

# Castlemaine Naturalist

June 2008

Vol. 33.5 #355



Choughs nesting

photo Noel Young

## **Choughs & Magpies - Chris Morris**

The question arises from time to time as to the relationship and interaction of the White-winged Chough to the Australian Magpie. Certainly both species dispute territory, forage over common ground and protect nesting sites and have a superficial resemblance, but are not closely related and in fact belong to different families.

Over most of its range the Chough and the Magpie occur side by side in the same sort of open woodland habitat. Perhaps the Chough is more at home amongst the litter and the Magpie on open pasture but there is considerable overlap and much of the time they catch the same sort of prey. This of course brings them into conflict.

Aside from the written work of Ian Rowley there is little literature on the subject of agonistic interactions between the two species; other than that encounters are rarely peaceful and confrontation develops to the point that Choughs take up a form of group defense which is used when caught in the open. When conflict between the two species is unavoidable the contest by the Choughs takes the form of whistling accompanied by elaborate displays of wing and tail wagging with greatly engorged eyes. On occasions all members of the group run together and face outward and display vigorously to give the impression of size and numbers accompanied by piping calls and gaping bills.

Magpies spend much of their day defending territorial boundaries against their own kind and others involving diving and mobbing intruders, whereas the Choughs spend most of the day as a group methodically walking (and working) over the ground searching for insect food without quarrelling or rivalry, there is therefore a vast difference between the social behaviour of choughs and magpies.

## Excursion to Crocodile Reservoir and Railway Dam -

Natalie de Maccus

Under the leadership of Rita Mills a stalwart band of fourteen Field Naturalists set out on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May for the Crocodile Reservoir at Fryerstown. Clearly this reservoir had been built with the expectation of its holding (and possibly in the past it did contain) a vast quantity of water. This was borne out by the height of the retaining wall we crossed and by the width of the stone run-offs provided at both ends of the dam wall.

The depth marker, which looked forlorn and appeared in need of a *raison d'être*, showed a maximum mark of 22 feet. It stood in a small puddle which was the sum total of water. Not only was there virtually no water, but there was not a crocodile to be seen! Various theories were offered to explain how the reservoir acquired its name. The most likely one seemed that it was because of the shape of a rock formation. But please don't quote us.

Flowering plants were scarce (as is to be expected at this time of the year). However there was a profusion of *Cassinia arcuata* (Coffee Bush), several *Astroloma humifusum* (Cranberry Heath) and a few *Acacia genistifolia* (Spreading Wattle). Twitchers were well rewarded at this location and at a few wayside stops.

We moved on to the Railway Dam at Tunnel Hill where there was plenty of water. Is Fryerstown rainfall so different from that at Elphinstone or is there another reason for the water level disparity? Does one dam leak or is the other spring-fed or creek-fed? We supplemented our plant list at this location with the addition of *Amyema miquelii* (Box Mistletoe), which I identified at home later with the assistance of Ern's Mistletoe pamphlet.

### Bird List for the Railway Dam – Chris Morris

Jacky Winter	Wedge tailed eagle
Galah	Spotted Pardalote
Striated Thornbill	Superb Wren
Yellow tufted Honeyeater	White eared Honeyeater
Yellow faced Honeyeater	White naped Honeyeater
Fuscous Honeyeater	Red Wattlebird
Flame Robin	E Yellow Robin
Dusky Woodswallow	Golden Whistler
Masked Lapwing	Crested Shrike-tit
Australasian Grebe	

## Traveling the Byways (avoiding the highways)

Rita Mills

As usual when we have been traveling, Doug and I have, as far as we can, avoided following the usual routes to anywhere, this time reaching Grafton via Hay, Griffith, Young, Wellington, Coolah, Gunnedah, Tamworth and Glen Innes.

We had been told that the road between Glen Innes and Grafton was closed, but we found in time that it was still open, so we were able to visit one of the picnic spots in the Gibraltar Range National Park, but, like our trip to the West, and the rest of this trip so far, we found very few (i.e. two, unidentified) birds. I didn't even find the Red-backed Wrens or the bowerbirds at Jackadgery.

