

Podcast 65 – Common Birds of Melbourne

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 65 – Common Birds of Melbourne

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast65.mp3>

Hi,

I love to go walking. Luckily, in Australia we have many great walking trails. Melbourne has large areas of national park and grassland which all have great walking trails where you can enjoy the outdoors and get closer to nature. One of the things that makes walking in Australia interesting is the wonderful variety of bird life which you will see. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about a few of the birds you will typically see in and around an Australian city like Melbourne. For a full list of suburban Australian birds, you should visit <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/>.

The bird I see most often is the Australian Magpie.



This bird is mostly black with some white, especially on the back of the neck. The male has pure white on the back of the neck and the female has a gray colour in this area. The magpie is typically around 30 cm from head to tail and has a long tapering beak. They are found in almost all parts of Australia. Most magpies are not shy at all. For example, you can be walking along a track or footpath and there will often be a magpie searching for insects in the grass next to the path. They especially like a newly mown lawn. Many magpies will stay where they are, even though you walk just a metre away from them. They will usually look at you as you approach to decide if you are going to disturb them. They always seem to have a cheeky look about them and they will sometimes cock their head sideways as you walk quite close to them. They really are cheeky birds. I love the sound the magpies make and to me it is one of the most typically Australian sounds.

Magpies can also cause problems in the breeding season from around September to early November. A small percentage of magpies will swoop anyone who comes near their nest. This means they will dive at you like a dive bomber, trying to peck

you in the head. Although very few people are actually injured when they are swooped by a magpie, it is actually quite a scary experience. I can remember being swooped when I was a child and it was terrifying. Nowadays it's not so scary but even so, I make sure to avoid any area where there is a swooping magpie during the breeding season. It is interesting that one of our most famous Australian Rules Football teams calls themselves the magpies. They are the Collingwood Football Club. Their colours are also black and white (see podcast 2). (Click on this link for more information about the magpie and to hear their wonderful call. <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Cracticus-tibicen>.)

Another wonderful and colourful suburban bird is the Galah, one of our Australian parrots. They are pink and gray – an interesting combination. They have a pink chest and neck, gray wings and back and also a wonderful softer pink colour on the top of their head. Their head feathers can also stand up when they are excited, like a tall hat they are putting on. Their beaks are hooked like all parrots, for cracking hard seeds. They are found just about everywhere in Australia and like to fly in large, noisy flocks. It's great to see them sometimes on the grass verge outside our house. They are generally a little more timid than the magpies and will fly away if you get too close. Interestingly, they mate for life. (Click on this link for more information and to hear the sound of the galah.

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Eolophus-roseicapillus>.)

Another bird I see a lot is the Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, also one of our Australian parrots.



They are found down the east side of Australia. They are quite large birds, about 48 cm from head to tail and they make the most incredibly loud screeching sound as they fly from tree top to tree top. It's like they are shouting at everyone else to be quiet, and yet they are the loudest birds around. Their colouring is very beautiful, with brilliant white feathers and a few splashes of yellow on the top of their head and under their wings. Like the galah, they too will raise the feathers on their head when they are excited. These birds have very strong beaks and have been known to damage the wood on the outside of houses and verandahs. They make a bit of a mess wherever they go, because of their size and their powerful beaks. For example, I have some nice trees in my garden which have large cones on them. After only one visit by a few sulphur crested cockatoos, there were broken branches and the ground around the base of the tree was littered with broken

cones. Ah well, I guess the birds own the trees, not me. (Click on this link for more information and to hear the loud screeching sound of the cockatoo.

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Cacatua-galerita>)

One of our most beautiful birds is the Crimson Rosella.



Crimson Rosella

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It doesn't matter how many times I see this parrot, I am always impressed with its vibrant and rich colours. The main colour is a bright red, also known as crimson. Their cheeks are blue and the outside of their wings are also blue – what a great colour combination – so beautiful. They live down the east coast of Australia and in Victoria and South Australia. These birds are normally very timid and I find they are very hard to get close to. I have read however that they are attracted to garden trays with seeds and, once they are

familiar with people, they will eventually take seeds from the hand. These birds even have a great Australian food brand named after them. I always buy Rosella brand tomato sauce when I go shopping. (Click on this link for more information and to hear the call of these bush beauties.

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Platycercus-elegans>)

Last of all, I would like to talk about the Laughing Kookaburra.



These birds are about 40 cm long from head to tail. They live on the east coast, Tasmania and also in south west of Western Australia. Their body is a soft white and their wings are brown. I especially like the brown stripe which goes through their eyes and across the top of their head. Their beaks are tapered like the magpie and when they make their wonderful laughing sound, they turn their heads to the sky as if laughing at the heavens. I sometimes see a kookaburra on my morning walk on the Yarra Trail. He just sits quietly on a branch and looks at me. I wish he would give me his laughing call, but that hasn't happened as yet. It's a wonderful sound to hear and, like the magpie's call, is one of the most

typical sounds of Australia.

<https://youtu.be/tVVb611RrBk>.

(Click on this link for more information about this great Australian bird.

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Dacelo-novaeguineae>)

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 65 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

approach = to come near

attracted = when you want to go towards something or someone

avoid = to stop doing something

beak = the mouth of a bird

branch = the part of the tree where you find the leaves

breeding = when animals are having their young

brilliant = very bright

cheeks = the side of your face

cheeky = a little naughty

cock their head = turn your head a little on its side
combination = when two things are put together
cones = part of a tree where the seeds are found
cracking = to break something hard
damage = when something is broken or destroyed
disturb = when something or someone makes you stop what you are doing
dive bomber = a fighter airplane which dives down to drop bombs
especially = when something is special or stands out from other things
eventually = after a period of time
feathers = the covering on a bird
flocks = a group of many birds
heavens = the sky
hooked = in the shape of a hook or a curve with a sharp end
impressed = when someone really likes something or thinks it is very good
injured = when you are hurt
insects = small animals with 6 legs. For example, a fly, an ant
lawn = an area with grass that has been cut
littered = when things are thrown on the ground
mate = when one animal joins with another animal to have their young
mess = when things not tidy
nature = animals, plants and the outdoors
neck = the part of your body between your head and your shoulders
newly mown = when the lawn has been freshly cut
parrot = a type of bird
peck = when a bird tries to take something with its beak
percentage = a term in mathematics which means 'out of 100'
powerful = strong
pure = is not mixed with anything else
scary = when you are afraid
screeching = very loud, high sound made by an animal

seeds = small parts of a plant, which you put in the ground to grow

shy = when an animal or a person does not like to be seen

splashes = an area of colour

stripe = a wide line

suburban = those parts of the city where the people live, where their houses are

tapering = going from wide down to a narrow point

terrifying = when you are very, very afraid

timid = very shy, often afraid

trails = track or paths you can walk on

trays = a wide plate, usually made of metal

typically = when something is seen many times, average, normal

variety = different types

verandahs = an area attached to a house where you can sit

verge = the space between the footpath and the road

vibrant = bright

wings = used by a bird to fly