BIRDS
of the Maribyrnong Valley

FRIENDS OF THE MARIBYRNONG VALLEY INC.
INTRODUCTION
Melbourne’s long forgotten river, the Maribyrnong is enjoying a rebirth.
Local people and others are increasingly recognizing the beauty and variety of the River's environment, its fascinating history and its great potential for recreation.
There is also a growing awareness of the abuses the River and the Valley have suffered in the past, and a determination to restore and protect them.
This book is published with State Government assistance by Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley Incorporated.
One of the objectives of this group is to promote a greater interest in and concern for the Maribyrnong Valley, and to encourage more people to discover what it has to offer in passive and active recreation.
We hope that this book will successfully introduce you to bird observing, and at the same time, stimulate an interest in the potential of the Maribyrnong Valley.
It is important that people develop a pride in this Valley, and become responsible users of a most valuable asset.
This in turn will assist the survival of our bird population, without which an important part of our natural heritage would be endangered.

FRIENDS OF THE MARIBYRNONG VALLEY INC.
SIXTY BIRDS OF THE MARIBYRNONG VALLEY

In this book there are illustrated fifty native and ten non-native birds which you are likely to observe in various parts of the Maribyrnong Valley. These have been drawn with great care in characteristic postures, with backgrounds of habitats which should aid identification. The arrangement of species of the fifty native birds follows the current listings by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. These listings are adhered to by the majority of authors of publications on birds, and the practice has been adopted in this book so that you may become familiar with the order in which you will generally find birds presented. The non-native birds have been included at the end of the illustrations.

Many novices may not know which are our native birds, or be aware that some non-native species deprive native birds of nesting places, and at times, by their numbers and aggression, of food and water. Admittedly, some native birds are also aggressive, and well they might be, for it should be remembered that all of the Valley was once available for their territories.

The fact is that the dwindling forests are providing fewer nesting holes which are important to many native birds such as Parrots, Cockatoos, Lorikeets, Rosellas, Kingfishers, Kookaburras. In addition, Starlings are spreading into rural areas in large numbers and taking over nesting holes. Blackbirds compete in urban areas with native birds such as Wattlebirds and other honeyeaters for insects especially during the breeding season. They, too, are seen more often in rural areas where they compete with native birds for nesting sites in low thick foliage, and for available insects and fruit on which many small native birds like Silver-eyes, Robins and Fantails feed.

Therefore, if our native birds are to thrive, introduced species should not be encouraged.
The following is a guide to the texts used with bird illustrations:

**Names** Owing to some confusion in the past relating to the use of common or vernacular names which varied with location and time, the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union produced a list of recommended universal names. These recommended names are used throughout this book. If an alternative name is in general use this name is given also, in brackets. The scientific name is shown in italics.

**Length** The length of the bird, in millimetres, is the average measurement from the tip of the bill to the tip of the tail.

**Colour** Any differences between the sexes or between juveniles and adults are given. If no mention is made of sex or juveniles this indicates that they are alike.

**Status** This describes the frequency of occurrence of the species in the lower Maribyrnong Valley. In this book the birds have been classified as follows: Very common, common, uncommon, or rare. Where birds are only seasonal visitors, the season when they normally visit is also given. Visitors can cause some confusion. They may be either migrants (seasonal) or nomads, migrants being birds that arrive each year and stay to breed, rear their young and then depart. The Clamorous Reed-Warbler and Sacred Kingfisher are examples. Nomads tend to wander from one area of their preferred habitat to another, staying perhaps overnight. Waders such as herons, ibis and spoonbills fall into this category, as well as ducks and grebes. Vagrants are those which wander in rarely.

**Habitat** This lists the type of habitat commonly used by the species.

**Food** The usually preferred food is given under this heading, but many birds will sometimes be seen enjoying a varied diet.

**Remarks** These are general comments on comparative size, calls, breeding and characteristic behaviour. Where confusion in identification is possible, the similar or confusible species are listed.
Stylised drawings showing terms used in bird descriptions.
### Other birds you may see or hear in the Maribyrnong Valley

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AUSTRALASIAN GREBE (Little Grebe, Dabchick)
*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*
245mm. Summer: Dark brown upperparts, pale grey underparts, blackish head; black neck with chestnut wash; yellow spot on face near bill. Winter: Much duller, greyer neck.
**Status** Common
**Habitat** Wetlands, streams, water with depth
**Food** Small pond-life
**Similar species** Hoary-headed Grebe, which has white-streaked rounded head in summer and is very similar to Australasian Grebe in winter.
**LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT** (Little Black Shag)
*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*

600mm. Black face, bill and body; purple-green gloss on wings.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Wetlands, streams

**Food** Fish, yabbies pond life

**Remarks** All black, about size of Pacific Black Duck, but smaller than Great Cormorant. Often fishes in very active parties. Often flies in large flocks. Roosts with other species of cormorants.

**Similar species** Great Cormorant, which has yellowish bill and throat.
LITTLE PIED CORMORANT (Little Pied Shag)
Phalacrocorax melanoleucus
580mm. Black crown. forehead, upperparts and tail; white underparts including thighs; pale yellow bill and face; breast sometimes stained brown.

