

# ELSTER CREEK WILDLIFE WALK

Come on a journey with us along the Elster Creek, from Elsternwick Park to the Bay!

Elster Creek is the only remaining waterway between the Yarra and Mordialloc Creek. The presence of fresh water provides vital habitat for wildlife.

Keep this guide on you as you find your way. There are four sections to the walk. You can choose to do one section at a time or walk the whole way. You can spend as much time as you like exploring. Can you spot all the animals who live along this special waterway? Enjoy your local adventure!

If you find a bird that is not in this brochure, find it in Melbirds or you can use any Australian Bird ID book or an online app.

We acknowledge we are gathering with respect ("Djilbruk") on the lands of the Boonwurrung nation and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge that these lands were never ceded.

Listen quietly to the birds, the wind and the water. Imagine how old this Country is and what it might have looked like before roads and houses were built many years ago.

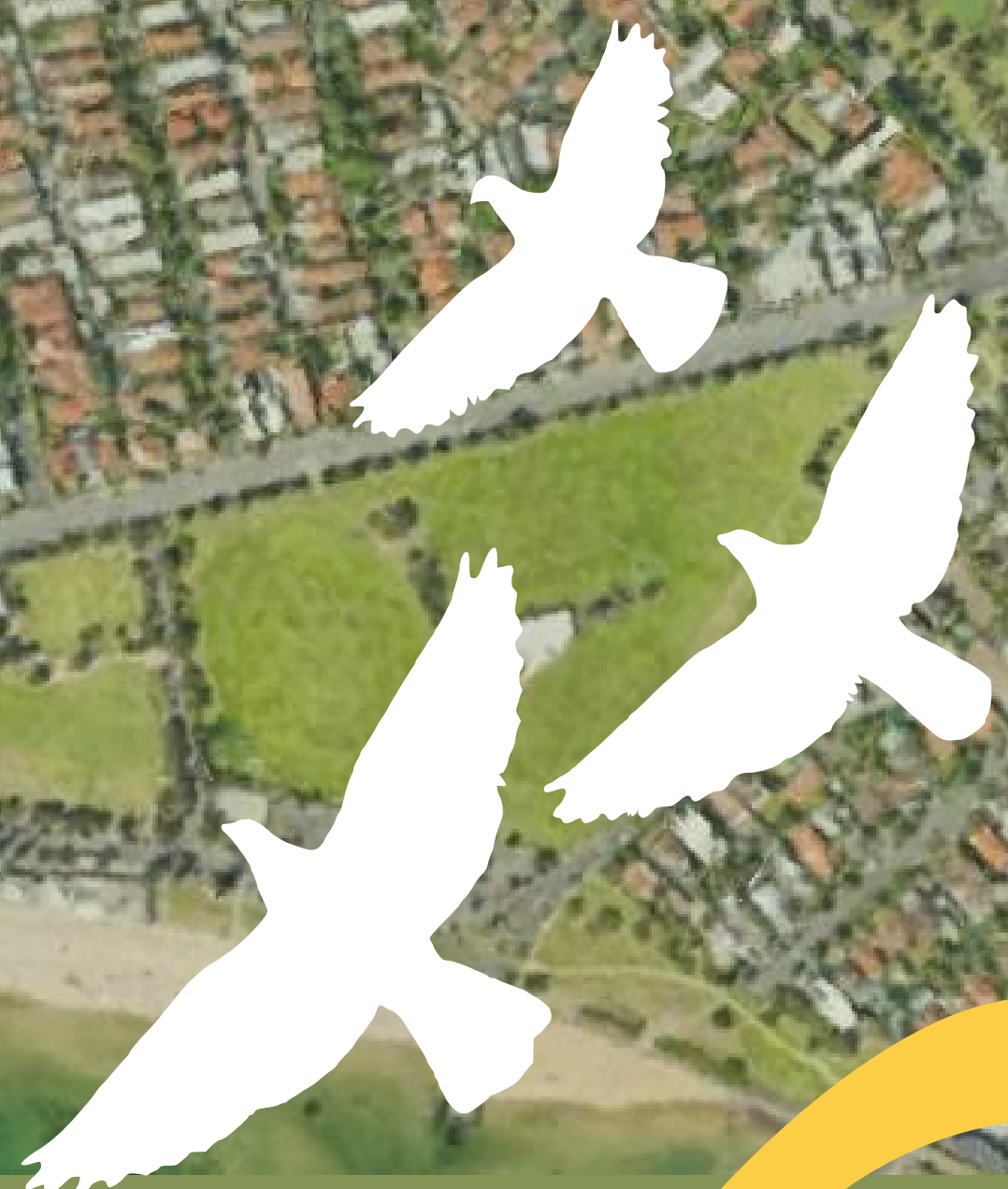
This project received grant funding from the Australian Government's Communities Environment Program



