

# birds

With its diverse environment and network of ponds Centennial Park is the perfect place to watch birds. The range of different landscapes provide food, shelter and nesting places for migratory, nomadic and resident birds species. The first bird list for the Park, dated 3 March 1929, contains the names of 35 native and 9 introduced species. Since then up to 124 native and 18 introduced species of land and water birds have been recorded.

## Bird Sanctuary

Closed to the public, the Bird Sanctuary is the fenced area of predominantly native vegetation located behind the Centennial Parklands Cafe. Easily recognisable by the large ornate gate, this area provides habitat for bird and animals species alike. The gate, decorated with bulrushes and a Brolga cast in bronze, was erected by the Gould League in 1938.



Although the Bird Sanctuary is closed to the public, you can still walk around the fence and see the **New Holland honeyeaters** feeding on nectar from the banksias. This small bird (left) is mainly black and heavily streaked with white and yellow and is quite commonly seen in the Park. During autumn and winter the Bird Sanctuary is a popular stop over for **yellow tailed black cockatoos** who frequent the Park in the afternoons. Their distinctive call and large flock often attracts the attention of park visitors.

## Land birds

Sandstone Ridge, around Kensington Pond and Lachlan Swamp are excellent spots to observe land birds. Sandstone Ridge is a good place to see land birds which prefer to stay out of the way of humans. This area also offers sweeping views across Centennial Park to the suburbs beyond.



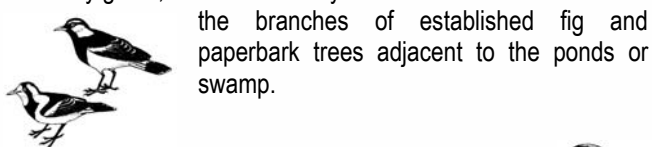
Amongst the undergrowth at Lachlan Swamp you may see **superb blue wrens** and the **red-browed firetail finch**. The finches are usually seen in groups feeding on grass seeds. The **superb blue wren** (right, male at right) flits between the trees, alighting on branches and fence posts. The male is brilliantly blue. Look up in the treetops to see Silvereyes, small birds with yellow and green upper parts, lighter underparts and a white ring around the eye.

The **fig bird** (below, male at right) can be seen widely throughout the Parklands in fig and gum trees in spring and summer. With its distinctive green body the male is distinguishable by its red naked face patch. It feeds in foliage mainly on fruits and hangs its head upside down. It is an acrobatic bird and may be seen perched on overhead wires.



The **welcome swallow** (right) is another common species. Most abundant in early spring it builds its nest in dark and well-hidden places, such as under the viewing platforms at the edge of Fly Casting Pond. It feeds on insects and is graceful in flight.

**Pee wees** or **magpie larks** (below, male at left) are familiar and widespread in urban areas. The female can be identified by her prominent white eyebrow and white neck below the eye. The magpie lark's bowl shaped nest is built from mud, bound by grass, and is commonly built on a horizontal branch overhanging water. Occasionally these nests can be seen in



the branches of established fig and paperbark trees adjacent to the ponds or swamp.

The **black faced cuckoo shrike** (right) is less commonly seen. With its grey body and black face and throat it may be seen in the trees, formal gardens, grasslands and overhead wires in and around the Parklands.



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The **Australian magpie** (below) is well known for 'dive-bombing' people when defending its territory in the breeding season. It is a conspicuous black and white bird, with a pointed black-tipped bill. The magpie feeds mostly on the ground and can become tame, often looking for food from picnickers. You can sometimes see family groups of magpies playing together.

**Kookaburras** (right) can be found throughout the Parklands and their distinctive laugh is often heard before they are seen. They are one of the largest kingfishers and their laugh usually incites other groups or family members to respond.



Perhaps one of the most difficult birds to find is the **tawny frogmouth** (below left). It is a large night bird of the Nightjar family whose mottled plumage camouflages it well against the bark of the paperbark trees in which it nests. By day it resembles a branch and if startled will remain motionless. The tawny frogmouth becomes active at dusk, hunting moving food such as rodents. At least 3 breeding pairs reside here.



Centennial Parklands is also home to some spectacular examples of the parrot family. These include the sulphur-crested cockatoo, the long-billed corella and the galah. The red-rumped parrot has been spotted in Moore Park. Sulphur-crested cockatoos are often seen at dusk in the paperbark trees surrounding Lily Pond.

## Water birds

The 12 ponds in Centennial Park and Moore Park are important habitats for aquatic birds that need fresh water to live and breed. More than 27 species of water birds regularly visit the Parklands with some species including Eurasian coots, purple swamphens, dusky moorhens, black swans and Pacific black ducks regularly breeding. This makes the Parklands a perfect place to watch the full breeding cycle and observe the changes that take place as chicks grow to adult hood.

