SparrowNet


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The SparrowNet Team have recently completed another field trip, this time sampling house sparrows around Victoria. This is the second leg of the first stage of the SparrowNet project, which follows on from the New South Wales trip last month. The aim of this part of the project is collect blood samples and take measurements in order to examine the population structure of house sparrows across their range in Australia. The team, including Associate Professor Simon Griffith, Dr Monica Awasthy and Samuel Andrew, sampled birds in Torquay, Geelong, St. Kilda (Melbourne), Albury and Burrumbuttock before heading back up to Sydney.

The following photos show one of the flocks hanging out at the stables, our mist net blowing in the wind with the birds behind it on the hedge and some of the birds in bags waiting to be processed at the racetrack.

At the Geelong Racecourse, we were overwhelmed with the number of birds flying back and forth from the horse stables to some nearby hedges – at one point we had to close the mist-nets to give ourselves a chance to catch up!
In Melbourne, we sampled all of our birds at the fantastic Veg Out Community Garden in St. Kilda, where the food in a small chicken coop at the centre of the garden attracted house sparrows all day. Mist nets are very fine and purposely hard to see, but you might be able to find it in this photo by looking for the poles on either end!

The following photos show the some garden plots at Veg Out, a male house sparrow in the garden, and finally measuring the head of one our birds.

In Albury, we caught birds between the horses inside a stable at the local racetrack. Later, we set-up at the Watson family chicken coop in Burrumbuttock. In the end, the trick for finding house sparrows on this trip seemed to be looking for horses and chickens!

**What next?** Sampling is now complete for New South Wales, and Victoria. Over the next few months the SparrowNet Team will travel across southern and inland Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and visit the western edges of their range near Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. Once collected, the blood samples will be processed to characterise the genetic make-up of the various populations and analysed for any differences/similarities. Investigations into various behavioural, physiological and reproductive attributes of the geographically and climatically diverse populations will follow.

**Thank you....** The SparrowNet Team was once again significantly aided by many kind and generous people who shared their knowledge, expertise, homes/backyards/properties and assisted with the catching of birds. These included: Assoc Prof Kate Buchanan (Deakin University) in Geelong/Torquay; staff at the Geelong Racecourse; the staff at BirdLife Australia’s head office in Melbourne and the BirdLife Melbourne area group; volunteers at Veg Out Community Gardens in St. Kilda (Melbourne) especially Sal, Janine and Lenny; horse owners/trainers at the Albury Racecourse stables; Dr Maggie Watson (Charles Sturt University) and the Watson family in Albury/Burrumbuttock.