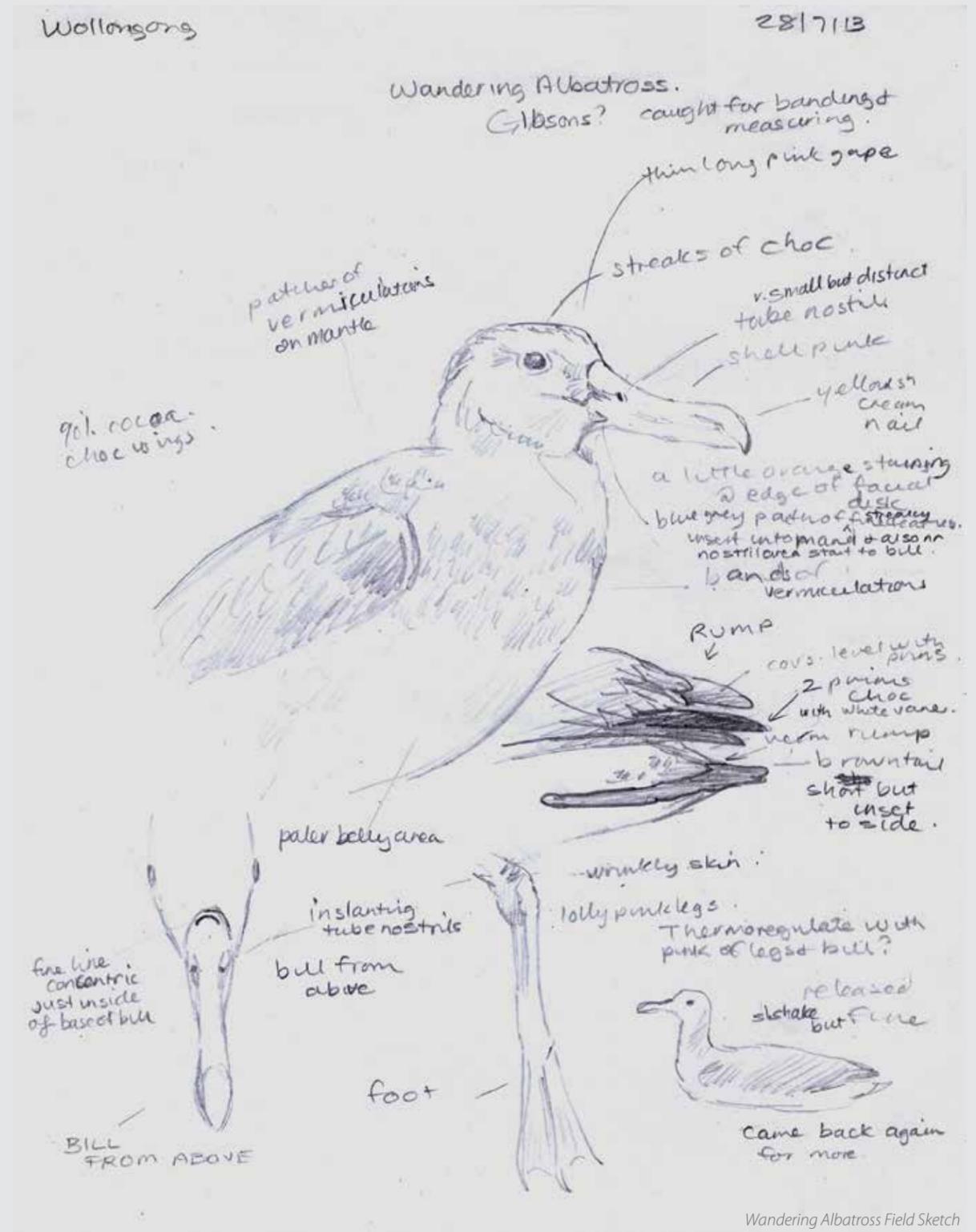




CONNECTED ELEMENTS

Wildlife and botanical artist
 Fiona Lumsden's art is also her activism
 writes Leigh Marchant

Fiona Lumsden at Jervis Bay



Wandering Albatross Field Sketch

Fiona Lumsden's wildlife and botanical artworks are about relationships: intimate relationships between artist and subject, interdependent relationships between elements of the natural world, and the relationship between people and their immediate environment.

Fiona's personal connection with the birds, plants and insects she paints arises from a lifetime living in the Blue Mountains, the region that provides the inspiration for much of her work.