St Columba's  
Primary School



# MAP



1. Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve
2. Elster Creek
3. Elwood Canal
4. Port Phillip Bay and Foreshore



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# 1 Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve

At the heart of this park is the Elster Creek which floods beyond its banks on a regular basis. When the creek floods, the park becomes a haven for wildlife, including waterbirds and frogs.

The park has several sections, including the dog park, playground, sport ovals and Elsternwick Park North, now set to become a nature reserve for local wildlife! Here, locals are working hard to bring back local plants that were lost from this place due to development. The Elsternwick Park North Nature Reserve is a 13-hectare area of Crown land, which has been set aside to provide habitat for wildlife as well as passive open space for the local community. Formerly a golf course, it is currently open parkland.

The site has a variety of habitats:

- a shallow lake and wetlands that provide vital habitat for water birds
- mature, hollow bearing gum trees, providing nesting sites for native birds
- grassy woodlands with areas of seed-bearing grass that provide habitat for ground feeding parrots

Over the last decade, the golf course was not used much. Low usage and limited maintenance of the golf course allowed the seed bearing grass to grow, branches and leaves were left on the ground and hollow bearing trees were left untouched. This provided excellent habitat for native species. It is also relatively free from light pollution at night. This is important for insect populations as well as nocturnal wildlife, like bats and possums.

All of these factors contributed to the site being a unique wildlife habitat. Bayside Council has recognised the uniqueness of this site in its decision to declare it a nature reserve.





Purple Swamphen



Chestnut Teal



Sulphur-crested  
Cockatoo



How many nest boxes can you spot in the trees? Is anyone home? Who do you think this nestbox is designed for?



Rainbow Lorikeet



How many welcome swallows can you count flying above the lake in search of insects?



Eastern Rosella

## Can you spot?

1. The quiet, colourful Eastern Rosella eating seeds in the grass
2. The resident Sulphur-crested Cockatoo living in a nestbox in a big River Red Gum
3. The Chestnut Teal filtering water in their bill
4. The biggest and oldest gum tree in the park
5. The noisy Rainbow Lorikeets
6. The Purple Swamphen digging for food (how big are their feet!) What is it digging for?
7. Can you guess where the water in the creek came from, and where it is going? Which direction is it flowing?



