



Bringing the Plains Wanderer Back from the Brink

Exhibition Resource

This resource is written to be taken around the exhibition and filled in 'in situ'. The questions aim to spark interest and inspire young viewers to look beyond the surface of an artwork. We hope it will ignite their curiosity about the creative and intellectual processes that are a part of being an artist as well as alert them to the status of the Plains Wanderer.

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Plains Wanderers are small, ground-dwelling birds found in sparse native grasslands of the Murray & Riverina. They have a yellow bill and legs, and feathers that are fawn in colour with black rosettes. The sexes differ in appearance, with the female being slightly larger, and she has a black and white collar above a red breast patch.

Plains Wanderers prefer sparse native grasslands, which typically occur on hard red soils. An open grassland structure with around 60% bare ground allows birds to easily move about, and seeds and insects to eat, and to detect and slip away from predators like foxes. Plains Wanderers will disappear from the habitat that becomes too sparse or too dense.

The vast majority (>99%) of records of Plains Wanderers in NSW over the past 30 years come from an area of the western Riverina bounded by Hay and Narrandera on the Murrumbidgee River in the north, the Cobb Highway in the west, the Billabong Creek in the south, and Urana in the east. Even within its western Riverina stronghold, the Plains Wanderer has a very patchy distribution.

The Murray/Riverina region is considered a hot spot for the species and critical to its survival. Long term monitoring of the Plains wanderer population in this area has shown they have declined by 93% since 2001.

The last couple of decades in the NSW Riverina have been tough for Plains Wanderers. There have been long dry periods and some very wet years. This has meant that large areas of habitat have often been too sparse or too thick to support birds, which has caused a steep decline in numbers. There is estimated to be only 300 birds remaining in the Riverina and less than 1,000 in Australia.

PLAINS WANDERER FAMILY

Christina Whitehouse

Artist's Statement

The painting I have done is of a male and female and their chicks under a night sky with the Southern Cross above.

The Plains-Wanderer is one of Australia's most iconic birds. It is quite a mystery bird and its habitat is also special: natural low scrubby saltbush and other herbage with a few larger bushes for security from predators. The birds can live in areas where there are sheep which graze and keep the saltbush low.



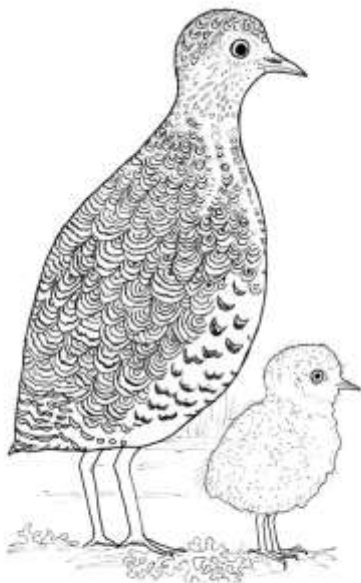
They blend in beautifully with their habitat as you will see from the night photograph I took of the female's head. Like the emu, it is the male who sits on the nest and raises the chicks until they are two months old when they become more adventurous and start their own lives.

Lots of chicks can be found in the paintings in the exhibition. Why do you think chicks are so important?

Why are the birds shown at nighttime?

How many chicks can you count in this painting and in the whole exhibition?

Colour in the chick with its dad below and then draw and colour some more.



THE HOLLOW

Kate Smith

Artist's Statement

I currently reside in an area that is the perfect habitat for the Plains Wanderer, however it occurred to me after reading about the Plains Wanderer that I would have no idea how to identify a nest if I came across one.

Further research helped me identify what their nests and eggs look like. My concept was to use the imagery I researched to recreate a nest using punch needle and various natural and woven fibres, using punch needle.



Can you see the different grasses the creator of this work has embroidered in this artwork? What is a 'hollow'. Why would the artist call her work by this title?

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A punch needle was used to create this work. Look up 'punch needle' on the internet and write some interesting facts about it below.

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Can you see why the artist has framed the work in a round, wooden frame?

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List the different fibres and threads the artist has used (look at the written panel beside the work).

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.....

This work is classed as a piece of fibre art. Why do you think it is 'art'? What makes it special?

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.....



Hidden in Plain Sight
(*Pedionomus torquatus*)

Miranda Brett

Artist's Statement

A graphic exploration of the distinctive patterns of the female Plains Wanderer's plumage within a diminishing form

This piece of fibre art is an unusual shape for an artwork. Why do you think the artist has chosen a triangle? How does this relate to the Plains Wanderer?

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How many different coloured threads can you count?

Are some of them layered more thickly in areas than in others?

How has the artist created highlights in her work?

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Can you see that the patterns in the embroidery are similar to the feathers of the Plains Wanderer bird but they could also be the landscape where the bird lives? Draw a triangle-shaped artwork yourself using the space below. Like this work, fill it in with similar patterns. Picture somewhere out in the country near where you live now.



