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★NEXT MEETING – THURSDAY MAY 12★

## CREATING HABITAT FOR SMALL BIRDS



Come along and hear how to create habitat for small birds in the bushland and in your backyard.

Photos: ©Chris Wiley

**GUEST SPEAKER JUTTA GODWIN** is a naturalist with strong ties to the catchments of Brisbane's Inner West. Her many years of involvement with the Cubberla-Witton Catchments Network have always had a focus on protecting biodiversity through habitat repair and enhancement and on the establishment of wildlife corridors, a task of particular importance in urbanised areas.

Small, delicate birds are increasingly disappearing from urban areas, the main reason being that people with buildings and



backyards have altered their habitats. Often the changes favour noisy miners and other 'bully birds'.

Jutta will give us some ideas on how to bring back the small birds by altering our backyards and other urban spaces.

**DATE: THURSDAY 12TH MAY 2016**

**PLACE:** Mt Ommaney Library Meeting Room, Dandenong Road, Mt Ommaney

**TIME:** 7.15 for 7.30 pm then join us for supper

**BE INFORMED • BE THERE • ALL WELCOME • IT'S FREE!**



### THE FINE PRINT

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## THE PHEASANT COUCAL

Cuckoos (birds in the Family Cuculidae) are an odd bunch. The European Cuckoo, of German cuckoo clock fame, is renowned for its disregard for parental responsibilities. Domestic duties such as building nests, incubating eggs or feeding chicks are cleverly avoided by laying their eggs in the active nests of any one of over a hundred unsuspecting host species. Such parasitic breeding habits are adopted by the majority of cuckoo species that inhabit Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia. However, not all cuckoos do this. Most American cuckoos, including the famous Roadrunner – yes, this is not just a Warner Bros. cartoon character – rear their own offspring. The same is true for quite a few species found all over the world, including those with wonderful, exotic names as Anis, Malkohas and Couas.

Of the 12 species of cuckoo that breed in Australia, all but one are parasitic. They range from the sparrow-sized Little Bronze-cuckoo, which lays its eggs in the nests of gerygones, to the enormous, toucan-like Channel-billed Cuckoo, which lays its eggs in crows' nests. It's not easy to stand out from the crowd in this diverse bird family, yet there is one Australian cuckoo that does just that.

The Pheasant Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*) is very much the 'black sheep' among the Australian cuckoos, and not just because its breeding plumage is mostly black!



Pheasant Coucals are about the size of a small hen, and

have long tails that give them their superficial resemblance to a pheasant. They are the only Australian cuckoos to accept their parental responsibilities, building nests and tending to their chicks. They are also the only Australian cuckoo to feed and live almost exclusively on the ground, and to be opportunistic predators, hunting prey as large as skinks, frogs and small birds. They live in dense, often swampy, undergrowth, in which they make small tunnels through the long grass, rank weeds and lantana. The genus *Centropus* (from Greek *kentron*, spike and *pous*, foot) is named for the long claw on their hind toe, used for scrambling across the ground and through dense vegetation. In fact, their adaptation to life crawling through the undergrowth means that Pheasant Coucals don't look much like a cuckoo at all, and one could be excused for thinking they were some sort of fowl.

Living in dense undergrowth, Pheasant Coucals are usually only seen when they scamper clumsily across roads or clamber into low trees to call. However, the loud, deep, booming 'woop, woop woop' call will be a familiar summer sound to most Brisbane residents, even if they don't know the identity of the creator. Brisbane residents with densely planted and established gardens might also be lucky enough to have Pheasant Coucals visit from time to time. Usually this happens in dry periods when the grassy understory in local creeks and parks dies off. At such times, dense thickets in nearby gardens may provide important refuges.

Given the dry summer we've just experienced, it is worth keeping an eye out in your garden for a large, clumsy cuckoo skulking quietly through the shrubbery, and reflect on the oddity that is the Pheasant Coucal. - **Chris Wiley** Photo © Chris Wiley

## I AIN'T AFRAID OF NO SNAKES ...

... at least, not the Green Tree python, (*Morelia viridis*)!

You know the scenario: you finally get around to tidying the messy corner at the back of the block, you're mattocking away happily to hit songs of the '80s when out of the corner of your eye you see something that's not a blue-tongue, however much you might want it to be... Or you're out for a stroll with the dog and it suddenly stops and despite the trusting look in its liquid brown eyes, you must ignominiously turn and flee ... very slowly.



Or worse, you're on your much-awaited Grey Nomad trip to the outback, it's a lovely day for a desert walk and you find yourself being eyeballed in a none-too-friendly fashion by something that resembles the sash from an old dressing gown you had as a child. You pray that it's only that non-venomous introduced pest, the American Corn Snake (*Pantheropsis guttata*) ...

