

# Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



The uncommon Noisy Friarbird at Barkers Creek  
photo by Geraldine Harris

## **ANNUAL REPORT for 2023/24**

The past 12 months have been another successful year for the club, with stimulating, informative presentations by a variety of speakers, and a range of excursions including our first weekend away for many years. However, the death on 2<sup>nd</sup> January of George Broadway has marked this year as both sad and memorable: George was a leader in every aspect of the club's activities from his involvement in its formation in 1976 until late last year. We miss him as an inspiring skilled naturalist, so generous in sharing his knowledge of the regional environment, and as a dear friend. And we continue to benefit from all the contributions George made to the club in so many ways. Another long-time member who was active in the club for many years, Enid Chapman, also died recently.

The topics covered in talks at our meetings included the amazing diversity of the Southern Australian Marine flora, Coliban Water's Biodiversity Strategy, Predator Control in the Grampians/Gariwerd, the use of highly trained Detector Dogs to monitor the impacts of wind farms on microbats, and the inclusion of Victorian field naturalist clubs' publications in the international Biodiversity Heritage Library – an enormous open-access database. Jane Rusden, Convenor of Birdlife Castlemaine District, was the annual CFNC-BCD speaker, demonstrating how she painted superb pictures of birds in their settings during her birding trip into the South Australian desert. As in 2022, the three winter meetings were held online using Zoom, with talks by speakers from as far away as Brisbane.

Amongst the enjoyable excursions this year, two highlights were the visit to McKay Reservoir – Castlemaine's primary water storage not usually open to the public – and the weekend beyond Ballarat, visiting Roy Pail's private

fenced Wildlife Sanctuary on the Saturday, and Birdlife Australia's Clarkesdale Sanctuary (where some members camped overnight) for an orchid and birding tour led by Emily Noble on the Sunday.

The full list of the monthly meetings and excursions is available through our increasingly popular new website. The Website Working Group led by Euan Moore continues to add to this invaluable resource, with monthly posts to members and a large group of other people interested in the natural history of our area. The club's monthly newsletter, the *Castlemaine Naturalist*, is central to the recording of our activities, with the reports on the monthly talks and excursions, lists of fauna and flora, and members photographs and articles on studies of local fauna and flora. The joint editors, Noel Young, Jenny Rolland and Jill Williams, are to be congratulated and thanked on the continuing high quality of the publication. Our thanks also to members who contribute articles and observations.

The Great Southern BioBlitz was held in November this year, and the club was again very successful in recording key fauna and flora within our area using iNaturalist. Sincere thanks to Mez Woodward who has taken on the arrangements, involving publicity and, together with Jill Williams and Euan Moore, preparing reports after the event.

Since the club hosted the 2019 Spring SEANA (South Eastern Australia Naturalists Association) weekend get-together, a good number of our members have been regular attendees at SEANA events, including Port Campbell and Yarram in 2023. These sessions are a great way to learn from local experts about the natural environment in other parts of Victoria.

The work to control invasive Chilean Needlegrass and related species in Castlemaine, led by Margaret Panter for many years, was passed back to Council staff in 2023 after Margaret decided she could not continue. The voluntary time contributed by Margaret and her team of assistants including CFNC members has been a very large saving to the Council. The club's quarterly Roadside Cleanup program organized by Geoff Harris continues, keeping rubbish levels along our stretch of the Pyrenees Highway low.

As I complete 3 years as President, I wish to thank all members of the committee for their many and varied contributions to the life of the club, and to Geraldine Harris who has continued to distribute our and other clubs' newsletters for many years by email and post, and until last year also made the arrangement for supper after meetings. Judith Nimmo will not be continuing on the next committee due to other commitments – thank you Judith for your valuable contributions over the past two years and for taking over the supper arrangements after meetings last year and continuing this year. Thanks also to those other members of the club who support our

activities in various ways, including Ron Wescott as Webmaster and Chris Timewell who arranges the annual Challenge Bird Count.

So finally, it gives me great pleasure to announce that your committee has decided to award Honorary Life Memberships to Geraldine Harris and to Treasurer Geoff Harris for their many outstanding contributions to the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club and to members over the decades since they joined in 1976, soon after the club was founded.

Peter Turner

## Honorary Life Memberships awarded to Geraldine and Geoff Harris

At the AGM on 8<sup>th</sup> March, Peter Turner, the retiring president, presented Geraldine and Geoff Harris with framed certificates confirming the Committee's decision (in Geoff's absence) to award their decades of service to the club with Honorary Life Memberships.