Status Common
Habitat Wetlands, streams
Food Fish. yabbies, pond-life
Remarks About size of Pacific Black Duck. Tends to be in small groups but roosts with other cormorants after feeding. The bill, as in all cormorants, is hooked at tip to seize prey which is swallowed head first. Often fishes in smallest of ponds.
Similar species Pied Cormorant, which is larger and has black thighs.
PACIFIC HERON (White-necked Heron)  
*Ardea pacifica*  
750-1000mm. Large glossy black bird with white head and neck; black spots down neck front; white patches on leading edge of wings, clearly visible in flight; long dark legs and black bill. Has maroon plumes on back and wings in breeding season. Feeds along waters edge or on marshy shallows, usually alone. Flies with slew, stately wing beats with neck folded.  
**Status** Uncommon  
**Habitat** River edges, swamps or wet grasses  
**Food** Frogs, fish, small reptiles  
**Remarks** Similar stance to but larger than White-faced Heron. Only call is a single croak.
WHITE-FACED HERON (Blue Crane)
*Ardea novaehollandiae*

675mm. Grey body and long neck; white face, long yellow legs; pointed dark bill; pink-buff breast plumes. Juvenile: Less white on face.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Wetlands, grasslands, streamsides, mudflats

**Food** Fish, frogs, aquatic and land insects, yabbies

**Remarks** Tall, slim species usually seen in shallows, mudflats and pad-docks. Perches in trees. In flight, neck drawn back on chest and two-tone grey underwing is visible. Guttural croak. Breeds locally in big trees, not always near water. Nest is a shallow saucer of twigs. Also known incorrectly as "Blue Crane". It is not a crane.

**Similar species** Pacific Heron, which has larger, blackish body, white head and neck.
GREAT EGRET (White Egret)

_Egretta alba_

800mm. White head, long neck and body; long black legs; long pointed yellow bill which is black during breeding season.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Wetlands, streamsides

**Food** Fish, frogs, large insects

**Remarks** Larger than White-faced Heron. A tall, slim, solitary species standing rigidly in shallows ready to spear prey with long bill. Perches on bare branches. Flies with slow wing-beats and neck folded back. Develops filmy plumes on back in spring. Harsh croak. Nest is a scanty platform of sticks in tree-top colony over water.

**Similar species** Cattle Egret, which is smaller and dumpier.
RUFOUS NIGHT HERON (Nankeen Night-heron)

*Nycticorax caledonicus*

600mm. Chestnut back; black cap and long bill; cream underparts; greenish legs and skin above eye. Juvenile: Brownish, heavily spotted and streaked.

**Status** Uncommon

**Habitat** Wetlands, strearnsides

**Food** Fish, frogs, small mammals, aquatic insects

**Remarks** More squat, shorter necked than common herons.

Usually roosts in groups by day in thick foliage of trees. Emerges at dusk for nightly hunt in shallows and paddocks. Much croaking and cackling. Breeds locally.

**Similar species** Australasian (Brown) Bittern, which skulks in reeds, is rarely seen and is similar in appearance to immature Rufous Night-heron.
**SACRED IBIS** (White Ibis)

*Threskiornis aethiopica*

720mm. Black bill; bare black head, dark legs and rump plumes, dingy white body. Juvenile: Feathered black head

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Grasslands, wetlands

**Food** Grasshoppers, grubs, pond-life

PACIFIC BLACK DUCK (Black Duck)  
*Anas superciliosa*

550mm. Brown body, scalloped on underparts; whitish eyebrow and cheeks; green flash on upper wing; dark line through eye; white under wing in flight.  
**Status** Common  
**Habitat** Wetlands, grasslands, streamsides  
**Food** Water-weeds, seeds, in-sects, snails, worms  
**Similar species** Grey Teal, which has no eyebrow; female Chestnut Teal, which has no facial pattern. Both of these species smaller.
GREY TEAL
*Anas gibberifrons*
410mm. Grey-brown body, marbled on upperparts; whitish chin; small white wing patch in flight.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Wetlands, streamsides

**Food** Water-weeds, seeds, pond-life


**Similar species** Pacific Black Duck, and female Chestnut Teal, which is darker with dark chin.
BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE
*Elanus notatus*

350mm. Silver-grey back; white head and underparts; black about eye, bill and shoulder.
Juvenile: Rufous wash on head and breast.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Grasslands, woodlands

**Food** Small birds, mammals, reptiles, large insects

**Remarks** There are usually a few of these elegant hawks in the district. At first sight looks similar to a Silver Gull in size and colour. Attracts attention as it hovers over grasslands or sits conspicuously on a pole or bare topmost twigs of a tree. Nests locally, sometimes in autumn, using large stick-nest.
**BROWN GOSHAWK** (Australian Goshawk)  
*Accipiter fasciatus*

Male 400mm. Female: 550mm. Slaty-brown upperparts, rufous underparts finely barred. Juvenile: Brown blotched and streaked underparts.  
**Status** Uncommon  
**Habitat** Woodlands, streamsides  
**Food** Small birds and mammals, large insects  
**Remarks** Female much larger than male. Hunts along hedges and through woodlands, usually below canopy. Sometimes circles on high, when rounded wings and long, strongly barred tail are noticeable. Prefers to perch among leaves. Nests locally in bulky stick-nests.  
**Similar species** Brown Falcon, which has facial "tear-drop" and no chest barring.
LITTLE EAGLE
*Hieracetus morphnoides*

Male: 480mm. Female: 550mm. Larger than Brown Goshawk, with long feathered legs, square-cut tail, partial crest on nape. Soars with flat wings and tail fanned. Underwing pattern diagnostic.