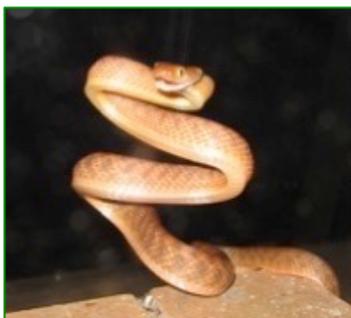


Never fear, OZZY SNAKES is here. This free, stand-alone app means it's all there in your phone or i-pad, no need to fret about not getting a connection. It's searchable by geographic region or snake name and appearance using thumbnails, then each entry opens out to photos (sampled here) that mean there's no confusing your Common Tree Snake (*Dendrolaphis punctulata* - stinky but cute-looking and harmless) with your Crack-dwelling whipsnake (*Demansia rimicola* - one to be avoided at all costs, by the sound of it).

You'll find detailed information about where each snake lives and its habits and, if you ignore this, there's comprehensive first aid advice, and graphic descriptions of how you'll feel if bitten, and your chances of survival.

In a quiet snake-free moment you can follow the links to the source documents the app relies on, or try your hand at the quiz. This herpetological heads-up was made by Adrian Gough, it's in the app store, and it's absolutely free.

Imagine, if one day you should need it, the pleasure of being able to phone the snake-catcher and calmly say 'Good day. There seems to be a Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*) staring at me through the bathroom window. Yeah – better get here as fast as you can, mate, the poor thing looks as if it's had a bit of a fright.' **ys**



## ANOTHER ONE FOR THE DIARY

### WHAT'S THAT? A CHILDREN'S MORNING??!!



Yes, you got it right,

**Pooh Corner Environment Centre**  
**Saturday 4th June 2016 , 9.00 am - 12 noon**  
For children 8 - 12 years, \$10.00 per child  
★★★★★

- **MAKE** a gift card with natural leaves, grasses, seeds, and pressed flowers
- **ENJOY** a short nature walk
- **CREATE** a wall hanging with interesting things collected on our walk



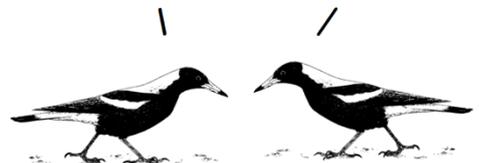
Photo@YSanz

More information coming later.  
Inquiries to Di Ruffles 3376 7737 or  
Shealagh Walker 3376 1287

★★

*they reckon  
us mags  
never fergit a face, eh?*

*tell yer the truth Mate,  
them humans all look alike  
ter me!*



**magpies!**

## COUCAL TRAIL AND PULLEN REACH, WESTLAKE



*A view to the south-west from the Coucal Trail. Pullen Reach is in the foreground, while Popes Reach is visible in the background where it recedes upstream.*

This article is the first in a series in which CDEA will profile local places of interest. In this article, we focus on Pullen Reach of the Brisbane River, Westlake. This was the site of the Centenary Suburbs' first environmental action for riverfront bushland protection, conducted with the formation in September 1991 of our first environmental group for the area, Save Our Riverfront Bushland (SORB). In 1999, a walking path upgrade was completed and named the Coucal Trail.

**The Coucal Trail** is a popular walk, for nearby residents and visitors alike, along Pullen Reach of the Brisbane River in Westlake. It meanders for a length of about 850 metres from Balaton Street in the south to Tennent Street in the north.

Passing through native bushland described as 'dry forest', the walk offers great views of the river and passes below an imposing exposed rock face located below Barcoorah Street. There are various intermediate access points along Barcoorah and Callabonna Streets.



*An aerial oblique view of Pullen Reach, looking north. Westlake is on the right and Coucal Trail runs most of the length of the riverfront bushland. The confluence of Pullen Pullen Creek is visible on the left bank of the river on the Pinjarra Hills side.*

The walking trail was named by the Green Corps<sup>1</sup> team of young men and women who constructed the first 400 m section of path from Balaton St to Callabonna St between December 1998 and May 1999. Because of their affection towards the Pheasant Coucal<sup>2</sup> bird, with its haunting "hoot-hoot" calls echoing and greeting them each day, they named it the Coucal Trail.

The SORB newsletter No. 12 of August 1999<sup>3</sup> has several articles written at the time, including personal observations by one of the Green Corps team members.

In the mid 2000s, the Coucal Trail was extended from Callabonna Street to its present-day access point near Tennent St.

Pullen Reach<sup>4</sup> is a one-kilometre long, nominally north-south reach of the Brisbane River, stretching from Riverview Close in the south to Wendouree Crescent in the north. It was named for the confluence with the Brisbane River of Pullen Pullen Creek on the Pinjarra Hills side of the river midway along this reach.