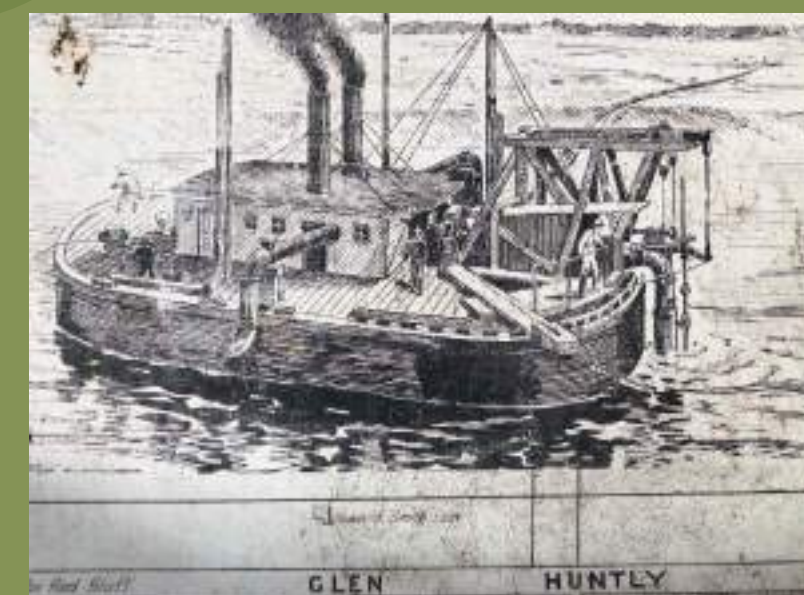
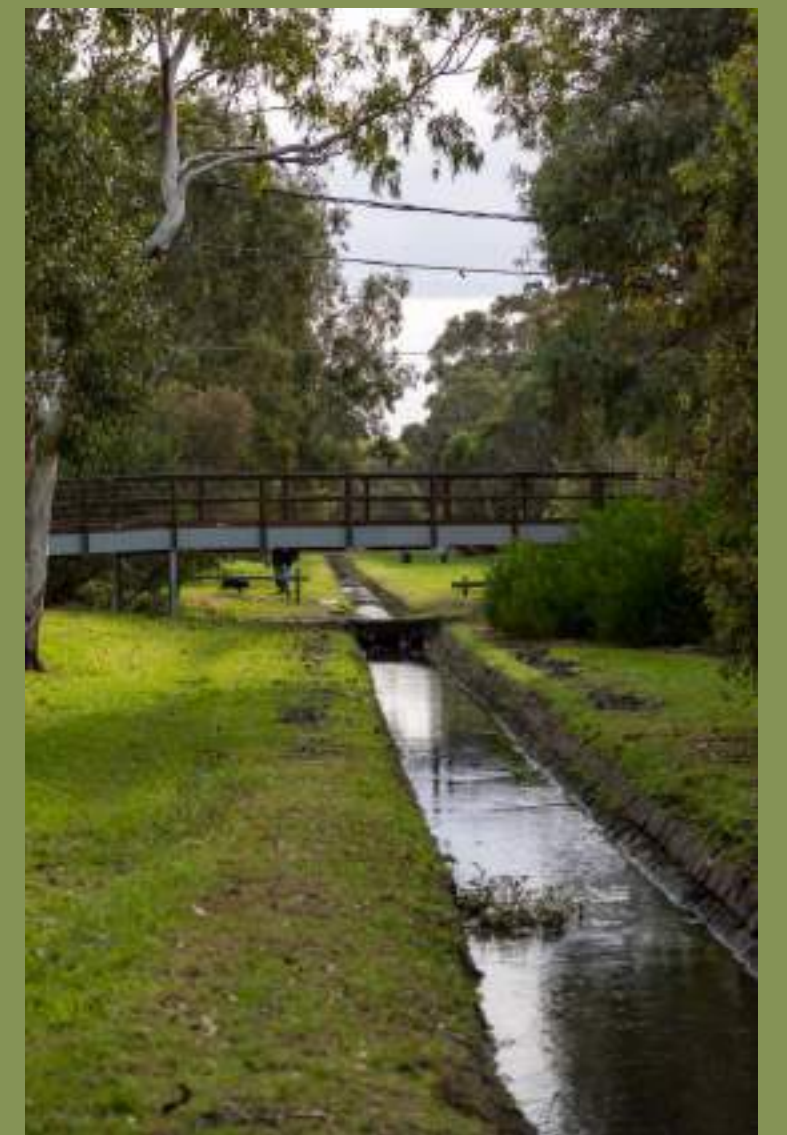
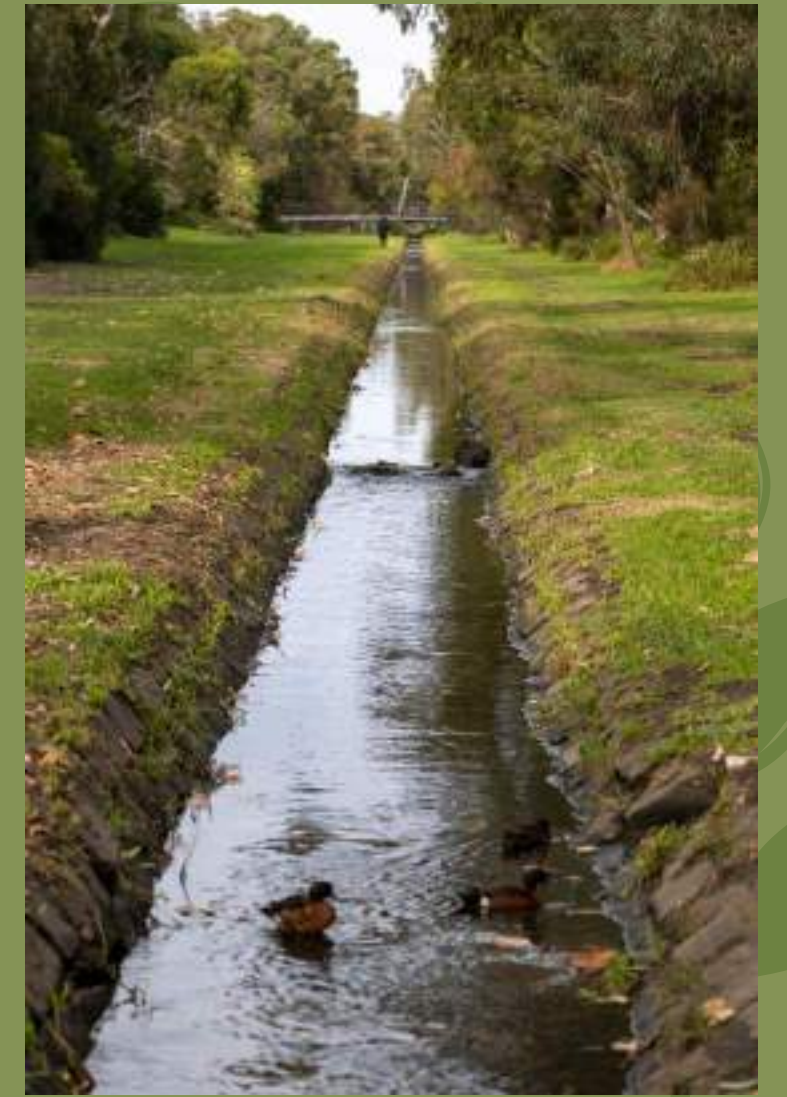
Did you know Elster is the German word for Magpie? The name for the creek was inspired by the hundreds of Magpies digging for worms in the Elwood swamp. Can you find the sign with the story of Elwood Canal, next to the bridge on St Kilda Road at the start of your walk? Have a read to learn about the history of this special place and how the swamp was drained to make room for houses and development.