As a fifteen-year-old living an isolated childhood in the small hamlet of Mount Wilson in the Wollemi Wilderness, she began exploring along logging trails into the rainforest. Old-timer woodcutters, the Kirk brothers, told her stories and taught Fiona the old names for birds and animals and she went on to read books like *The Flora of Sydney Region*, Troughton's *Furred Animals of Australia* and Chisholm's *Bird Wonders of Australia*. Later, solo trips in a Ford Escort allowed Fiona to follow her fascination for birds into the national parks around Sydney.

These early experiences set the pattern for her approach to her work. Fiona says: 'I spend enormous amounts of time in the field: looking, absorbing, drawing on the spot, making notes, photographing and identifying. That way I get a real feel for the subject and its environment: how much it varies and changes, what features and aesthetics I think are most important to convey and capture; its essential character.'

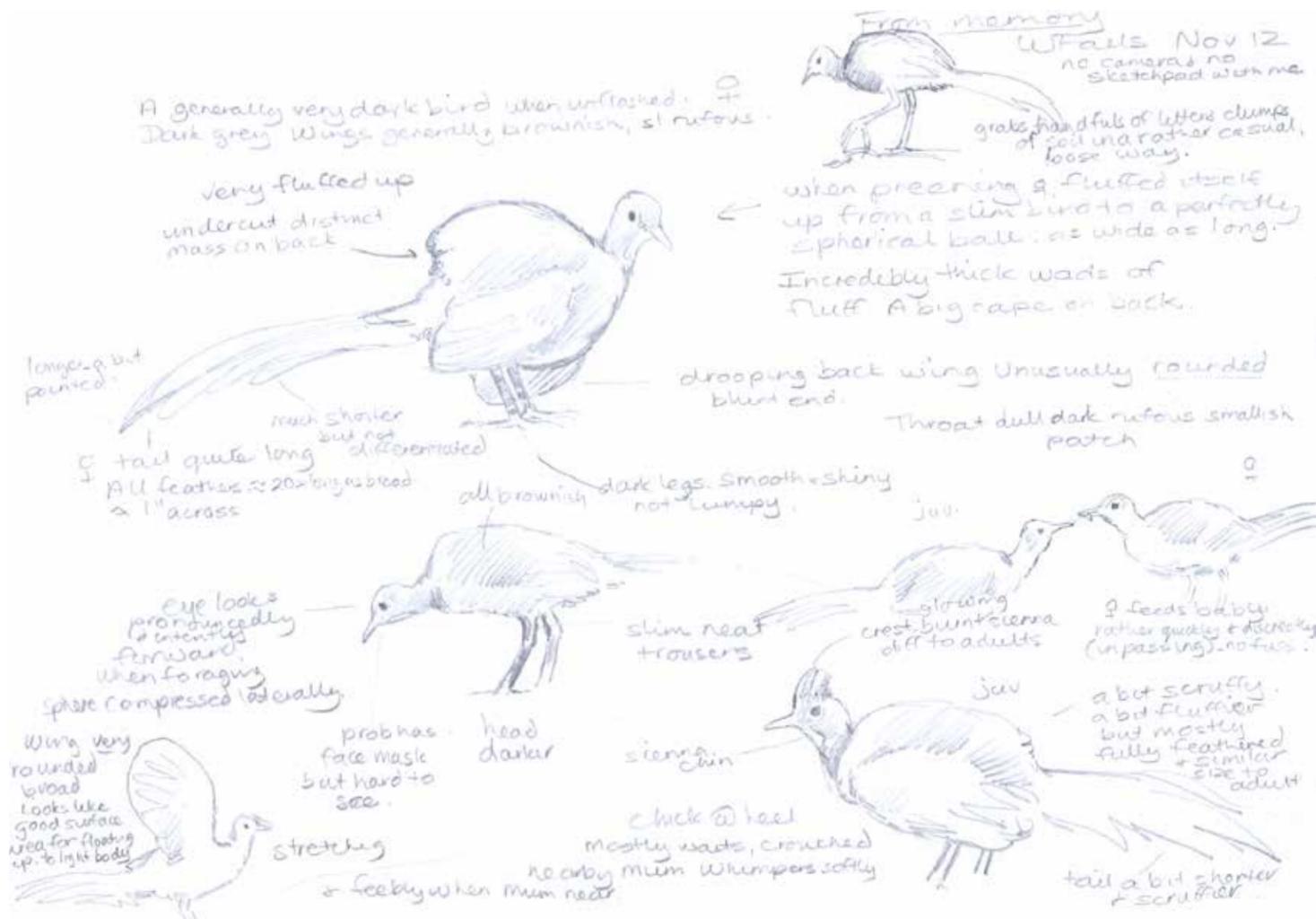
Some of her works draw on sketches and reference photos dating back years. The Superb Lyrebird composition (pictured) includes nests and nestlings found on ledges during her rock-climbing days in the 1980s. She has also collected found items, like fallen feathers, for many years and works these into her botanical and natural history compositions.