Most users of the Coucal Trail along Pullen Reach, as they amble along enjoying the bush and taking in the views, would be unaware of the historical connections of this and neighbouring stretches of the Brisbane River.

### Aboriginal history

The outcropping sandstone ledges, cliffs and slopes of the Westlake side of Pullen Reach offer some hints to expert eyes of this location's linkage with past Aboriginal use of the area.<sup>5</sup>

Various observations have been made in the last couple of decades. In the early 1990s, grooves were found in rock ledges below the Coucal Trail indicative of rock sharpening use. In the late 1990s these were shown to a visiting member of the Jagera people who confirmed that possibility.

In the mid-1990s, the late Mr Neville Bonner AO, a Jagera elder and former senator, visited Pullen Reach to inspect the rock face and cave. Uncle Neville declared it as a

"significant site", having observed evidence suggesting its seasonal use for male initiation ceremonies.

More recently, a visiting botanist and expert in Aboriginal artefacts found split stone fragments at a location on the Westlake side of Pullen Reach indicative of Aboriginal tool-making.<sup>6</sup>



*Pullen Reach (Westlake side) as viewed downstream from a canoe trip in May 2000.*

### European exploration history<sup>7</sup>

Historical references recorded for the first European explorations of the Brisbane River at Pullen Reach and its neighbouring stretches, upstream and downstream, commenced with John Oxley's first visit in 1823. In his return visit in 1824, he had with him Allan Cunningham, a botanist. There were further exploratory journeys upstream by Edmund Lockyer (1825) and Charles Fraser (1828).

Oxley went ashore at upstream end of Popes Reach, near present-day Birkin/Lather Roads, Bellbowrie (a kilometre upstream from Pullen Reach). His field book records in part "... ascended the bank. The country was very open and generally to be called quite level ... The soil a rich, sandy loam; gum and apple trees".

The chart drawn by Lieutenant Stirling to accompany Oxley's report to Governor Brisbane in January 1824 clearly shows the confluence of Pullen Pullen Creek with Pullen Reach of the river, though neither was named then. The map's annotation in this vicinity, on the Westlake-Wacol side, was "Fine open country; gentle hills and vallies (sic)" while the opposite side bore the description "rich flats of land".

Allan Cunningham was a botanist on Oxley's second trip upstream along the Brisbane River in December 1824. His journal refers to leaving westwards from what we now know as Mount Ommaney (the hill) above Summit Close in the suburb of the same name.

Referring to Pullen Reach, Cunningham's journal continues "again the River takes a bend from the Southward, the banks become lower, which abound in Hibiscus heterophyllus and a Casuarina, the Crinum observed in the lower Reaches of the River, being here very general on the mud flats on each side which at the present low level of this water are partially dry".

These botanical observations link those explorers to the present day. The plant species that he mentions in his observations, Hibiscus heterophyllus (Native Rosella or Native Hibiscus) and the Crinum lily (Crinum pedunculatum) remain part of the native vegetation along Pullen Reach to this day.

So, what are you waiting for? Get out and sample this fine example of Centenary Suburbs' many nature walks. Enjoy the bushland, birdlife and river vistas, while absorbing the sense of the past history and occupation of Pullen Reach!

- **Ed Parker**

Acknowledgements: Photos and map © Ed Parker. Aerial view extracted from Google Earth 2005.

References and links:

<sup>1</sup> SORB, Mar 1999: Green Corps project Dec 1998 – May 1999: <http://www.sorb.org.au/resources/nl11/greencorps.htm>

<sup>2</sup> SORB, Jul 1999: Pheasant Coucal article July 1999: <http://www.sorb.org.au/nwatch/04coucal.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> SORB, Aug 1999: Various articles in SORB newsletter No.12, Aug 1999: <http://www.sorb.org.au/resources/NL12.PDF>

<sup>4</sup> DRNM: Pullen Reach place name: [https://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/qld/environment/land/place-names/search#/search=Pullen%20Reach&types=0&place=Pullen\\_Reach48200](https://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/qld/environment/land/place-names/search#/search=Pullen%20Reach&types=0&place=Pullen_Reach48200)

<sup>5</sup> Pers. comm. Ed Parker, who was present for the two separate visits of Uncle Neville and Caroline Bonner as representatives of the Jagera people.

<sup>6</sup> Pers. comm. Ed Parker 2015.

<sup>7</sup> SORB, 1996: Early European Exploration of the Brisbane River: <http://www.sorb.org.au/resources/history/index.htm>

Related references are:

Steele, JG; 1972. The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District 1770-1830. University of Queensland Press.

Davie, P et al; 1990. The Brisbane River - a Sourcebook for the Future. Australian Littoral Society, Queensland Museum.



*Map below shows the original Coucal Trail completed in May 1999. The path now extends north to Tennent Street.*