Prior to European colonisation, Elwood was home to the Yalukit-Willam clan of the Boon Wurrung tribe. The swamp provided an abundance of food, including plants, turtles, ducks, eels, frogs, fish and freshwater shellfish. Can you imagine what amazing feasts there would have been!

Since European colonisation of the area, the swamp has changed a lot. Today this section of the creek has been paved and only a narrow nature corridor remains along the creek, with the road and houses around it. This nature corridor with water, trees and shrubs provides food and shelter, and allows animals to move freely along the creek.

Can you see the flood markers in the fords? Sometimes, after the rains or a very high tide, the water level in the creek rises so high that the cars cannot cross!

In the moist leaf litter under the trees and shrubs you may spot many insects, birds or even a marbled gecko! Marbled geckos are an arboreal species (living in trees) and they hide under the bark of trees, or fallen timber logs during the day.



At night time, you can look for small micro bats, like the Gould's Wattled Bat who live in tree hollows and roof tops. Can you find the tube-like nestboxes? These were designed for microbats. Sometimes, up to 30 micro bats move in and they huddle together, upside down, hanging by their feet from the top of the box. Gould's Wattle Bats are often the first species of microbat to emerge at dusk. For this reason they are also the small bat we most commonly see, chasing insects in the sky as the sun sets.

You can also spot larger bats, the Grey-headed Flying Fox, who travel at dusk from their colony at Yarra Bend to the suburbs in search for fruit, flowers and nectar in suburban gardens and in reserves like these. You can search for Brushtail Possums on roofs, in trees and on powerlines and look for Ringtail Possum that do not live in hollow trees, but build a nest in a tree, called a drey! Looking at the names of these two possums, can you guess the difference between the two species?

If you are lucky, you may even see the local Boobook Owl sitting in a tree above the compost bins waiting to catch a mouse, a rat, sometimes even a possum. You may also see a Tawny Frogmouth (which is not an owl, but they look like one!) Did you know that Tawny Frogmouths are masters of disguise, terrible at building nests and spray their predators with faeces when annoyed? Their call sounds like the bass of a house party!

At night, you can see Marbled Geckos hunting for insects, using street lights.



**Brushtail Possum**



**Gould's Wattled Bat**



**BooBook Owl**



**Ringtail Possums**



**Grey-headed Flying Fox**





**Red Wattlebird**



**Pied Butcherbird**



**Mudlark**



**Magpie**



**White-faced Heron**



**Tawny Frogmouth**

Elwood Canal  
Linear Reserve

## Can you spot?

1. The Red Wattlebird chasing insects in the treetops or drinking nectar from a grevillea flower
2. The White-faced Heron catching small fish in the creek
3. The Tawny Frogmouth expertly camouflaging on a eucalypt tree branch
4. More nest boxes...can you count them all?
5. The Pied Butcherbird singing its beautiful song
6. The Mudlarks digging in the leaves. Some of them move in circles as they scrape the leaf litter away with their feet to catch cockroaches and other bugs. Can you guess why these birds are also called a Magpie Lark?
7. Several magpies warbling



You'll notice the canal is much broader on this side of Glen Huntly Road. The Elwood Canal helped shape the transformation of Elwood from a small village on swampy ground to its present day suburb. The Canal is 1.2km long, 16.5 meters wide and 3.4 meters deep. It represents a rare example of a 19th century public engineering work which was a part of a much larger dredging project. A dredge was built and put on a barge to pump sand and clay with water from the bay foreshore to fill up the surrounding swamplands where houses would be built. Surplus water was channelled back to the bay through the new Canal.

Because of the canal widening, there is no longer a natural sand bank or barrier between the creek and the Bay. Salt water from the Bay now moves freely in and out of the canal with the tide. The salt content of the water in the canal varies, but depends on the tide coming from the bay (salt water), the rainfall and storm water flowing into the creek (freshwater) and the wind. When the water in the Canal is salty or brackish (a mixture between salty and freshwater), many marine species find their way into the canal. Toadfish and even jellyfish are common, all the way up to Glen Huntly Road! Toadfish are native to shallow coastal and estuarine waters of southeastern Australia, where they are widespread and abundant. Like other pufferfish, it can inflate itself with water or air.

If you are really lucky, you might spot an eel! This special native fish has been living in this waterway for many thousands of years, since time immemorial, even longer than the First Peoples were here. With their long thin olive-green bodies, the Short-finned Eels (or Ilk in local Boon Wurrung language) look simple, but these fish love to travel. They can swim up to 5,000 kilometres to their spawning site near the Coral Sea, off the Queensland coast – a journey that can take over a year! The baby eels travel back to Victoria with the East Australian current and find their way back to the Canal to grow into adult eels! After years of growing, the females will start the journey again. The eels tend to feed at night in the shallow edges of the water and often fossick for fish, worms, insects, small crustaceans and molluscs. You may even see them eat unsuspecting young pigeons living under the bridges!