**Status** Uncommon

**Habitat** Open woodlands, usually near water, timber along rivers

**Food** Small birds, rodents, large insects

**Remarks** Builds quite a large stick-nest very high in tree. Similar species Whistling Kite, which has more prominent wing-tip - fingers- and longer tail.
AUSTRALIAN HOBBY (Little Falcon)
*Falco longipennis*
Male: 300mm. Female: 350mm. Black cap and face; dark grey upperparts, whitish half collar and chin; rufous underparts with darker streaks; yellow legs.

**Status** Uncommon

**Habitat** Woodlands, streamsides and suburban parks

**Food** Small birds and mammals, large insects

**Remarks** Bold, dashing hunter about size of Crimson Rosella. Female larger than male. With long, pointed, scythe-shaped wings, catches prey by sheer speed of flight. Uses high bare branches as look-outs. Nests locally, using old stick-nests of magpie or raven.

**Similar species** Australian Kestrel, which is rufous above.
BROWN FALCON
*Falco berigora*

Male: 400mm. Female: 500mm. Brown above, whitish underparts and brown "trousers". A very dark brown phase is not uncommon. Long up-turned wings in flight and long tail.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Open woodlands and cleared areas

**Food** Small birds, mammals and large insects

**Remarks** Sometimes seen on city fringes, Rough stick-nest smaller than that of a Goshawk. A common urban raptor. Breeds locally.

**Similar species** Brown Goshawk (juvenile), brown blotched and streaked underparts.
AUSTRALIAN KESTREL (Nankeen Kestrel)
*Falco cenchroides*
Male: 320mm. Grey head and tail; rufous back; whitish underparts; black band near end of tail most obvious when hovering. Female: 350mm, Brown upperparts; tail light rufous brown and finely barred.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Grasslands and woodlands, built-up areas

**Food** Small mammals, birds, reptiles, insects

**Remarks** Female larger than the male as in most hawks. This dainty hawk hovers over paddocks with rapidly-beating wings and long fanned tail, and plummets down, feet first, to seize prey with the talons. Looks very pale viewed front-on but rufous on back. Roosts and nests on ledges of buildings and quarries, also in hollow trees and abandoned nests of other birds. Breeds locally. Similar species Black-shouldered Kite, which is white and black; Australian Hobby, darker, stronger and faster flyer.
DUSKY MOORHEN

_Gallinula tenebrosa_

380mm. Sooty black body; orange-red bill and facial shield, legs and feet; two white shafts under tail. Juvenile: Green bill.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Wetlands, streamsides, streams

**Food** Vegetable matter, pond-life

**Remarks** Same size as Eurasian Coot; flicks tail, swims about pecking food from water surface, or grazes on banks. Rarely dives. Prefers still waters. Discordant shrieks. Breeds locally, building cup-shaped nest of water-weeds in reedbeds at water level.

**Similar species** Coot, which has white bill and facial shield; Purple Swamphen, larger and purplish.
**EURASIAN COOT** (Coot)

*Fulica atra*

380mm. Black body including undertail; white bill and facial shield; long grey legs and lobed toes.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Wetlands, streamsides, streams

**Food** Vegetable matter, pond-life


**Similar species** Dusky Moorhen, and Purple Swamphen, which has red bill and white undertail.
MASKED LAPWING (Spur-winged Plover)  
Vanellus miles  
375mm. Black cap, nape, side of breast; yellow facial mask and wattles; brown upperparts; white underparts and rump; long reddish legs. Small yellow spur at shoulder.  
**Status** Common  
**Habitat** Grasslands, wetlands  
**Food** Insects, seeds, grubs  
**Remarks** Smaller than Australian Magpie; prefers wet feet; pairs or small parties frequent grassy paddocks or edges of swamps. Very noisy and aggressive. Often flies at night with strident repeated call. Breeds locally from July onwards. Nest is a scrape on the ground with some grass stems or pieces of dung.
**BLACK-FRONTED PLOVER** (Black-fronted Dotterel)

*Charadrius melanops*

170mm. Brown cap and streaked back; black forehead, line through eye; red eye-ring; "V" on breast; white throat and abdomen; long dull orange legs; reddish beak. Juvenile: Duller; no "V".

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Wetlands, grasslands

**Food** Insects, seeds

**Remarks** Smaller but longer-legged than Common Starling. Usually in pairs on muddy edges of ponds or bare ground nearby. Difficult to see because of camouflage. Runs very quickly; frequently bobs head. In flight, a large white patch shows in the broad wings. Chattering "chit, chit" call, often at night. Nests locally on a scrape of bare ground away horn water.
**SILVER GULL**
*Larus novaehollandiae*

410mm. Pale grey back; white head, neck, rump and underparts; red bill, legs and eye-ring. Juvenile: Black eye, bill, legs; brown mottled back.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Wetlands, grasslands, built-up areas

**Food** Insects, seeds, berries, eggs, nestlings, food scraps

**Remarks** Wandering far and wide, flocks frequently fly over en route from coastal roosting grounds to garbage dumps and ploughed paddocks. Commonly seen on river banks and any open area. Frequently known as "Seagull" but is found far inland. Breeds locally.
CRESTED TERN
*Sterna bergii*

460mm. White forehead and breast; paler grey underparts, darker grey back and wings; shaggy black crown, black nape; straw-yellow bill; dark legs. Juvenile: Blackish grey, mottled above.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Streams and banks

**Food** Dives spectacularly for small fish.

**Remarks** Singly or in small groups flying swiftly and gracefully along tidal section of river, Narrow wings and forked tail.
**GALAH**

*Cacatua roseicapilla*

360mm. Grey back, tail; paler grey rump; pale pink crown, short crest; rose pink underparts.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Seeds, nuts, bulbs, fruit