Geraldine and Geoff joined the club in 1976, the year it was founded – 48 years ago! At that time Geraldine addressed her former science teacher as “Mr. Broadway”, and she has written movingly about how much she – and Geoff, I'm sure – learnt from George and other dedicated members about our natural environment over the years since.

I'm sure I speak for most members who have been out in the field with Geraldine – she is an outstanding field naturalist who is keen to share her knowledge and new observations and write about them for the newsletter. And Geoff is right there too.



Photo: Lou Citroen

In 2003, Geraldine joined the committee as Assistant Newsletter Editor, becoming editor for the following 4 years. She was again on the committee from 2014 to 2016, and has for many years distributed the newsletter by post and email, working with Geoff in maintaining detailed membership lists.

The club's Roadside Cleanup work along the Pyrenees Highway started in 1999. Geoff has been leading this activity for many years now, liaising with volunteers, organising the equipment, taking the rubbish to the tip and preparing reports for the newsletter. The club can be proud of the way we keep the 4 km stretch of the road out of town free of much of the rubbish that gets thrown from vehicles.

And of course, Geoff has been Treasurer since 2016, and keeps the club's finances in excellent order, with monthly reports to the committee – even when he and Geraldine are away exploring distant parts of Australia. Somehow they find internet connections at the right time to send out emails and submit reports.

In 2018, SEANA hosted an Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) 10-day gathering, starting in the Grampians then moving through the volcanic plains to Warrnambool, and along the Great Ocean Road to Anglesea. 74 naturalists from 22 clubs from across Australia attended. Geraldine and Geoff with two others organised this major complex activity, from the places where people could stay and eat to the many excursions and speakers to showcase this cross-section through Victoria's natural wonders.

We congratulate Geraldine and Geoff on their Life Memberships and thank them for their outstanding service to the club and the nurturing of our local natural environment.

Peter Turner

## **Rocking Along to the Flinders Ranges!** Catherine Harboe-Ree



## **Presentation to Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, March 2024**

In September 2013 and June 2022 Brian and I visited the Flinders Ranges. The presentation I gave to the March meeting was based on those visits.

The Flinders Ranges stretch for over 430 km, from Port Pirie in the south to Lake Callabonna in the north. In the northern section of the Ranges is the Ikara - Flinders Ranges National Park, with Wilpeena Pound as its centrepiece, and further north again is the Wilderness Sanctuary Arkaroola.

The formation of the Flinders Ranges began about 800 million years ago when ancient sea covering the area for about 300 million years deposited sediment over the area. The Ediacara Hills in the northern Flinders Ranges is the site of discovery of some of the oldest fossil evidence of animal life.

The Flinders Ranges mountains are a classic example of a folded mountain range, formed when two continental plates collide. Wind and water erosion are the other key natural forces that have shaped the Ranges.

Of interest to us is that the folds have caused anticlines and synclines, which are also a geological feature in the Castlemaine district.

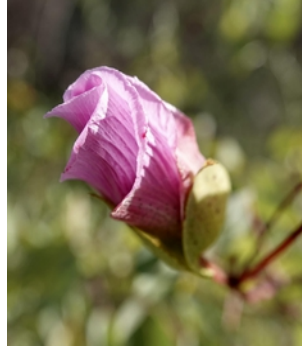
In the 1940s the geologist Reg Sprigg discovered fossils that eventually were understood to define a new geological period, in which soft-bodied creatures lived on microbial mats in water. This period, which is now known as the Ediacaran Period, began 635 million years ago and ended 542 million years ago, when we entered the Cambrian Period with the emergence of animals with skeletons and shells.

Apart from the spectacular landscape, and despite the low rainfall, the Flinders Ranges abound with fauna and flora, some endemic to the area. Over 150 bird species visit the area, there are a number of macropods, most interestingly the Yellow-tailed Rock Wallaby, and there are hundreds of distinct flowers, shrubs and trees, including significant bush tucker plants.

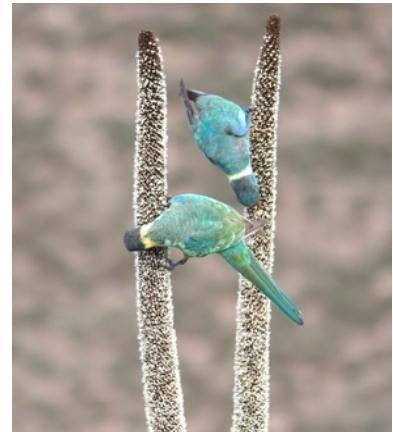
In 1967 Reg Sprigg and his wife Griselda acquired the property that is now known as Arkaroola and established it as an ecotourism sanctuary. This rugged area is now closed to mining, despite the reserves of radioactive minerals and gems, and provides a fascinating opportunity to explore the Flinders Ranges at their northern end.

