

I've been enjoying the delights of aromatherapy lately, autumn aromatherapy that is. Crisp early morning breezes that pinch your nose, mixed with the drifting scent of wood fires warming cold kitchens and that wonderfully distinctive odour of fallen leaves forming a damp, bronze carpet at the base of our Liquid Ambers. It is an exhilarating time of the year - and a little frustrating too!

The woods have grown quieter now that our summer visitors have gone. And our resident birds are too preoccupied with finding food in a diminishing larder to sing. As I walk some tracks I am grateful to see any bird at times, except perhaps the Pied Currawongs who are seeking the same little birds I am. My branch and rock throwing skills are improving daily!

Still I enjoy the walk, the wonderful autumn smells and the anticipation of seeing one bird in particular. Its rich, vibrant calls and ringing song is one of the most distinctive around Berry and the male looks an absolute stunner. Last June I was with a group of birders exploring the woods of Black Ash Nature Reserve. Our leader was Chris Chafer, a Wollongong birder of very considerable experience and not easily impressed. While we were all enjoying the walk and the company we were frustrated we hadn't seen more birds. Then we heard a call that broke the silence and in to view flew a bird dressed in a yellow-green overcoat and a luminous lemon-yellow waistcoat topped with a starched white bib trimmed in jet black. This was a male Golden Whistler and he looked good!

He was busy too and appeared blissfully unaware of the barrage of binoculars following his every move. Or maybe he was aware of us and, hoping to impress, was delighting in showing off his splendidly sharp plumage. It worked. We were entranced, our spirits rose and Chris said it for all of us "It only takes a Golden Whistler to make an autumn day"

I was telling Barry, a friend visiting from Sydney, of this incident just recently. We were at the trig

point at Red Rocks Reserve scanning the Kangaroo Valley with our binoculars in the hope of seeing a Grey Goshawk or a Wedge-tailed Eagle. The views were breathtaking but we didn't see any goshawks or eagles. In fact we hadn't seen much at all for two days!

We had come to Red Rocks to see if the heath was flowering. It wasn't, except for a small patch of Heath Banksia and that was busy with Eastern Spinebills and New Holland Honeyeaters, both attractive birds and well worth seeing. But they weren't the birds we had hoped to see, so we decided to explore.

As soon as we left the Heath Banksia a breeze-free stillness settled over the heath. We listened, we looked. We walked, we stood. There wasn't a sound. Not even a scurrying shadow skipping through the undergrowth. Resigned to it being 'one of those days' we turned back to the car and started the slow bumpy drive back to the road.

Then, like little mice, out on to the track popped four Southern Emu-wrens. The rays of the afternoon sun caught the orange in their plumage flushing it with gold highlights. The soft colours of the male's lilac ear muffs shimmered silver. They looked fabulous. The tail of an Emu-wren is made up of four filamentous feathers; similar to those of an Emu and, in certain lights, the tail is quite hard to see and the bird can easily look like a short plump mouse as it hops among the leaf litter.

They are also very secretive birds and notoriously difficult to see. Yet here were Barry and I enjoying the best views either of us had ever had of Emu-wrens. "Autumn is a great time of the year" Barry said as we drove contentedly home.

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