NOW YOU SEE ME? ...

Samantha Davies

Artist's Statement

'Now you see me?'...

The most recognisable and beautiful of the two sexes, the female Plains-wanderer is presented here walking carefully across a moonlit field of grasses and yellow-buttons, with lichen softly covering the clay pan Hay plains. In creating this work, I wished to provide the viewer with a detailed image of the female and an insight into its environment and behaviours. The title I have chosen asks the viewer to think about the what future this critically endangered bird may have and invites the viewer to think about actions they may take to ensure that the answer to the question is not '...Now you don't'.

Looking at this painting, there is a lot of bright yellow colour. The flowers around the bottom edge are called 'Pale Beauty Heads' (*Calocephalus sonderi*) and are found in western NSW.



Pale Beauty Heads

Another common yellow flowering plant found in the bird's habitat is Yellow Buttons (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*). It has another name - can you find out what it is?



Yellow Buttons

Why do you think the Plains Wanderer has such bright yellow body parts?

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.....

Why do you think the female has a red-brown breast plate? (Hint - look at the bird's habitat for clues)

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.....

The brightest parts of the bird are its b _ _ _ , its _ _ _ t and its e _ e _ .



THE PLAINS WANDERER

Jan Lawler

Artist's Statement

What better inspiration for a painting than that of the Plains Wanderer, a critically endangered bird, the majority of whose remaining habitat is located on my very doorstep. I see a challenging opportunity to draw attention to this small, vulnerable and near flightless bird and its diminishing native grassland environment.

As a visual artist I portray the uniqueness of this species through a collage of images depicting the nest, eggs, chicks, male and female adults and the environment in which they live. Because of their excellent camouflage it is a challenge to deliver a visual impact whilst retaining this element of survival and at the same time drawing attention to the decline of this small, secretive and elusive bird.

My creative experience and life in south-western NSW over the past 50 years has filled me with an abiding interest and love of the plains, its colours, its people and most importantly the fauna and flora of the region.

Look at the painting up close (but don't touch it – you have natural oils on your fingers that may alter the surface). The artist has spread thick layers of paint. Does that effect the scene looking at from further away? What affect does that have on you, the viewer of this specific artwork?

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.....

What other differences can you find between how this painter had applied the paint in her work, and how another painter in the exhibition has applied the paint? Look for 'textures' – i.e. smooth or rough surfaces, thicker or thinner paint, a long brush stroke or a more punching stroke. Think about what effect they make to the scene; and how that might affect what you think about it.

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WHAT'S MY FUTURE?

Ian Campbell

Artist's Statement

Plains Wanderers are very special because they are the only member of their family in Australia making them one of the most genetically distinct bird in the world.

They have suffered since European settlement through habitat loss and introduced predators and have now declined to isolated patches made up of their preferred native vegetation which supplies a suitable food source of seed and insects.

Deniliquin could be considered the centre of their now-reduced range with a scattered population on farms with native grassland in Northern Victoria and more extensive habitat on the plains north of Deniliquin.

Introducing irrigation channels and more specifically rice crops onto these plains increases the presence of feral cats and foxes which are attracted by the abundance of frogs and mice. The predators then become established in the Plains Wanderer preferred habitat.



Look at the 'composition' of this piece – at the way the artist has arranged the different elements on the canvas.

Name the main elements that you see

Where are your eyes drawn to look first?

Why do you think this happens?

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Which animal in the painting is the biggest - the cat or the fox?

Can you imagine why the painter might have put the bird in between them? ..

.....

Why do you think there is the green patch at the top of the painting?

PLAINS WANDERER UNCOVERED

David Booth (Ghost Patrol)

David Booth is an artist who lives in Melbourne. He first became famous for his large-scale murals painted in city laneways in the CBD. He has recently completed his first mural on a wind turbine at Hepburn Spring Wind Farm which is also very large in scale.



Booth began as a ‘street artist’ which had its roots in graffiti art. Looking at his painting in this exhibition, the style is very different from the other works.

Can you describe that difference? (Hint – look at the colours and the lines)

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The artist is also known as Ghost Patrol. Can you guess why he might have that name?

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Have you seen graffiti before? How would you describe it?

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Does it relate to what you see in David Booth’s painting?

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Some references to look up online about this artist

<https://bluethumb.com.au/blog/news-and-media/ghost-patrolled-an-interview-with-one-of-the-most-renowned-street-artists-in-australia/>

<https://theupsider.com.au/laneway-tate-modern-ghostpatrol-rise-fame/1863>

ENDANGERED 1

ENDANGERED 2

Pam Wettenhall

Artist's Statement

The Plains Wanderer is one of many species under threat and if the arts can assist with recognition, education, solutions and promotion of our troubled landscape we are supporting in a small way.

