Magpie is similar, as far as getting up close and personal. Magpie wins on that account. Very sociable, rather nice.

Time to leave. Brief stop at the Jamison lookout. Still deserted. Then the call of the Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoo. Six flew across the Valley.

Reminded me of something similar over twenty years ago, start of Darwin's Walk. Thirty or forty flew out of the trees. That was special. (Ron)



SPRINGWOOD: Birdwood Gully

These amazing sandstone formations have chalk marks where people go bouldering. I've not seen anything quite as complex as this eroded rock structure.

The painted rock was found by a little girl on a rock hunt. Apparently there's a Facebook group encouraging children to paint a rock, join the hunt, find a rock and replant and map it. I thought it a good way to encourage youngsters to have fun on a bushwalk (Katriona)





WENTWORTH FALLS: New life unfolding

This magnificent old oak tree spreads its branches over the path I walk most days, along Falls Rd to the escarpment. In every season, it is awe-inspiring and beautiful. This morning the new leaves it is putting out as the weather warms seemed to me something of a metaphor for the new life unfolding for me now as I learn how to live alone, though not lonely.

(Robin)

MIDDLE HARBOUR: Harold Reid Reserve

Today it is overcast, a little sombre. It has many moods. It is a relatively peaceful spot - apart from all the other walkers. The water has many hues from turquoise to grey blue. In the distance is Innesfallen Castle, Castle Cove.

Fungi on a fallen tree trunk in the reserve. The reserve is a peaceful retreat from the hustle of Sydney and is largely natural.

Spring flowers in a neighbour's garden. I delight in the floral displays I pass on my walks but not enough of a botanist to be able to name them all.

The virtual walks have brightened my lockdown days. (Nuala)

