

# Tale of Two Gliders

## Chasing yellow-bellied and greater gliders during COVID

**Michael Johnson, Melbourne, Vic, Australia**

Way back in COVID times (yes, I know, it is still here, but the shutdowns have gone), in June 2020 our restrictions had relaxed to the point where we could go anywhere in the greater Melbourne metropolitan area, but not beyond. I decided to try and “tick” two local gliders I had not seen in the wild, the yellow-bellied (*Petaurus australis*) and the Southern greater glider (*Petauroides volans*). A little research suggested Bunyip State Park and particularly the Mortimer Picnic Ground. The advantage of this site was that it was only about 50 minutes’ drive away and within the metropolitan area.

The first attempt was a failure. I was with my friend and wildlife watching companion Graeme, and my brother-in-law and niece came along, making the occasion a little too social. We did have nice pizza in Gembrook, though, and on the way out saw an Eastern grey kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*) and Ua red-necked wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*).

Graeme and I tried again a couple of weeks later. We walked a track that left the west side of the picnic ground, went over a ridge and a road and then looped back to the picnic ground. It started in wet sclerophyll forest with tall gums and giant tree ferns along the creek, then when it crossed the road and ridge line it entered dryer, more open forest with melaleuca fringing the creek.

This time we had more success hearing yellow-bellies call along the creek line on the dryer side. We also had close views of a Krefft’s glider (*Petaurus notatus*) in a bush beside us then volplaning across a valley in front of us. Graeme also saw a wild *Homo sapiens* bare-footed and scantily clad coming down one of the tracks then heading up another, in the middle of winter. I didn’t see it (Graeme could not determine the sex) but I did find a footprint in the mud. We considered reporting it to the authorities but decided that they had a right to live as they wished.

We also drove along the road through the park to Tonimbuk and back, and saw a common wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*), swamp wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) and sambar deer (*Rusa unicolor*), as well as kangaroos.

Unfortunately, soon after this we went into our second and longest lockdown so even Bunyip SP was out of bounds. It was November before we got back there, and finally we had success. I saw my first wild yellow-bellied glider in a tree beside the road next to where the track crosses.

2021 was frustrating as we experienced four more lockdowns, although they were all a lot shorter than the 2020 lockdowns. We continued to visit Bunyip State Park as opportunity arose and started using the tracks that left the picnic ground at the eastern end. Our sightings increased dramatically and we were seeing two, three or four every night, as well as Krefft’s gliders. There seemed to be a lot more here or maybe we were just getting better at seeing them. But no greater gliders.

Come November 2021 all restrictions were finally lifted. 90% of the population had been vaccinated, and that was apparently good enough. I thought it was about time we finally knocked the greater glider off. I knew Badgers Weir Picnic Area (part of the Yarra Ranges National Park), had an excellent reputation for them, and was about one and a half hours drive away.

When we got there, we found the gates locked to vehicles, however there a small car parking area next to the gates. We had no trouble walking up the tarmacked road towards the picnic ground, searching for gliders as we went. At one point a security guard drove up the road, lights flashing, but when we told him what we were doing he was fine.

Almost straight away, we saw yellow-bellied gliders. However about 20 minutes in, we finally saw one, my first Southern greater glider. After that it was all yellow-belled and Krefft's gliders, including some great volplaning, and we only saw the one greater glider. But at least I had finally seen it!

Just recently this video, [Tips to find cute gliders](#), has been released. Worth watching, but it was filmed in tropical north Queensland, so quite a different environment to where I saw my gliders.