## 3

## Elwood Canal

Beyond the bend in the Canal you can see two strange structures in the water. These are litter traps, designed to capture any litter floating down the canal - including single use plastic bags, coffee cups and bottles - before it reaches the bay. The traps are emptied on a regular basis. Can you see the Pacific Ducks and Pied Cormorants using the trap as a prime resting spot? This is because they are safe here from people and pets.

In the big pine tree with the large nest box near Broadway, you can see some big nests in the treetops. These are built by White-faced Herons. Perhaps you can see them perched in the tree? Perhaps you can also spot the Willy Wagtails catching insects in flight, wagging their tail feathers as they move around? For many years now, they have been breeding in tiny nests in the plane tree on the corner of Broadway and Byron street. Their nests are so small that their head and tail stick out. Mudlarks also build their nests in the same tree: beautiful cup-like nests made of mud.

Another special resident is the Nankeen Night-Heron. With its rufous feathers you may be lucky to spot this delightful, quiet bird. During the breeding season, you may notice two or three thin, white plumes from the crown of the bird's head down its neck. The Nankeen Night-Heron is almost fully nocturnal. They tend to leave roosts shortly after sunset and are most active from dusk to dawn. The Nankeen Night-Heron enjoys fishing at low tide in the Canal near bridges. This bird is hunting alone and can often be seen downstream from the bridge on Broadway.





**Great Egret**



**Noisy Miner**



**Nankeen Night-Heron**



**White plumes during breeding season**



**White-faced Heron**



**Short-finned Eel**



**Toadfish**



**Willy Wagtail**



Watch the  
Boon Wurrung  
Dreaming Story  
of the Eel

## Can you spot?

1. The Great Egret fishing under the Glen Huntly bridge
2. The White-faced Herons perched in the tree and two big nests in the treetops
3. The Pacific Ducks and the Pied Cormorants on the litter traps. Why do you think they have chosen this place to rest?
4. The Willy Wagtail chasing insects in the sky
5. The Toadfish or the Short-finned Eel in the Canal
6. The Nankeen Night-Heron fishing near the Broadway Bridge