Fiona's fieldwork continues to be supported by reference to books, photographs and information on the internet. The challenge, however, is not just faithfully to reproduce the subject. For her bird portraits she aims to balance accuracy and aesthetics. Fiona says: 'The bird needs to be recognisable and informative but also appealing to the viewer. Like an old-fashioned portrait it needs to capture personality but flatter the subject. It's always a compromise between textbook accuracy and having the birds look immediate and lively.'

If her own relationship with her subjects is the starting point for Fiona's work, the subject's relationship with their wild environment is just as important. Bird portraits are shown with a suggestion of the landscape or plants where they can be found or, in some cases, as just one element in an intricate ecosystem. The intense red flowers of a Crimson Bottlebrush are visited by the tiny, brilliant red Scarlet Honeyeater. A closer look reveals two butterflies—a Spotted Jezebel

'Wildlife and botanical art can be a powerful tool to increase appreciation of the natural world'





and Small Grass Yellow—and several native bee species that represent some of the myriad insect visitors to this abundantly flowering plant.

In another painting, the unique hanging swamps that cling to seepage points in the Blue Mountains provide their own surprises. The thick and sometimes spiky mountain swamps harbour secretive inhabitants like the tiny, fragile Southern Emu-wren with its long wispy tail (pictured). Long flowering grevilleas provide nectar for wide-ranging foragers like the Caper White Butterfly—a western species that sometimes moves through the mountains in very large numbers—and the attractively furry Teddy Bear Bee.

The final element in Fiona's work is her desire to foster people's relationship with their own environment, to draw them into its intricacies so that they are motivated to conserve it. This desire is particularly reflected in her regional bird posters.

Fiona says: 'Wildlife and botanical art can be a powerful tool to increase appreciation of the natural world. People won't love and protect what they don't know about. I always hope by depicting the beauty of our wonderful wild world in artworks that I do my bit to help raise awareness and appreciation of threatened species and the importance of nature in general.'

Ever since her early years in Mount Wilson, painting in an old studio with damp, bulging walls covered with Margaret Senior's Australian wildlife posters, Fiona has wanted to create bird posters. Now she is doing just that. Her posters are hand-painted artworks filled with tiny bird portraits that, at a glance, show a large cross-section of species from a region. Each poster is the product of years of work, endless drafts and some compromise.

'It is so exceptionally complicated,' says Fiona. 'There is compromise and artifice in the composition, of

Opposite page:
Superb Lyrebird Field Sketch
This page: Birds of Sydney poster, detail



Blue Mountains Grevilleas and Southern Emu-wren



Crimson Bottlebrush and Scarlet Honeyeater

course. With my regional bird posters I'm just hoping to stimulate interest for further investigation of nature—especially with beginners. I try to give people as many species as I can on one page in an attractive way! Fiona's first poster was of the beautiful Capertee Valley in NSW and showcased 121 of their woodland birds in a broad landscape format. Her second poster, Birds of the Blue Mountains, incorporates 109 species within a setting of cliffs, rainforest and bushland. She is now in the final stages of her most ambitious poster to date, Birds of Sydney Coastal Bushland, which includes 170 native birds. Drafting this latest poster has taken several years of arranging and rearranging the tiny birds, each only a centimetre or two long, and redrawing the composition. Once again, fieldwork has been key. After discovering that Sydney offshore waters are some of

the best in the world for sea birding, she went on boat trips to the edge of the continental shelf in the name of research. Her joy in the natural world was heightened by close encounters with albatrosses and fragile-looking Storm Petrels flying over massive, heaving waves and was only tempered somewhat when she joined in the heaving.

The passion Fiona is looking to inspire in others with her posters and other work is a reflection of her own enduring passion for the natural world. Her art is not separate from her love of nature, her knowledge of nature and her being in nature. Her art is also her activism.

Leigh Marchant
leighmarchant@gmail.com



Fiona Lumsden's bird posters, prints and originals can be purchased at www.fionalumsden.com or in retail outlets throughout the Blue Mountains. For the stories behind her artworks visit Fiona Lumsden's Wildlife Art Page on Facebook.

Fiona is exhibiting unframed originals and limited edition prints at *Botanica 2015, The Art of Seduction: the Birds and the Bees*, The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, 18 April—10 May 2015.