**Remarks** Occasionally larger flocks of these handsome cockatoos appear, attracted by ploughed fields or fruiting trees. Call "willie-willock" as well as screeching. Sometimes seen on suburban reserves. Nests in hollow trees.
SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO (White Cockatoo)
*Cacatua galerita*
500mm. White body; long yellow erectile crest; black bill.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands, forest

**Food** Seeds, nuts, bulbs, berries, fruit

**Remarks** Always some to be seen. Numbers seem to increase seasonally. Extremely noisy with raucous screeches. Very destructive. Move about in flocks raiding nut and fruit trees or digging for seed corms and bulbs in fields. Nest in hollow trees.
CRIMSON ROSELLA

*Platycercus elegans*

350mm. Crimson head, rump and underparts; mottled red and black back; blue cheeks, wings and tail. Juvenile: Green; blue cheeks; red blotches on crown and body

**Status** Uncommon

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests

**Food** Seeds, fruit, berries

**Remarks** Sometimes known as the "Red Lowry", it is a little larger than the white-cheeked Eastern Rosella. Small parties appear in winter probably coming from the ranges to avoid the cold. Green juveniles can cause problems in identification but are larger and broader-tailed than Red-rumped Parrots and lorikeets, and always have blue cheeks. Bell-like call, as well as harsher chattering. Nests in hollow trees.
RED-RUMPED PARROT (Red-backed Parrot)

*Psephotus haematonotus*

270mm.

Male: Bright green head, back and breast; red rump yellow abdomen. Female: Dull green including abdomen and rump.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Grasslands, woodlands

**Food** Seeds

**Remarks** Sometimes known as the "Grass Parrot". Smaller and slimmer than a Rosella. Spends much time on ground foraging for grass and weed seeds. Pleasant warbling voice. Nests in hollow trees and fence posts. Swift flyer, calling as it goes.

**Similar species** Juvenile Crimson Rosella, and Musk Lorikeet, which has red facial marking and short tail.
PALLID CUCKOO
*Cuculus pallidus*

330mm. Male: Pale grey; yellow eye ring; long tail with notched markings. Female and Juvenile: Dark grey with black and grey mottling.

**Status** Common in summer

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Caterpillars, insects

**Remarks** About the size of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. Spring and summer visitor. Attracts attention with loud up-the-scale and scolding calls, usually from top of exposed bare branch, pole or power line. Sometimes calls persistently at night. A parasite, foisting eggs on local insectivorous birds with cup-shaped nests. Similar species Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.
FAN-TAILED CUCKOO
*Cuculus pyrrhophanus*

260mm. Grey above, chestnut-buff breast; yellow eye-ring; undertail barred black and white.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests

**Food** Caterpillars, insects

**Remarks** About Blackbird size. Some stay through winter though most migrate north. Feeds in trees and on ground. Conspicuous in spring with trilling, descending call, or sad single-note piping. Parasitises birds with dome-shaped nests, such as thornbills.
HORSFIELD'S BRONZE-CUCKOO
Chrysococcyx basalis
170mm. Dull, bronze-green back, duller cap; creamy underparts with incomplete bronze chest bars, rufous at base of tail. Throat streaked, not barred; pale eyebrow.
Status Uncommon summer migrant
Habitat Woodlands, forests Food Caterpillars, insects
Remarks This small cuckoo forages in foliage and grass. Parasitises mainly fairy-wrens, thornbills and other similar domed-nest builders. Call is descending "Tsee-yew".
SACRED KINGFISHER
Halcyon sancta
220mm. Dark blue-green back; creamy-buff to rufous collar and underparts; long straight blackish bill; blue rump and short tail.
Status Common in summer
Habitat Streamsides, wetlands, forests
Food Small fish, reptiles, large insects
Remarks About Common Starling size, but with large bill. Summer migrant. Call is persistent "dik dik". Does not always dive into water for food. Hunts and catches food on land as well as in water. Nests in hollows. Breeds locally.
Similar species Azure Kingfisher, which has orange breast and short tail.
WELCOME SWALLOW
*Hirundo neoxena*

150mm. Steel-blue back; rust-red forehead, throat; whitish underparts; deeply forked tail with white spots.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Built-up areas, grasslands, woodlands, over water

**Food** Small flying insects

**Remarks** About the size of a slim House Sparrow. Buoyant, eccentric flight as pairs or parties pursue insects. Usually rests on wires, bare twigs or ledges. Present all year. A pleasant twittering song. Breeds locally; the cup-shaped mud nest is built under verandahs, bridges, in creek-banks or inside hollow tree trunks.

**Similar species** Fairy and Tree Martins, which have whitish rumps, no rufous on throat.
BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKE
*Coracina novaehollandiae*

330mm. Blue-grey back and head, long tail; paler upperparts; black face, throat, wing-tips. Juvenile: Black streak extending through behind the eye.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests

**Food** Caterpillars, large insects and berries

**Remarks** About the size of a slim Feral Pigeon. Pairs or small parties of these nomads are very partial to feeding in eucalypts but will also take food from ground. Flight is undulating. Wings shuffled into place on alighting. "Purring" call. Nests locally, building small flat nest in stout, horizontal fork.