## 4

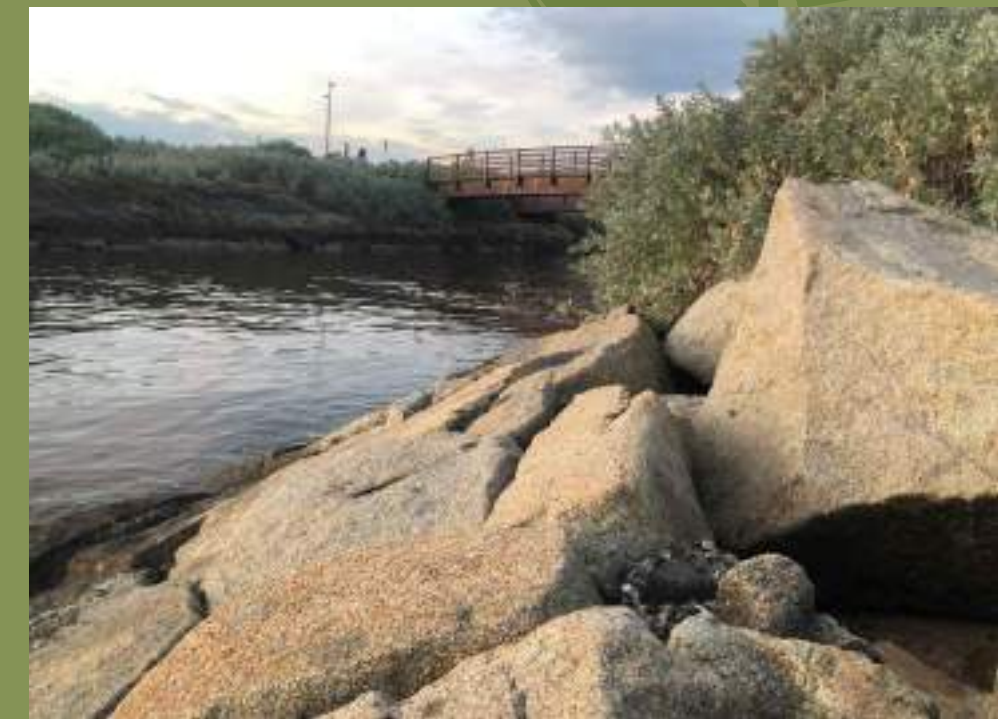
## Port Phillip Bay and Foreshore

Walking the final steps following the Elwood Canal to the Bay, you will find the very last foot bridge: a good vantage point! You can see the Canal lined with big rocks to protect the banks from the wave and wind action. These rocks are the territory of the Rakali, a native water rat that looks like an otter. Rakali live in burrows on the banks of the bay, canal and creek, and feed on aquatic insects, fish, crustaceans, mussels, snails, frogs, birds' eggs and water birds. If you see a very big rat with a long tail with a white point, you have spotted a Rakali! Rakali have partially webbed back feet, almost like a platypus or a duck, to help them swim. Not only are they strong swimmers, but they can also travel long distances on land.

When you look at the Bay, you may see Crested Terns fishing. With their black crest and their pointy beak, they are smaller and more streamline than gulls. They fly across the water in search for a delicious fish to eat. When they spot their prey, they put both their wings close to their bodies and they dive straight from the sky into the water, like a torpedo, sometimes from 10 meters high, and make a big splash!

Other birds that hunt here are our iconic local Little Penguin. Their home is the penguin colony on the St Kilda Breakwater, where they live with at least 1400 other penguins! You can spot them after sunset when they return to their burrows after a day of fishing for anchovies.

You may also be lucky to spot a dolphin! The Burrunan dolphin is a unique species of dolphin found in Port Phillip Bay and is one of the oldest species of dolphin in the world. Burrunan is an Aboriginal name meaning "large sea fish of the porpoise kind" (of course we know it is a mammal and not a fish!) It was classified as a separate species from the Common Bottlenose Dolphin in 2011. Less than 300 Burrunan dolphins remain and almost all of this species can be found in Port Phillip and Corio Bay.



The plantings of native vegetation along the Canal form a habitat network for small birds. On most days, you can hear the high-pitched melodic song of the beautiful and tiny Superb Fairy-wren as they move in small family groups through the low scrubs. They are shy birds but may come out to have a look at you. Male Superb Fairy-wrens change colour every year, from dull brown, to intermediate (blue tail only), to bright blue! Females and young males are all brown. In the shrubs, they are safe from the bigger aggressive birds.

These aggressive birds include the Noisy Miner and the Indian Myna who both dominate the birdscape in most parts of Melbourne. They look similar but are very different birds! The Noisy Miner is a native grey honeyeater with a black head, orange-yellow beak and feet, a distinctive yellow patch behind the eye, and white tips on the tail feathers. The Indian Myna is related to the Starlings and was introduced from southeast Asia. The Indian Myna is readily identified by the brown body, black hooded head and the bare yellow patch behind the eye. The bill and legs are bright yellow. Can you see the difference?

If you walk south along the Bay you will see a hill with a white beacon: Point Ormond. Thousands of years ago, there were high red cliffs here where you would have been able to see all the way back along the Elster Creek and the old swamp, back to Elsternwick Park and beyond. If you climb the hill now, the suburb of Elwood is stretching in front of you to the east.

Looking North, you can see the city. This is the end of your walk.





