



“VALLEYFIELD” NATIVE BIRD & BANDICOOT SANCTUARY

We have always been conscious of the threats that face our native species here in Tasmania, especially being old enough to recognise how quickly so many are facing extinction in recent times. At Valleyfield we found we were hosting a natural sanctuary space for a number of our endangered native animals – marsupials, birds and amphibians. As the Vineyard matured, we decided the other land we have, although small, should become formalised into a Sanctuary to provide safe habitat for these species.

Unfortunately our efforts have been significantly impacted by the recent Dept. State Growth's diversion of freight transport along our historic rural corridor of Illawarra Road, with no provision made for these endangered species.



In 2021, upon hearing that Tasmanian Land Conservancy were conducting research into the reduction of endangered and vulnerable Eastern Barred Bandicoot populations in the area, we applied to join Land for Wildlife and installed wildlife cameras at Valleyfield to photograph the bandicoots here. We found they were using the 200 year old Hawthorn Hedges around our boundary for safe habitat – including along the (then much quieter) edge of Illawarra Road. They have disappeared from much of the Northern Midlands as their habitat has disappeared. Here, we have even had one come inside to escape a rather sudden and violent hailstorm. Safely released and hopped away towards the nearest hedge!



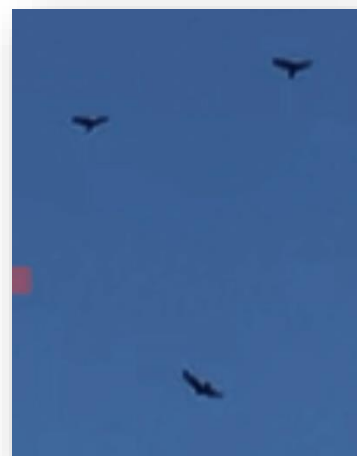
Southern Bell Frog

Litoria raniformis

Conservation Status (EPBC): Vulnerable

Another precious and endangered species we have here is the Green & Gold frog, or Southern Bell Frog. Whilst we have recorded and seen them, they are hard to capture on camera, hence the stock photograph. One evening I had one hop over my boot! A decent size frog with beautiful colouring, they have a deep low growl of a croak and were very vocal in the recent Spring seasons, when we started recording them for the Frog ID program. Recently they have been harder to detect and we think the impact of freight traffic is having a detrimental effect on their population here.

One of the most precious sights we witness here is the local Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring and hunting over the vineyard and dam... we have seen a pair here regularly riding the thermals and rising over the dam since we moved here in 2005. This photo was a rare capture of a third eagle – perhaps an offspring. There are only a few hundred nesting pairs left in Tasmania, after being mistakenly hunted and poisoned to near extinction.



Another rare encounter was with a Spotted-tailed Quoll, hunting in the stables. A very shy and evasive nocturnal hunter, we were surprised to capture a photo of one. Rarely seen in the area and a declining population.



Aren't they a gorgeous family! Cape Barren Geese are not supposed to inhabit this area, but we have a nesting pair that seem very happy to take up residence around our dam sanctuary and raise their goslings. Once their goslings have stretched their wings, one of their parents' favourite lookouts is on the roof of our old shearing shed.



Our sanctuary also hosts a variety of more common species of native birds, frogs and other species. We are careful when the weather warms up to not step on a Copperhead snake!



Annually, Black Swans will raise a hatching of cygnets, and multiple species of frogs proliferate. Tasmanian duck species are more transient rather than resident, but often there are Wood Ducks, Mountain Ducks, Mallards, Pacific Black Ducks amongst others. Besides the endangered Southern Bell Frog, we have regularly recorded the Eastern Banjo Frog with their distinctive drumming sound, Common Eastern Froglet, Brown Tree Frog and the Spotted Marsh Frog.

"Mad as a March Hare" doesn't quite work in the Southern Hemisphere! Whilst the hares love living in the vineyard and are active all year round, they certainly up their frolic in the Spring which, of course for us, is September-November.



Pademelons are another nocturnal visitor – this little group having an evening graze on our lawn one clear and frosty evening. It's so precious to have them relaxed enough to be able to photograph them from the verandah.



Retaining the native grasses, such as weeping grass, is important to both preserve these also, while providing cover and habitat. We also plan to improve habitat by planting shrubs and tussock forming species.

Around our cellar door garden at night we sometimes hear the Southern Boobook Owl with it's distinctive "mo-poke" voice. During the day the Laughing Kookaburra is common – although introduced to Tasmania, they are welcome here in Spring when they help keep the hatching copperheads in check! We have flocks of Superb Fairy Wrens, the males having the beautiful blue highlights to their plumage, and we see the pretty Scarlet Robins with their vibrant red breasts. Forest Ravens, Sulphur Crested Cockatoos, Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos are all common, as are Little Wattlebirds, Yellow Throated Honeyeaters, New Holland Honeyeaters, Green Rosellas, Welcome Swallows, Noisy Miners and our warbling Magpies.

We wonder how different it was for the proliferation of wildlife when "Valleyfield" was first settled... This sketch by John Glover Jr. in 1840-50 shows the Valleyfield house and the already established Hawthorn Hedge, before there was any road through the property. The 200 year old hedge itself is historically precious, besides providing a safe habitat and boundary for our Sanctuary. Hopefully State Growth will put some environmentally protective measures in place to mitigate the impact of freight traffic before it is too late...

