



## All about wildlife

*Kirsty Ramadan from BoHollow Wildlife is a wildlife rescue expert. Here she shares some of her knowledge about our very familiar wildlife neighbours.*

# This is a sad week for Victoria's wetlands

After an extensive independent enquiry as to whether duck shooting season has a valid reason to continue in Victoria, the decision has been made to go ahead. The findings of the enquiry were clear cut in the reasons, backed with evidence, why shooting native ducks is not sustainable nor wanted by the majority of the public, yet here we are again.

Species everywhere in Australia are declining at an alarming rate. Populations of once common species are declining, even becoming locally extinct in areas yet this is a 'sport' which those in power back to continue?

A simple decision backed up by evidence could have easily been made to stop the decimation of our wetland habitats and species who occupy them but yet again, decision makers have caved in to a minority who believe it's their right to shoot native species and disrupt the entire ecosystem of our wetland environments.

### **Loch Garry is my home**

More importantly, Loch Garry is also home to a plethora of wildlife. It is a significant breeding site for many wetland species as it is a seasonal floodway fed from the Goulburn River which is heavily treed with a Red Gum/Box forest.

The bird life in there is astounding. The trees standing both in the water and around the water's edge support breeding colonies of Australian Darters, Little Pied, Pied and Black Cormorants, Nankeen Night Herons, White-faced Herons, Egrets, including the endangered Great Egret, Grebes, different species of water hen and ducks, Black Swans, Pelicans and numerous raptor species. This wetland is home to a breeding pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles and their offspring is currently still honing its hunting skills inside the Loch right now alongside its parents.

A breeding pair of Peregrine Falcons were successful in getting young through this season as were a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles. The Loch Garry Whistling Kites have also been very successful in getting young through this

season. Currently the Loch is buzzing with activity from all these different species. Much to our excitement, a few Rakali have also recently been seen feeding in the waters of the Loch. Once abundant here, our native water rats disappeared for many, many years in this area, only to recently return.

If you think this special place sounds like an environmental paradise for a diverse range of species, you would be right...it is.

Until duck season opening 10 April at 8am sharp, this wetland will be shot up by the duck shooters who are already gathering in camps just over the levee bank. Our house sits barely a kilometre from Loch Garry. The sound of gunshot will reverberate around us, reminding us that there is nothing we can do to protect the creatures who we otherwise protect all year round. My children always ask if there is anything we can do, the answer is always the same. We tried to stop it.

This year is no different. We have tried to stop it. We have submitted our concerns to the Conservation Regulator, the Game Management Authority, ministers and relevant officials to no avail. The people who live here, protect and respect our unique wetland cannot even set foot within 50 metres of the water without possessing a hunting licence once the season begins. Unless you have witnessed it personally, the only description that is apt is one of akin to war zone. The gunshot is a continual shocking

disturbance for everyone and everything within earshot. Outboard motors roaring from one end of the wetland to the other, captained by men with a gun in one hand, a can in the other...and the cans are not of the soft drink kind.

Wood removal, littering of both spent cartridges, toilet paper, bird remains and general human rubbish is always left.

Once the season is over, we go out with heavy hearts, kayaking where there was life everywhere only to be faced with an eerily silent wetland. The few birds which may remain take flight when they catch wind of a human

200 meters away.

Loch Garry borders a National Park. No fences. One side of the main track is National Park, the other side of the main track is Game Reserve. Loch Garry was State Forest slated to be included in the Lower Goulburn National Park. It was, without any community consultation or transparency, quietly excluded from the original plans and handed to the Game Management Authority to appease the shooters as Reedy Swamp was another wetland which became protected under the new National Park. Reedy Swamp sits right in Shepparton, is more visible to the public eye and certainly less acceptable to have shooters causing havoc. The locality and isolation of Loch Garry, could be why this is an acceptable shooting ground of native species. Environmentally, the Loch is possibly more important than Reedy for both habitat and diversity of species recorded. When we are faced with constant misdemeanours and bad behaviour from shooters, calling officials is faced with, 'sorry, we do not have the resources to send any one out there. Don't approach them yourselves though as they are obviously armed and potentially drunk'. Where do we go to get assistance? Officials put in a brief appearance and once they are gone, the shooters know they are free to do as they please.

If we wish to protect these environments there needs to be public outcry. Just like our forests are disappearing through the death of a thousand cuts, these areas which are open to shooting are dying through the death of a thousand shots.

It's cases like this and government decisions which continue to ignore the evidence that is put before them, cause me to ponder whether we have come as far environmentally that we purport to have come. From where I stand, I see continual government support of the destruction of our wild places and the native diversity which depend on their protection.

This week is indeed a sad time for Victorian wetlands.



**Juvenile Sea Eagle, taken in Loch Garry mid November last year. Two adults and one juvenile were seen inside the Loch about a week ago as Loch Garry is their breeding and hunting territory. Being shy birds in this area, they will move out of the area tomorrow when the shooting starts.**