**2 Pied Cormorants,  
1 Seagull**

**Superb Fairy-wren**



**Male**



**Rakali**



**Burrunan Dolphin**



**Little Penguins**



**Crested Tern**

**Elwood Canal**

**Robinson  
Reserve**

## Can you spot?

1. A bright blue male Superb Fairy-wren in the shrubs?

You might hear their wonderful melodic song before you see them. Stand very still, they may come and check you out!

1. The aggressive Noisy Miner or Indian Myna chasing other birds? Can you tell the difference?

2. A Crested Tern diving headlong into the ocean to catch a fish?

3. The slender fin and back of a Burrunan Dolphin sliding through the water?

4. The Rakali moving fast in the water or on the rocks?

5. Can you hear the call of the Little Penguin from the water?



# How to live with local wildlife

We share this neighborhood with many wild animals. How wonderful is that! Did you know a local naturalist called Gio recorded more species in Elwood in a single day than there are in Melbourne Zoo? How many species do you think he found? (Hint: it's over 300!)

Wildlife watching should be an activity that causes no harm to the animals or plants we are observing. Below is a guide to some ways we can make sure we care for our environment and the animals we share it with:

- When bird watching, keep a respectful distance and let the birds choose if they want to come closer. Sometimes when we are too close to a bird, their nest or their young, it can cause stress for that creature.
- Please leave the environment as you found it. Leaf litter, rocks and branches are important habitat for bugs, geckos and reptiles.
- If walking your dog in a wildlife area, please keep them on a leash
- If you own a cat, please ensure that they are kept indoors at night. Cats are a predator to many of our native species.

Promoting biodiversity in our local area:

- If you'd like to promote habitat for our urban wildlife, you could help provide more space for native plants in your home or school. These native plants are helpful to provide shelter and food for many species. Your local nurseries will know exactly what species are suitable for your local area. Please find a list of local nurseries at the end of this guide.

Watch!

Gio's video about  
Elster Creek  
Wildlife



## Find out More or Get Involved!

### Friends of Elster Creek

[www.facebook.com/friendsofelstercreek](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofelstercreek) or [earthcareskilda.org.au/project/friends-of-elster-creek/](http://earthcareskilda.org.au/project/friends-of-elster-creek/)

### Elsternwick Park Association

[elsternwickpark.org](http://elsternwickpark.org)

### Port Phillip EcoCentre

[ecocentre.org.au](http://ecocentre.org.au)

### Bayside City Council - Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve Master Plan

<https://www.bayside.vic.gov.au/news/plan-elsternwick-park-nature-reserve>

### Friends of Native Wildlife - Bayside

[www.bayfonw.org.au/](http://www.bayfonw.org.au/)

### Westgate Biodiversity Nursery

[www.westgatebiodiversity.org.au](http://www.westgatebiodiversity.org.au)

### Bayside Community Nursery

[www.bayside.vic.gov.au/bayside-community-nursery](http://www.bayside.vic.gov.au/bayside-community-nursery)

## Activity

Locate your home and your school on Google Earth. Where are you in relationship to the Elster Creek Wildlife Walk?

## Photo Credits

Georg Ramm: Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, Chestnut Teal Ducks, Willy Wagtail, Brushtail Possum, Mudlark, Pied Butcherbird, Red Wattlebird, Noisy Myna, Nankeen Night-Heron x 2, Pied Cormorant, Superb Fairy Wrens, Crested Tern, two White-faced Herons together (on land)  
Andrew McCutcheon: Little Penguins, Golden Rakali, Southern Boobook Owl, Little Forest Bat  
Troy Muir: Dolphin  
David Fonda: Grey-headed Flying Fox  
Narelle Louise: Eastern Rosella, White-faced Heron (in flight)  
Marcus Gwynne: Great Egret, Rainbow Lorikeet  
Marion Hoffman: Tawny Frogmouth  
Remaining photos courtesy of Cecile van der Burgh or Creative Commons

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