**Similar species** White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike adult and immature, which have black streak not extending beyond eye.
**FLAME ROBIN**  
*Petroica phoenicea*  
135mm. Male: Dark grey back, white spot on forehead; strong white wing bars and outer tail shafts; flame-red throat and breast. Female and Juvenile: Grey-brown buff-white wing-bars.  
**Status** Common winter migrant  
**Habitat** Grasslands, woodlands  
**Food** Insects  
**Remarks** Migrant that breeds in mountains, spending autumn and winter at lower levels. Catches most prey on the ground, using shrubs and fences as vantage points. The male gives an occasional weak lilting song.  
**Similar species** Scarlet Robin, which has black throat and scarlet breast.
**GOLDEN WHISTLER**

*Pachycephala pectoralis*

170mm. Male: Black head and breast band; white throat; nape, breast and abdomen yellow. Female: Pale grey-brown, dull grey-white breast.

**Status** Uncommon

**Habitat** Woodlands

**Food** Insects


**Similar species** Rufous Whistler, female and immature: brownish-grey above, dark streaks on grey buff underparts.
GREY SHRIKE-THRUSH (Grey Thrush)
*Colluricincla harmonica*

230mm. Upper back brown; underparts light grey; wings and tail grey; black bill.

Juvenile: Underparts streaked.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands

**Food** Large insects, grubs, small reptiles, nestlings

**Remarks** About Blackbird size, this native is not a true thrush. Thinly scattered in the district with a preference for woodlands and larger trees. Melodious call and single piping note. Cup-shaped nest lined with much bark is placed in a fork or niche in a tree trunk.

**Similar species** Golden Whistler (female)
GREY FANTAIL
*Rhipidura fuliginosa*

160mm. Dark grey upperparts and breastband; white eyebrow, throat, wing bars and outer tail feathers; fawn to cinnamon belly.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests

**Food** Small insects

**Remarks** Spectacular white-shafted fanned tail of length equal to its body gives this delicate bird a high prominence. Extremely active in its eccentric insect-gathering flight. Song is a vigorous sweet chatter. Nest is wineglass shaped, suspended from slim tree branch. Breeds locally.

**Similar species** Rufous Fantail, which is much more rufous-brown, especially the rump; Willie Wagtail, black above with white underparts, and larger.
WILLIE WAGTAIL
*Rhipidura leucophrys*

200mm. Black head, back, tail, throat; white breast and belly; white eyebrow; long fanned tail.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Insects

**Remarks** Bold, ever-friendly "Willie" is a fan-tail not a wag-tail. Cheery lilting call of "sweet, pretty creature", sometimes on moonlight nights. Also scolding "chikachik". Breeds locally, and the small, cup-shaped nest is usually built on a horizontal branch. Wags tail often; sometimes perches on backs of livestock. Chases insects by running on ground or flying around foliage.

**Similar species** Grey Fantail
CLAMOROUS REED-WARBLER (Australian Reed-Warbler)
*Acrocephalus stentoreus*
170mm. Unstreaked olive-brown above; pale buff underparts; light eyebrow.
**Status** Common spring/summer migrant
**Habitat** Reedbeds
**Food** Insects
**GOLDEN-HEADED CISTICOLA** (Golden-headed Fantail-warbler)  
*Cisticola exilis*

100mm Small streaked grassbird with buff underparts and buff tip io tail. Head black-streaked (both sexes) in winter, but male golden-headed in breeding season.  
**Status** Common  
**Habitat** Grasslands  
**Food** Small insects  

**Remarks** Frequent melodious whistling call, often from grass tops, low ihrubs, fences. Dome-shaped nest of grass and spider web. Breeds locally. Similar species Little Grass-bird, which is larger with upperparts heavily streaked.
SUPERB FAIRY-WREN (Superb Blue Wren)

*Malurus cyaneus*

140mm, including very long tail. Male: Light blue crown, cheeks, back; dark blue nape, breast, rump and tail; whitish underparts. Male in non-breeding plumage similar to female but retains blue tail. Female and Juvenile: Brown upperparts, including tail; chestnut line through eye.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, streamsides

**Food** Insects, grubs

**Remarks** The only species of Blue or Fairy-wren south of the Dividing Range in Victoria. Cheerful, trilling song. Breeds locally and builds domed nest. Usually seen in parties consisting of a brightly coloured blue male with several brown-coloured females and a few juveniles, all with erect tails, hopping in and out of low-growing vegetation.
WHITE-BROWED SCRUB WREN
*Sericornis frontalis*

120mm. Dark olive-brown upperparts; browner rump; white lines above and below pale eye; flecks on bend of wing; creamy underparts.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, streamsides

**Food** Small insects, grubs

**Remarks** Plumper than a Superb Fairy-wren but with shorter tail. Usually keeps within cover of bushes and bracken near ground-level. Scolds intruders with persistent rasping notes, but also has a variety of trills and whistles. Breeds locally, from July onwards. Builds a domed nest, often at ground level in thick cover.
**YELLOW-HUMPED THORNBILL** (Yellow-tailed Thornbill)  
*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*

110mm. Grey-green upperparts; buttercup yellow rump; forehead black with white spots; white eyebrow, creamy underparts.  
**Status** Common  
**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands  
**Food** Small insects, grubs  
**Remarks** Plumper and shorter tailed than Superb Fairy-wren. Small parties feed in short grass as well as shrubs. In flight the buttercup yellow rump flashes but is obscured when the wings are folded. Has a pleasant tinkling song given in undulating flight. Untidy, globular nest with a side entrance built in thick foliage. Breeds locally.  
**Similar species** Brown Thornhill, which has brown upperparts and streaked, greyish underparts.
RED WATTLEBIRD
*Anthochara carunculata*

350mm. Plain black crown; brown upperparts, heavily streaked with white; white cheeks and tail tips; fleshy red wattles near ears; yellow belly.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests, sub-urban gardens

**Food** Nectar, fruit, insects


**Similar species** Little Wattlebird, which is smaller and darker, with spot-ted crown, and cinnamon under-wing patch in flight.
WHITE-PLUMED HONEYEATER
*Lichenostomus penicillatus*

160mm. Olive-grey upperparts; paler underparts; thin white plume on each side of neck.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests, sub-urban gardens

**Food** Insects, nectar, fruit

**Remarks** One of the few native birds adapted to suburban gardens. The size of a House Sparrow but slimmer. Principal diet of insects and nectar. Breeds locally, the cup-shaped nest being suspended in a slender fork or inch of leaves.