Feral plants and animals have resulted in loss of habitat, species loss and degradation of the environment, but there are a number of reparation programmes under way, some of which are led by the Adnyamathanha people, who have lived in the northern Flinders Ranges for tens of thousands of years.





Ediacaran fossils, Bunyeroo Gorge;    Sturts Desert Rose (*Gossypium sturtianum*)  
Yellow-tailed Rock Wallaby at Arkaroola;    Ringneck Parrots



## Observations

### Noel Young:

About 200 Grey-headed Flying-foxes have taken up residence in the CBG recently; and a Marbled Gecko climbing the back door on a warm night.



## Peter Turner:

### 1. Tailed Emperor, an uncommon butterfly in Mt Alexander Shire

Seen under the Powerful Owls' favourite Stone Pine on March 20th. It appeared to be nearly dead, and was not there the next day. Until recent years the only record in iNaturalist was in 2012 on Mt Alexander, other 2012 records by Tony Morton are listed on our website. One was reported in iNaturalist on 5th January 2023 in Newstead, and on 8th January in Kalimna by Euan. In March 2024, one recorded on 17th in Moonlight Flat and on 24th one in Chewton. This area seems to be at the southern extreme of this beautiful butterfly's normal range.



### 2. An Uncommon Moth

I was sent this photo by Doris Pozzi in Talbot; a friend had advised her to contact Castlemaine FNC. Euan Moore identified it in *Moths of Victoria Vol 4* as in the genus *Cymatoplex*, but not yet studied to the level of providing it with a species name. There are only a few records of sightings in our region, initially by Steve Williams (Eppalock) and John Landy (Fryerstown). Steve Williams spoke at the CFNC meeting in April 2013 on "Caterpillars to Moths" and mentioned this moth, named by Geraldine in her report as the "April Fool Moth". There is a more detailed note about Steve Williams' studies of this moth in the following post on the Connecting Country website on 21/3/2014:

<https://connectingcountry.org.au/have-you-seen-this-secretive-moth-of-central-victoria/>, with a link to Williams' paper in *Victorian Entomologist Vol 43(3) June 2013*. The



moth's caterpillar lives and feeds exclusively on Drooping Cassinia (*Cassinia sifton*) with the moth emerging late in March to mate and lay eggs in just a few days before dying. There are a few recent reports in iNaturalist of sightings near Newstead, but this is clearly an uncommon species that needs an official name!



## Geraldine Harris:

Visiting microbat – possibly a Chocolate Wattle bat, and Musk Lorikeets enjoying Natasha's new birdbath at Muckleford.



## Slender Tick-trefoil (*Desmodium varians*)

Desmodium = small chain, varians = variable habit and leaves

*Desmodium varians* is a small native climbing or prostrate herb in the Fabaceae family found in eastern Australia. Although it is described as a widespread species of eucalypt forests, woodlands and grassy woodlands, it is not commonly known or seen, and often overlooked until it flowers in spring or the distinctive five-segmented seed pods develop in December/January.

Some years ago when I first noticed this small group of plants, I thought they were Variable Glycine (*Glycine tabacina*) but since then I have photographed the plants with their distinctive scolloped chain of seedpods and learned their correct identity. I look for them each year and am always thrilled to find them - as sometimes they are reduced on a second visit having been eaten, I suspect, by resident Swamp Wallabies or rabbits.

[https://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FACT-SHEET\\_Desmodium\\_varians.pdf](https://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FACT-SHEET_Desmodium_varians.pdf)

<https://castlemaineflora.org.au/>



Photos – Geraldine Harris



## Hiding in Plain Sight

Euan Moore

In 1827, members of the Astrolabe Expedition under the command of Dumont d'Urville captured two specimens of a storm petrel off the north-east coast of the North Island of New Zealand. These specimens were subsequently lodged with Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. A third museum specimen was collected during the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These specimens were given the name *Pealeornis maoriana* by Mathews (1932) but were subsequently regarded as colour variations of the widespread Wilson's Storm Petrel and little notice was taken of the black and white storm petrels that were occasionally seen in the Hauraki Gulf.