The native **Pacific black duck** (right) is the most common waterbird throughout Centennial Park. It is easily recognised by its black eye stripe and green/blue colour on the wing. It feeds on the surface of the water stripping seeds from water plants and sometimes ventures some distance from the ponds to enjoy fresh grass.



Far less common is the **musk duck** (left, male at left), another native species which is most often seen on Randwick and Busby's Ponds. It sits very low in the water and is an exceptionally good underwater, diving to feed on small invertebrates and small fish. The male has a large lobe of skin on his neck and performs a bizarre courtship display in which he spreads its fan-like tail above its head and splashes jets of water sideways and backwards. The maned duck and the hardhead are other duck species you may see in Centennial Park.

**Black swans** (right) live and breed on a number of islands or building nests from reeds in what territorial and males can display aggression. Black swans feed on aquatic plants, stretching along the edges of the ponds. Pairs may breed for life and the male is distinguished by a slightly longer neck than the female.



of ponds in Centennial Park, nesting on existing seems to be the middle of the pond. They can be quite towards other males and juveniles, including their own. their long necks to the bottom or from grass growing



The islands in Willow Pond and the northern-most island in Busby's Pond are favoured habitats for nesting cormorants. The **little black cormorant** (left) and the **pied cormorant** are commonly seen with their wings outstretched to dry following their underwater foraging for fish. Unlike ducks they have no oil on their feathers making them less buoyant and allowing them to dive and remain below the surface more easily. They have strong, hooked beaks that they use for fishing and webbed feet which enable them to be efficient hunters underwater. You may see them seemingly popping up from nowhere!



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The **purple swamphen** (right, also known as the eastern swamphen), with its purple/blue chest and scarlet bill and shield, is a common sight around the edges of Randwick and Lily Ponds where there is ample vegetation cover. Its long red legs and slender toes enable it to wade into the water in search of food but make it a less efficient swimmer than webbed footed species. Purple swamphens can sometimes be seen in the limbs of paperbark trees that overhang the ponds.



Closely related to the purple swamphen, the **Eurasian coot** both visits and breeds in Centennial Park. It is a small black bird with a white bill and shield and can be seen on Duck Pond, most commonly in the winter. The coot makes a 'kyik' or 'kyok' sound. It is not to be confused with the **dusky moorhen** (left) which can appear similar from a distance. The dusky moorhen is easily distinguished whilst swimming by its white rump which is revealed when the tail feathers are flicked up. The dusky moorhen has a reddish shield and beak with a yellow tip.



Usually restricted to Musgrave and One More Shot Pond the **little grebe** (right) is commonly seen on open water. It is a small bird, with a small oval yellow spot between the bill and the eye. It feeds on the surface of the water and in the shallows however diving is also common behaviour. It is one of the few birds from throughout the Parklands that is also seen on Kippax Lake at Moore Park.



It is not uncommon to see the **Australian pelican** on Duck Pond, stopping over on the edges of larger islands in small groups or resting atop the wooden posts next to the boardwalk platform.

The **sacred** or **Australian white ibis** is well adapted to living in urban areas, dominating nesting sites on islands in Randwick and the northern end of Busby's Ponds. Its long curved black bill is well adapted to hunting in the shallows, mud and grass. You will often see large numbers of ibis probing in grasslands following heavy rains. The ibis are often considered a pest as their long bill also enables them to spread rubbish from garbage bins and annoy picnickers for food scraps. They also contribute to habitat degradation through their nesting and breeding habits.

## Tips for birdwatching

Bird watching throughout Centennial Parklands and across the seasons can be a very rewarding pastime. It is possible to follow the lifecycle of species such as swans, coots, swamphens and moorhens as they breed. Consider the following tips to help you enjoy the variety of bird life:

- Walk slowly and stop often
- Listen and wait for birds to come to you, don't try to get too close
- Visit different ponds to observe a range of species

## Can I feed the birds?

Rangers understand that visitors enjoy feeding the birds. However it is requested that when feeding birds visitors think about the food that the birds would normally eat in the wild and feed them accordingly – remember that the birds in Centennial Parklands are not pets. Bread does not contain all the nutrients that these wild birds need, so try feeding them grass and seeds instead. You can still enjoy feeding them and getting a close look while helping to ensure they get the nutrients they need.

## Sick or injured birds

If you find a sick or injured bird, please do not handle it. Call the Rangers on 9339 6699 or 0412 718 611 after hours.

## References

*A field guide to the birds of Australia*, Graham Pizzey, 1987, Collins ; and *Parklands: The Magazine of Centennial Parklands*, Autumn 2001



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