**Similar species** Silvereye, which is smaller with white eye-ring and greyish back.
STRIATED PARDALOTE

*Pardalotus striatus*

105mm. Back brown, rump paler; crown black, streaked white; yellow wash on throat; broad white streak along wing; white eyebrow.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests

**Food** Insects, including lerps, and scale

**Remarks** Body size of Superb Fairy-wren, but tail very short. Feeds in treetops, particularly eucalypts. Breeds locally, making nest hole in bank or tree hollow.

**Similar species** Spotted Pardalote, which has black crown with white spots.
SILVEREYE (Grey-backed White-eye)
*Zosterops lateralis*

120mm. Green head, throat and rump; greyish back and underparts; buff flanks; white ring around eye.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, gardens

**Food** Small insects, grubs, fruit, nectar

**Remarks** Smaller and slimmer than House Sparrow. Prominent white eye-ring. Moves in busy parties through shrubs in search of insects, particularly aphids. Much twittering. Breeds locally, building a small suspended nest of fine grasses and spider webs.

**Similar species** White-plumed Honeyeater, which is larger and green-ish, with white plume on side of neck.
RED-BROWED FIRETAIL (Red-browed Finch, Waxbill)
*Emblema temporalis*

110mm. Olive green upperparts; greyish underparts; bright red eyebrow, rump and bill. Juvenile: No red eyebrow; blackish bill.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Seeds, insects

**Remarks** Plumper than Fairy-wren, the Red-browed Firetail is usually seen in small flocks searching the ground for seed. The red rump is con-spicuous in flight when the bird is dashing for cover. A thin, squeaky call. Builds an untidy nest of dried grass with entrance at the end, in thick bush or creeper. Breeds locally.
AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE-LARK (Mudlark)
*Grallina cyanoleuca*

280mm. Male. Black crown, face, throat, chest and back; white eyebrow, underparts, rump and bar in wing. Female: White face and throat.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, wetlands, grasslands

**Food** Large insects, grubs, pond snails

**Remarks** Larger than Blackbird but with long legs, the jaunty Magpie-lark is a ground feeder which tolerates wet feet. Hunts in shallow water, lawns and paddocks. Usually found in pairs or families. Tends to flock in autumn. A melodic call, very noisy after rain. Breeds locally, the large, bowl-shaped mud nest being placed on a horizontal limb or even the cross-bar of a power, pole.
AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE (White-backed Magpie)
*Gymnorhina tibicen*

400mm. Male: Black head, breast, abdomen and flight feathers; white back, wing-bar, under-tail coverts. Bill white with black tip, both sexes. Female and Juvenile; Light grey back.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Insects, grubs, small reptiles

**Remarks** In pairs or small parties in most habitats. The main requirement of the bold Magpie is a few trees for roosting and nesting. Delightful carolling song. Breeds locally. Often pugnacious in defending the large stick-nest.
LITTLE RAVEN (Crow)
*Corvus mellori*

500mm. Black with purplish gloss in wings; white eye. Juvenile: Brown eye.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Insects, carrion, fruit, seeds

**Remarks** The Australian crows and ravens are a confusing group, the local species being the Little Raven. A short abrupt "cah cab" call. Usually in parties. Shuffles wings into place when it alights Breeds locally; bulky stick-nest in tall trees, often several nests adjacent.

**Similar species** Australian Raven, which gives drawn-out gurgling call, rare in the district.
FERAL PIGEON (Domestic Pigeon)
*Columba livia*

330mm. Usually blue-grey with darker bars in wings, but very variable in colour — from white In red or black mottled.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Built-up areas, grasslands

**Food** Seeds, bread, food scraps

**Remarks** Introduced domestic or homing pigeon gone wild. Feral Pigeons are numerous about buildings, under bridges and in quarries where they roost and nest on ledges, Breeds locally. Forages on ground in streets and parks. Commonly in flocks. Occasionally called Rock Dove.

**Similar species** Spotted Turtle-dove, which has longer tail.
**SPOTTED TURTLE-DOVE** (Indian Turtle-dove)

*Streptopelia chinensis*

315mm. Mottled grey-brown back; grey head; long brown tail with white tip; black and white spotted nape; pinkish-fawn underparts.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, built-up areas

**Food** Seeds, grass shoots, food scraps

**Remarks** An introduced Asiatic species well established throughout district and countryside. Pairs and small parties feed on ground. Perches on buildings, overhead wires and trees. Persistent cooing. Breeds locally. Nests at most times of year in thick foliage.

