



Friends of Pallister's Reserve Inc.

Pallister's Reserve is a 254 ha wetland reserve on Masons Road, Orford,
owned by Trust for Nature, & managed by the Friends of Pallister's Reserve Inc.
Established January 1990

**Sept.
2026**



Next Meeting: Sunday, September 27, 2026

10am: Working Bee

Noon: Lunch

12:30pm: General meeting

Replenished Wetlands



Higher-than-average winter rains have replenished Pallister's swamps and ponds, wetlands that in recent years struggled to show open water. The August 23 photo above was taken at the wetland just south-west of the wool-shed. The arrival of the long-awaited inundation was celebrated – resoundingly – by multitudes of frogs! (Would have been a great time to identify our amphibians from their calls using the FrogID app!) During a visit to the south of the Hockings block later that day, Richard Alexander observed that he had never previously seen so much surface water during his years of volunteering at the Reserve.

Sadly, the current conditions may be short-lived. The ongoing presence of open water in Pallister's wetlands relies upon a high hydration level of the ~4–5m thick layer of swelling clay that underlies the Reserve. It appears that this clay has progressively dried during the past two decades, largely due to a ~1.5m decline in the annual average water-table – to be addressed further in the next month's Newsletter.

Also contributing to the wetland depletion will be the 2026-2027 El Niño event. Supercharged by climate change, this El Niño is shaping up to be the most extreme on record. Since 1999 Pallister's rainfall measurements have averaged 173mm for the October-December period. **BOM currently forecasts** that for Orford there is a 44% chance of less than 112mm being accumulated in this 2026 quarter. More telling, however, will be the elevated El Niño maximum temperatures: BOM advises that maximum high temperatures for the Pallister's region will likely fall in the top 20% range of historical observations. Coming in "**thirstwaves**", sustained high temperatures may soon evaporate open water remaining in south-west wetlands.

September Tasks

- Mow
- Read bores.
- Fungi and orchid observations.
- Weeding: Bridal creeper, Italian arum, Coast wattle, thistle ...
- Check for South African Weed Orchid

Made by Man

The following extract from the [Guardian edition of August 15, 2026](#) reports discussions that journalist Graham Readfearn had with Dr. Frank Wong – virologist and avian influenza expert at the CSIRO's Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness, and Prof Marcel Klaassen – bird flu expert and ecologist at Deakin University. Klaassen has been studying the H5N1 strain for 20 years.



Frank Wong: "The most successful trait of the bird flu is adaptability ... avian influenza viruses evolve quickly because they are prone to errors when their genes are being continually copied.

"Most mutations are not successful but, given the right environment and situation, some mutations give an advantage.

Farming poultry in dense populations for human consumption has helped new versions of avian viruses to emerge.

"In a way, it's like an incubator for highly pathogenic avian influenza that you don't see in the wild environment.

"In the wild it is not to the virus's benefit to kill its host. But in a domestic chicken flock, if a virus mutates from low pathogenicity to high, it selects for that trait because the infection burns through that population."

Klaassen goes even further. "This is a man-made virus," he says. "Did these viruses evolve in the wild? No, they did not.

"Low pathogenic viruses come in and, with high densities of birds and large numbers, you have an ideal environment for a virus to evolve. All of the high pathogenicity influenza viruses evolve in poultry."

Pallisters Reserve lies in the traditional Country of the Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar peoples, who never ceded their sovereignty of the Land. We are indebted for their past and ongoing custodianship.

Meetings are held at the Reserve; usually every fourth Sunday except July and December.

Co-leaders: Julia Schlapp 0427 778 265 & Anthony Leddin 0408 333 046 Sec./Treasurer: Trevor Kennedy 5565 8692;

Minute Sec.: Nick Glover; Newsletter Editor: Ross Hicks (pallisters_newsletter@proton.me).

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Koala Count, August 2026

by Trevor Kennedy

The third three-monthly survey was held before the August meeting at the reserve. Peter's results for his koala count during his August bird counts was also available. Both sets of results are included in the table below.

Notes:

1. Total numbers were higher in the Pallisters block of bush than at any other time since surveying started in 2022.
2. The Pallisters sites varied in numbers more than usual with site P1 having the highest number of koalas seen for a single 300m transect since 2022.
3. Numbers in the Hocking bush remained low as in the past.
4. The suggested number of koalas in Pallisters bush depended on the site, but ranged from 300+ down to 43. Overall, taking the block as a whole, the estimated number for Pallisters bush is 173 with a density of 2.7 koalas per hectare, higher than a past study where a density of 2 koalas per hectare caused vegetation damage that was important.
5. Numbers in the Hocking bush are estimated at just 20 with a low density of 0.3 per hectare.
6. The survey estimated the total number of koalas in both bush blocks at about 216.
7. Peter's Koala count, during his bird surveys, estimated 100 koalas across his five 2-hectare sites with a density of 0.8 koalas per hectare. However, he has one site, B5, outside the bush areas and it again had nearly half of the koalas he saw. These 3 koalas in 2 hectare gives a density of 1.5 per hectare in bush outside the two main blocks and suggests that the overall suggested number for the reserve is higher than our koala count. This suggests that we need to estimate the area of scattered bush at the reserve and survey these over time to estimate this extra number of koalas.
8. No koala joeys were seen in the survey.

Thanks to everyone who helped with the surveys last month and a reminder that our next koala count is in the morning before November's meeting.

Transect	Area surveyed (ha)	No. koala adults	No. koala young	Total koalas present	Estimated koala population	Estimated koala density (/ha)
P1	1.5	8	0	8	346	5.3
P2	1.5	3	0	3	130	2.0
P3	1.5	1	0	1	43	0.7
Koalas Pallisters block	4.5	12	0	12	173	2.7
H1	1.5	0	0	0	0	0.0
H2	1.5	1	0	1	40	0.7
Koalas Hocking block	3.0	1	0	1	20	0.3
Koalas all Pallister bush	7.5	13	0	13	216	1.7
Koalas during bird count	10	8	0	8	100	0.8

Pallister block area assumed = 65 ha; Hocking block area assumed = 60 ha; total bush area = 125 ha