Being such a small bird and now only surviving in a restricted region, this awareness programme is important so future generations can recognise the bird and its habitat for its survival. This will only happen if the Riverina landholders and the local communities are environmentally educated and involved in its survival programmes, feral pests eradicated and breeding programmes embraced/adopted and the designated stock routes strictly managed.

Hopefully, this is the beginning of many awareness programmes that involves the arts. The more organisations involved the greater the chance of educating and promoting confronting issues to the wider community which may assist with solutions.



These art works have the same title and use the same theme. They both include city and rural scenery. Can you pick out other similarities between the two

paintings?

What are the most striking differences between the two paintings?

What is the artist trying to say about why the Plains Wanderer is endangered?



PLAINS WANDERER – SURVIVING PADDOCK

Josephine Duffy

Artist's Statement



My contribution is a series of printed imagery (intaglio and relief) and works on paper, compiled within a concertina book format. I chose this art format in order to map the trajectory of the movements of Plains-Wanderer birds as a form of tracery line. From my initial research I have noted the seemingly haphazard nature of its 'tracks' across the landscape. Indeed, it does 'wander'. I particularly wanted to incorporate the tracery lines which indicated the necessary wandering range needed

to exist.

I have explored the notion of the birds' wandering patterns across its unique grass lands on country that is now marginalised. I have made link to colonisation within this narrative as well, in regard to the movement of farm machinery and people 'working' the land. Moreover, I seek to map the nature of the movement of the species as it physically wanders across the plains - as well as the 'movement' of its status to 'critically endangered'. I have interwoven imagery of the movement of endemic grasses on the landscape, and the nature of changing weather.

This is a very multi-layered work. The artist says that the pages in her book are 'intaglio and relief'. Intaglio printing is where lines are etched (dug) into a hard surface and the paint or ink lies in the grooves and is transferred to the paper underneath. 'Relief' is where the paper (or material) is laid on top of the etched surface and the paint or ink only transfers from the raised surface. In that sense 'intaglio' and 'relief' are opposites.

This book is structured with one half 'intaglio' and the other half 'relief'. This means that the middle two pages are related but opposites in some way, as are the next two pages moving outwards, and the next two, and so on. The way the pages are related is sometimes easy to see and sometimes quite obscure. Look at the pages with a fox on them and try and work out the relationship; or the green pastures and try to find its opposite.

On the other side of the concertina, is lettering. Read what is written from one end and note the word and its colouring. Then read from the opposite end, again noting the word and its colour. What can you read? Can you work out the relationship between these two words and their colours?

This artist is a printmaker and creates Artists' Books. Her 'book' is made of a lot of different materials – look at the card next to the artwork. Why do you think this work is 'Art'?



THE WANDERER

Robyn Davis

Artist's Statement

The Plains-wanderer is a tiny, unique ground-dwelling bird. She is a very special little girl, this one, under 15cm tall, living in the sparse native grasslands of the dry Riverina country. She can breed in her first year, laying between 2-5 eggs which hatch in 23 days. Her mate will hatch the eggs and rear the chicks while she busies herself, finding another male to mate with.

The Plains-wanderer is 'in a great state of decline which is likely to lead to extinction as the native grasslands are cultivated and farmed'. I have chosen to paint a female Plains-wanderer for her colour and have used metallic paints of gold, silver, and bronze to represent the special value of these rare little treasures.

What makes this painting different from the other works in this exhibition?

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Describe some of the different techniques the artist has used in the background.

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Do you think there is a meaning behind the wavy patterned line and multiple circles painted around the bird? Can you imagine what the artist might be saying?

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This artist is an ordained minister in a church. In her artworks she always paints something which symbolises her Christian faith. Can you find it in this work?

NOT ALL WHO WANDER ARE LOST

Krysta Hallum

Artist's Statement

I chose to draw this particular bird because of its stance and the way its body and neck is curved. I wanted to draw the plains wanderer in a way that is rarely seen in photographs but could also look proportionate on the page without having a background drawn in.

I tried to tie a minimalistic approach toward drawing this bird alone by having a lot of blank space around it to depict its status of being critically endangered and somewhat alone.



What do you think the title means? Is the artist talking only about Plains Wanderers?

This work is a drawing done with graphite and coloured pencils on paper. The artist has paid a lot of attention to detail. If you like drawing, things to note in this work are the way the feathers haven't been drawn all over the stomach but just in parts; the feathers have been suggested. The same with scales on the bird's legs, and the splash of red for the breast.

The luminous quality of the background is also meticulously coloured and worth noting.

When you read the Artist's Statement the author notes that the drawing is 'minimalistic' and has lots of 'blank space'. The bird is drawn so that its endangered status is emphasised, and that it is 'somewhat alone'. Do you think the artist has achieved this?

How would you draw something so that he or she (or it) looked alone? What would you emphasise? What colours would you use? Explore ideas about this with a friend or your teacher.

Draw a person or another animal to show it alone and lonely using some of this artist's techniques.