**Similar species** Feral Pigeon, which has larger body, shorter tail.
**SKYLARK** (English Skylark)  
*Alauda arvensis*  
180mm. Brown back with heavy darker streaks; upper breast streaked; pale underparts; white; shafts in tail and trailing edge of wing; slight crest  
**Status** Common  
**Habitat** Grasslands  
**Food** Insects  
**Remarks** Larger than a House Sparrow. Introduced from Europe last century. Attracts attention with persistent, animated song, while hovering above the paddocks and then descending with much fluttering of wings. Breeds locally, building a cup-shaped nest in grass or on the ground.  
**Similar species** Richard's Pipit, which bobs tail up and down.
BLACKBIRD (English Blackbird)
*Turdus merula*

350mm. Male: Velvet black; orange bill and eye-ring; longish tail. Female and Juvenile: Dark brown; mottled on breast; yellowish-brown bill.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, forests, built-up areas

**Food** Insects, worms, fruit

**Remarks** Introduced from Europe in 1862. Very much at home in gardens and hedges where it may be seen tugging at earthworms or scratching in litter. Nest is usually placed in low, thick foliage, but ledges on buildings are also used. Breeds locally. Melodic, flute-like song in spring. Also strident alarm call.

**Similar species** Song Thrush, Common Starling
SONG THRUSH (English Thrush)
*Turdus philomelos*
230mm. Pale brown above; creamy below with dark speckled breast.
**Status** Common
**Habitat** Urban areas
**Food** Insects, worms, snails
**Remarks** A little smaller than a Blackbird, and also introduced from Europe. Rather self-effacing; tends to keep under cover of bushes, but also feeds on adjacent lawns and fields. One of the few birds which eats snails, breaking them open on a kerb or stone wall. Beautiful song in winter and spring, often before dawn and at dusk, given from tree-top or TV antenna. Also metallic alarm call. Breeds locally.
**Similar species** Female and immature Blackbird, which have darker mottled underparts.
EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH

*Carduelis carduelis*

130mm. Red face; brown back; grey rump; black crown and tail; broad gold bar in wing. Heavy white bill. Juvenile: No red face.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Seeds

**Remarks** Another European introduction in 1860; slightly smaller than a House Sparrow. Breeds locally, both in gardens and parklands. Large flocks form in autumn, feeding on seeding grasses or flower-heads, particularly thistles. Undulating flight. Male sings from conspicuous perches branches or overhead wires while the female broods nearby.
EUROPEAN GREENFINCH
*Carduelis chloris*

150mm. Male: Olive green (duller in winter); broad yellow bar in wing and side of tail; heavy bill.

**Status** Common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands

**Food** Seeds

**Remarks** Introduced from Europe in 1863. This sparrow-sized finch is quiet and unobtrusive except in spring, when the male sits on an exposed twig or telephone wire giving persistent buzzing call. Undulating flight. Nests locally in leafy trees and bushes, favouring introduced trees.

**Similar species** White-plumed Honeyeater, which is larger and has no yellow wing stripes.
HOUSE SPARROW

*Passer domesticus*

150mm. Male: Brown side of face and streaked back; grey crown and underparts; large blackish bib on throat, less conspicuous in winter. Female and Juvenile: No bib; pale eyebrow.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Ubiquitous

**Food** Seeds, insects

**Remarks** One of the two sparrow species in the district, both introduced from Europe in 1863; the male House Sparrow may be identified by grey crown and large, blackish bib, whereas both sexes of the smaller Tree Sparrow have chestnut crowns as well as smaller bibs and black patches near the ear. The names can be confusing because both species live about houses and nest under eaves as well as being found in trees, particularly when flocking in autumn. Both species breed locally. They have similar habits and diets.
COMMON STARLING (English Starling)
*Sturnus vulgaris*

210mm. Summer: Iridescent greenish-black with some fine spots; pale yellow pointed bill. Winter: Many fine spots; blackish bill. Juvenile: Plain greyish-brown; pole throat, short tail.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands built-up areas

**Food** Insects, grubs, fruit, food scraps

**Remarks** Introduced from Europe in 1860. Walks, does not hop. Very large flocks gather in winter when they roost in trees or on building ledges. Wheezy spring song with much flapping of pointed wings and pulsating throat. Nests in holes in trees and buildings. Takes over nesting mites of native birds in urban and rural areas. Breeds locally. Similar species Blackbird, which has longer tail and no spotting.
COMMON MYNA (Indian Myna)

*Acridotheres tristis*

240mm. Rich brown breast and upperparts; black head; yellow bill and legs; bare yellow skin on face behind eye; whitish belly; large white spot in flight in extended wing; white tail tips.

**Status** Very common

**Habitat** Woodlands, grasslands, built-up areas

**Food** Insects, seeds, food scraps

**Remarks** An Asiatic species introduced in 1860, now very common in small parties in gardens and paddocks and on buildings. It is not related to the native Noisy Miner, which is a honeyeater. Large communal roosts in winter in buildings or dense trees. Animated chattering and whistling. Nests in holes in trees, thus competing with parrots. Breeds locally.
HABITATS

Most species of birds frequent very specialised habitats. They have evolved in association with such habitats to the point that they find a suitable food supply, shelter and roosting conditions, and nesting sites in a quite limited range of vegetation types.

For instance, most species of cockatoos and parrots nest only in tree hollows or the like. Ibis roost and nest in trees or low vegetation over or near swamps and shallow water. Clamorous Reed-Warblers live, feed and breed in dense plants (usually of the reed type) adjacent to fresh water, and even the common Silver Gull who takes advantage of man's food wastes at tip-sites or picnic areas returns to the riverside or beach-front to roost and breed.