In 2003 birding tour operators in the Coromandel and Hauraki Gulf waters north-east of Auckland did take a more careful look at these black-and-white storm petrels. After almost 150 years since the last definite sighting and having been considered extinct for 108 years, the NZ Storm Petrel was rediscovered within 80km of Auckland, NZ's largest city. Since its rediscovery the NZ Storm Petrel population has been estimated at around 1700 birds, albeit with a wide confidence range. The species is listed as Critically Endangered (IUCN).

In 2013, breeding grounds were found on a high, densely forested ridge on predator-free Little Barrier Island. It is possible that this species is also breeding on other predator-free islands in the Hauraki Gulf.

Earlier this year Jenny and I had the opportunity to see this bird while on a Hauraki Gulf pelagic tour run by the same company that rediscovered the bird in 2003.

This is a good example of how rare, unusual, or even 'extinct' life forms may be hiding in your local area. All you need to do is look and record anything unusual that you may find.



NZ Storm Petrel showing the distinctive white rump and dark streaks on the breast.

References:

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289661023\\_Rediscovery\\_of\\_the\\_New\\_Zealand\\_storm\\_petrel\\_pealeornis\\_maoriana\\_mathews\\_1932\\_Two\\_sightings\\_that\\_revised\\_our\\_knowledge\\_of\\_storm\\_petrels](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289661023_Rediscovery_of_the_New_Zealand_storm_petrel_pealeornis_maoriana_mathews_1932_Two_sightings_that_revised_our_knowledge_of_storm_petrels)

Rayner M., Gaskin C., Taylor G., Tennyson A., Baird K., Friesen M., Ismar-Rebitz S., Population estimation of the New Zealand storm petrel (*Fregetta maoriana*) from mark-recapture techniques at Hauturu/Little Barrier Island and from at-sea resightings of banded birds . Notornis, 2020, Vol. 67: 503-510 0029-4470 ©

[https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Rayner\\_67\\_et\\_al\\_503-510.pdf](https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Rayner_67_et_al_503-510.pdf)

## From your Committee

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the AGM on 8 March, all nominees for office bearers and committee members were appointed to the 2024/25 committee (see back page). Lou Citroen and \*Mez Woodward were warmly welcomed as new committee members and retiring committee member Judith Nimmo was thanked for her contribution. The Annual Report and Financial Report for 2023/2024 can be found on our website on the "About us" page. Our outgoing President, Peter Turner, was thanked for his sterling contribution to the Club over many years, and Peter in turn awarded long-term members Geraldine and Geoff Harris with Honorary Life Memberships (see article page 3).

\* Mez has since decided that she will be unable to serve on the committee but will still be organising the club's participation in the Great Southern Bioblitz and will contribute to the club in other ways.

Right: Peter Turner receiving gifts of appreciation from Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Photo: Lou Citroen



## MEMBERSHIP FEES DUE BY 1 APRIL

Membership subscriptions for 2024/25 are now due. See the back page for categories and amounts. Your completed membership form (available from the Membership page of the CFNC website) can be mailed or emailed to [castlemainefnc@hotmail.com](mailto:castlemainefnc@hotmail.com)



### Our Guest Speaker for April will be Tim Entwisle

Professor Tim Entwisle is an author, botanist and former director of botanic gardens in Melbourne, Sydney and London. He also lived for a few years at Yapeen and completed his final years of secondary school at Castlemaine High School. In 2022, Tim published a memoir called *Evergreen: the Botanical Life of a Plant Punk* (Thames & Hudson), and this will be the subject of his talk for us on 12 April. He will explain why he became a botanist (and phycologist) and some of the highlights of his three decades working in, and visiting, botanic gardens around the world. Tim will also share with us the story of a seaweed (an alga) called *Entwisleia bella*, and how this came to be named after him. (Tim will bring some books for sale and signing.)

### Excursion - Saturday April 13th, 1.30pm “Significant trees in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens” Leaders - Euan Moore and Peter Turner

Join us for our rescheduled walk in the Castlemaine Botanical gardens to remember and celebrate George Broadway. This walk was cancelled in March due to the hot weather. We will follow the route mapped by George for his brochure highlighting the interesting collection of trees in the gardens, and finish with a gathering over afternoon tea.

**Meet:** 1.30pm. We will meet at the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens (not at The Octopus) by the Rose Garden adjacent to the southern Downes Road car park, which is where the Significant Trees walk begins. Saturday afternoons are a busy time in the Gardens, so allow time to park further away.

**Bring:** Water, sun protection, chairs and afternoon tea.

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