It seemed at times that the only birds in Australia these days are raven species. Magpies—but fewer than usual— Crested Pigeons and little else, although we saw several large flocks of White-winged Choughs; one just after Gunnedah of over 30 birds and on the way home a flock of about 100 near Gulpa Island not far from Mathoura. We didn't even record many Galahs or cockatoos, and almost no raptors for the first 3 days.

Over the mountains and down to Grafton, and everything was looking much greener, but still, as at Jackadgery, there were less birds around than we saw last year.

But the caravan park at South Grafton had more birds than the one we stayed in last year. My list included some Variegated Wrens, and a pair of White-headed Pigeons which we saw regularly. Over in the paddock behind our cabin we often saw White and Straw-necked Ibis, and Cattle Egrets accompanying the cattle as they fed. The big draw-back was a flock of about 40 mainly male Common Mynahs.

On the way home we didn't follow the coast road to Coffs Harbour and up to Armidale because of flood warnings, but drove through the mountains, which I enjoyed, despite dodging log trucks in a few places. When we emerged onto the Armidale road I found that we were just near Ebor, so we drove down to the Ebor Falls Picnic Area at the head of the Guy Fawkes Gorge. I had read a book a few months ago about brumbies, including the mob in Guy Fawkes National Park, so this was quite a thrill for me, and helped me understand what the author meant by "rugged country"!

From Armidale, to Quirindi, to Coolah, to Forbes (the Peregrine was still at Gum Swamp, unsuccessfully chasing Galahs), and then across to Condoblin—and I found where all the missing Galahs had got to! They are all along the Lachlan between these last two towns! We saw more birds in this area than on the whole trip, and at our morning tea spot I had a male Red-capped Robin eyeing me curiously from about 10 feet away.

Lake Cargelligo was full, and we drove in the rain from there until Griffith. There was more rain that night at Jerrilderie, and we hoped that it was falling in Castlemaine, too.

Next day as we drove across to Conargo where we had morning tea at the little store (“Please stop and buy a cup of coffee, and help us survive” - or words to that effect!) we found that this southern part of the Hay Plain was looking quite healthy with a flush of green starting to appear after rain had fallen there, but still there were very few birds.

I think we were nearly to Echuca before we stopped seeing occasional puddles by the side of the road.

And, by the way, we didn’t come home via Bendigo: we detoured again along some lovely tree lined roads between Elmore and Axedale and then the back way home over the Mount!

## **From the May Business Meeting:**

### **Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. Statement of Purpose**

The Committee has decided that it is desirable to make some changes to our Constitution and the first part of that process is to update our Statement of Purpose.

When the Club became incorporated in 1984, the Model Rules produced by Consumer Affairs were adopted as our Constitution and the Statement of Purpose lodged with it was very brief and restricted our activities to lectures and excursions. Meanwhile, many of us were under the belief that a more extensive Statement of Purpose also adopted by members in 1984 covered our activities. However, it is now clear that this document was never lodged for official purposes.

As a result of the Planning Workshop last year, the Committee believes it is clear what our members expect our Club to be able to do. It has therefore drafted a revised Statement which it hopes will be adopted at a General Meeting called for the purpose. We are asking members to examine it critically and provided some feedback to ensure that the final version will receive universal support.

### Statement of Purpose:

*“The Objects of the Club shall be to:*

*(a) study Natural History in all its branches and to form collections of Natural history specimens as applicable;*

*(b) promote the above by periodical meetings, field excursions, occasional lectures from visiting lecturers by invitation, the formation of a library and the publication of the Club’s activities as deemed desirable;*

*(c) take appropriate action to protect native fauna and/or native flora;*

*(d) take appropriate action in matters relating to natural History and /or the environment.*

*The criteria for appropriate action in (c) and (d) shall be decided by the Committee. No officer or member of the Club may take action on behalf of the Club without prior authorisation by the Committee. In the event of urgent matters requiring attention before the Committee can be convened, such authorisation may be decided upon by the President and the Secretary. If either the President or the Secretary is unavailable, such decision may be taken by either the President or the Secretary together with at least one other Committee member.”*

Comments from members may provided to any Committee member in any suitable format by the end of July.