Since each species of bird requires a niche in which to live, be it ocean or river, grassy plain or wooded mountain, it is essential that we make every endeavour to see that sufficient habitat of each type remains untouched. It is of little use for loggers to say that they are rehabilitating areas that they harvest — only very old trees can provide hollows for nesting. Sculptured lake edges and streamsides without waterside vegetation provide no sanctuary for waterbirds; cleared farmland and manicured roadsides offer no protection to the ground dwelling birds; and man and his pets on a secluded beach disturb and frighten to the point of nest desertion the seabirds that nest on sand or amongst ocean-side tussock grasses.

Careful thought should always be given before any type of habitat is modified.
URBAN AREAS
The built-up areas of the Maribyrnong Valley consist of home gardens, shopping centres, government buildings, light industry and schools, where there are lawns of various sizes and small areas consisting of native and introduced trees and shrubs.
In this type of habitat, the dominant birds are introduced species, such as:
Blackbird
Spotted Turtle-dove
House Sparrow
Feral Pigeon
Common Starling
Song Thrush — to a lesser extent
Common Myna
The native birds to be found here are:
Red Wattlebird
Willie Wagtail
White-plumed Honeyeater
Australian Magpie-lark
Silvereye
Australian Magpie
These birds are usually present throughout the year
PARK WOODLAND

This includes various parks, golf courses and sporting fields where there are large stands of young and mature trees (native and exotic). Mown grass has replaced the natural understorey in most cases.

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<th>Parks</th>
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<td>Thompson Street Reserve</td>
<td>27C6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cranwell Reserve</td>
<td>27D10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canning Reserve and Tea Gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riverside Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aberfeldie Park</td>
<td>28C6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maribyrnong Park</td>
<td>28D8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairbairn Park</td>
<td>28C9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Footscray Park</td>
<td>24D2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Brimbank Park is an exception; although it is a structured park, there is natural vegetation along the River. Melways 14J9

Organ Pipes National Park has native grasses which have been re-established and allowed to flourish naturally. A dense understorey of low-growing shrubs has also been created -- a haven for small birds. Melways 3C5

**Golf Courses:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Golf Courses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medway</td>
<td>27 F9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essendon</td>
<td>28 C10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keilor</td>
<td>3J9</td>
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High in the trees the most commonly seen birds are:

- White-plumed Honeyeater
- Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
- Red Wattlebird
- Golden Whistler
- Yellow Thornbill
- Brown Goshawk
- Crimson Rosella
Brown Falcon
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Grey Shrike-thrush
Pallid and Fan-tailed Cuckoos (Spring and Summer)
On the lower branches or on the ground you might see:
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Galah
Australian Magpie
Grey Fantail
Australian Magpie-lark
Willie Wagtail
Little Raven
Red-rumped Parrot
GRASSLANDS and PADDOCKS

The flat open areas of the Maribyrnong Valley are mainly covered with introduced grasses, fennel and artichoke thistle, occasionally inter-spersed with native and introduced trees and shrubs. The steeper parts of the Valley have a thicker covering of shrubs such as boxthorn, tree violet and bottlebrush. This type of habitat may be found at Avondale Heights and Sunshine.

Typical birds observed here hovering in the air are:

- Black-shouldered Kite
- Australian Kestrel
- Skylark

Others flying across open spaces include:

- Welcome Swallow
- Australian Hobby

Those which eat the seeds among the grasses and thistles include:

- European Goldfinch
- European Greenfinch

Insect eaters are represented by:

- Willie Wagtail
- Flame Robin
STREAMSIDES (Riparian)
The areas immediately adjacent to the Maribyrnong River and Steele (Rose) Creek, including the open water surfaces, provide a habitat for birds closely associated with water.
These areas extend upstream from Footscray Park. Some sections of the river bank are flat and bare; others are low and better vegetated.
Birds observed resting or flying above the water are
Silver Gull
Great Cormorant
Little Black Cormorant
Little Pied Cormorant
Crested Tern
Pacific Black Duck
Grey Teal
Further upstream on the muddy banks are:
  White-faced Heron
Great Egret
Dusky Moorhen
Eurasian Coot
In the reed beds Clamorous Reed-Warblers can be heard (Spring and Summer)
Thick vegetation near the River is good cover for:
White-browed Scrub-wren
Red-browed Firetail
Superb Fairy-wren
  Regenerating and mature River Red Gums provide good roosting places for water birds, and during spring and summer for the Sacred Kingfisher.
WETLANDS and FLOODPLAINS
These are low-lying marshy areas with shallow ponds which retain water most of the year. Floodplains are adjacent to watercourses and are likely to be inundated when flooding occurs.
This type of habitat can be found:
Along the River below Avondale Heights
Below Medway Golf Course
Fairbairn Park
Below Edgewater Estate
Low lying areas of the former Explosives Factory at Maribyrnong
Playing fields near Footscray Park
Between Lynch's Bridge and Hopetoun Bridge
Marshy land with small ponds at Humes site
Taylors Creek wetlands (adjacent Brimbank Park)
Birds likely to be found here are:
Sacred Ibis
White-faced Heron
Masked Lapwing
Silver Gull
Black-fronted Plover
Golden-headed Cisticola
On the open water you may see:
Australasian Grebe
Hoary-headed Grebe
Eurasian Coot
Pacific Black Duck
Grey Teal
Silver Gull
Welcome Swallows are often seen hawking over the water.
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This digital edition is dedicated to the memory of Pat and Holt Pettit – dedicated birdwatchers and champions of the Maribyrnong Valley over many decades.

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