A thank you to the contributors to the newsletter, and a reminder that your newsletter is only as good as its contributions . . . .

Your articles or observations are needed -  
if it is of interest to you, then it will be interesting to others.

Contributions are welcomed by email [noelyoung@aapt.net.au], on floppy or CD in MS Word, RTF or TXT format. Photos or drawings preferably as JPEGs. Hard copy is OK, preferably printed on A4 in a basic font like Ariel or Times New Roman (for OCR transfer). Short notes or observations may be handwritten, (provided we can read it!) Mail or deliver to 9 Murphy st., Castlemaine, or The Editor, CFNC PO Box 324 Castlemaine.

## **FNCV Biodiversity Symposium 2008**

**When:** Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September  
**Topic:** Birds and the environment

“Dont miss out on this exciting all day event. Mark the date in your diary now and tell your friends. Find out about our urban raptors and shore-birds, whether or not weeds can form important habitat for our birds and what we should do about this, plus much more.”

**Please check the FNCV website in the coming months at [www.vicnet.au/~fncv](http://www.vicnet.au/~fncv) for further details.**

### **VALE STUART MORRIS**

Stuart Morris died at Renshaw House on 30<sup>th</sup> April, aged 89. He had been a long time resident of Castlemaine. He served in the second World War in the medical corps of the RAAF. For many years Stuart was a valued member of CFNC. He will be remembered for his broad knowledge and his willingness to share that knowledge with other field naturalists and with the community in general. He will be sadly missed.

Natalie de Maccus

## Observations

- ◆ Yellow faced, Yellow tufted, White plumed and White naped Honeyeaters, Spinebills and Brown Tree-creepers seen at the Golf course – Debbie Worland
- ◆ Pied Currawongs – Denis Hurley
- ◆ Fuscous Honeyeaters back at Muckleford – Hans van Gemert
- ◆ On at least five occasions in May, large flock of 50 to 100 YT Black Cockatoos flying over Happy Valley, either towards or from the direction of the Pine plantation – Noel Young
- ◆ Richard Piesse reported (a) Kororoit Creek sightings after rain (and consequent extra rubbish in the stream): White faced Heron, Darter, and Little Pied Cormorant and (b) recent plant surveys with Ern and Lesley - Parsons Band orchids at Belltopper Hill, Wattle Flat and along the Maldon Railway; Red tipped Greenhood at Wattle Flat and along railway, and a variety of Midge Orchid at Wattle Flat.
- ◆ Gil Rayner reports the following; seen in Maldon - large flocks of Little Lorikeets, feeding on mature flowering gums. Four Flame Robins, one male, and three immature/female, trying to feed in hawthorn bushes while being chased by New Holland Honeyeaters and Wattle birds.

Several Grey Shrike Thrushes, small group of Yellow Rumped Thornbills, and a pair of Wood Ducks.

In the garden Spring flowering plants (in Autumn!) Cypress Daisy Bush, Tufted Burr Daisy, Magenta Storksbill starting to grow already, and a nest of Blackbirds!

- ◆ A Red capped Robin seen at the Prison Farm – Geraldine Harris
- ◆ Tiny Greenhoods *Pterostylis parviflora* seen in the Sandon State Forest – Hans van Gemert
- ◆ Swift Parrots at Barkers Creek on Saturday (7) and Sunday (5). We watched them in Grey Box trees for about an hour on Sunday – there didn't seem to be any blossom but they appeared to be making a meal of the new green fruit. A Red Wattlebird tried to move them on but as soon as it went away they moved back to the same tree - Geraldine and Geoff Harris.

<p><b>Disclaimer:</b> The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p>
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# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## June 2008

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Broadways, 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**Fri June 13 meeting:** Mike Weston on wildlife conservation.

**Sat June 14 field trip:** Gower school and Smiths Reef

**Fri July 11 meeting:** Nigel Harland on Cocos Keeling/Christmas Island.

**Sat July 12 field trip:** Aboriginal sites walk with Maryborough FNC – Bull Gully aboriginal wells and canoe tree, with optional afternoon tea at Maryborough Station - leader Lorraine O'dal.

### Subscriptions for 2008

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2008 Committee

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