

# Castlemaine Naturalist

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*Triodia scariosa* at Scotia Sanctuary  
Photo: Geraldine Harris

## **A Visit to Scotia Wildlife Sanctuary 22-24 August 2008.**

Geraldine Harris

Scotia Sanctuary covers 65,00 hectares (160,000 acres). It is situated on the South Australian border, between Broken Hill and Mildura and is one of the most important mallee nature reserves in the Murray-Darling basin. In the broader landscape Scotia is bordered to the west by Danggali Conservation Park (SA National Parks and Wildlife), to the south by Tarawi Nature Reserve (NSW National Parks and Wildlife) and to the east by Nanya station (University of Ballarat). Comprised of two pastoral properties, Ennisvale and Tarrara, it was originally purchased and set up by Earth Sanctuaries Ltd. in the mid 1990's. Australian Wildlife Conservancy acquired Scotia in 2002.

After dinner on Friday night and a talk about the reintroduction of endangered mammals at Scotia Sanctuary we set off on a nocturnal tour through the 4000-hectare (10,000 acre) area of Scotia known as Stage 1. Stage 1 is entirely free of foxes, cats, goats and rabbits. A fence around Stage 2, enclosing an additional 4,000 hectares has been completed and eradication of foxes and cats is now underway. Together stage 1 and 2 will comprise the largest feral-free area on mainland Australia. Stage 3, scheduled to occur later in 2008, will further extend the feral free area to over 12,000 hectares (30,000 acres).



Spotlighting from the back of an open-back vehicle we were treated to the sight of Eastern Bilbies with their long pointed noses and black and white tails zigzagging their way through the scrub, elegant Bridled Nailtail Wallabies browsing (presumed extinct until rediscovered in 1973) and Burrowing

Bettongs (Aboriginal name: Boodies) – tiny animals belonging to the kangaroo family that live in a network of underground burrows! Other endangered animals that have been released into Stage 1 are the Brush-tailed Bettong (Woylies), the Greater Stick-nest Rat (Wopilkara) and the Numbat. All of the mammals reintroduced at Scotia over the last 3 years are currently listed as 'extinct' in NSW.

On Saturday morning, Tony, who is responsible for land management and feral eradication at Scotia, took us to inspect the fences that are used to exclude feral animals. He talked about the feral animal control programme and the methods and equipment he has developed to rid Scotia of feral animals – the advantage of being able to think like the target animal was clearly demonstrated. Stopping to look at a stand of *Casuarina pauper* there was plenty of evidence of Bilby and Bettong burrowings. These holes are changing the health of the soil by acting as nutrient traps and by slowing down the water flow. There is no permanent water supply on Scotia but these animals don't actually need to drink. They are nocturnal and gain all their water through the plants they eat and their bodies are adapted for minimal water loss.



We visited the soft release pens prepared in anticipation of the next translocation of Stick-nest Rats. A small number of animals are released into large wire cages almost filled with a tangle of twigs and branches. They are fed a special mixture of birdseed, fruit and chenopods plants and their health is checked regularly. After a month, when they feel comfortable with

their surroundings, the door is opened and they can move out into the wider environment as they wish – monitoring has shown that they often return to the shelter of the open cage for a period of time before venturing out permanently. We were told that when checking the health of one individual it is not unusual to have 3-4 others climbing over your person, such is their inquisitive nature.

Close by we visited the fledgling nest of resident Stick-nest Rats being constructed under and inside the hollow trunk of a fallen tree. Once widespread across Australia, the Scotia population is the only wild population of the species in NSW – The greater Stick-nest Rat clings to survival on a handful of offshore islands and one other mainland reintroduction site.

After lunch we learned about AWC's research programme (in partnership with the University of NSW and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) looking at biodiversity reconstruction at Scotia. Kerryn, AWC's Wildlife Ecologist, took us to one of her 42-biodiversity monitoring sites - areas of 100m x 100m with 12 pitfall traps within each site. In November, with volunteer assistance, she will systematically traps at each site putting up 12 feet of shade cloth net in a straight line passing over each open pit bucket buried in the sand. Over night small animal will run into the net and then hopefully turn towards and drop into the bucket ready for recording early the next morning. This information adds to the baseline data of the area and enables workers to learn about other species that need consideration. Bolam's Mouse and Southern Ningauai are two small mammals that are of particular interest since being discovered in pit traps on Scotia. Still other plots are used to collect information about vegetation, and landscape function analysis (eg the role of plants causing water to meander across landscape resulting in less erosion, and the build up of twigs and humus in Bilby diggings causing micro habitats etc).

We visited a Mallee Fowl nesting site and learned that effective fox control and fire management are the key to the survival of Mallee Fowl in the Scotia region. We were shown how radio-backpacks are fitted to Bettongs, and Bridle Nail-tail Wallabies, collars to Stick-nest Rats and transmitters to the tail of Bilbies (very soft fur and skin) before they are released so the animals can be monitored and survival rates measured.



After dinner we went on a nocturnal tour to the Rufous Hare-wallaby (Mala) enclosure. This specially constructed fenced area (100 hectares or 250 acres) is home to one of three surviving populations of Mala that are listed as extinct in the wild. They receive some supplementary feeding. Most of the Scotia population were airlifted from the NT in October 2004. Outside the Marla enclosure, we saw more Bilbies, Bridle Nail-tail Wallabies, Boobies and a Woylie!

On Sunday before setting off for home we visited a burnt area of Scotia to examine the devastation that fire can bring to such fragile habitats. Two years after the fires native vegetation is beginning to return but in such a harsh climate it will be another 40 years or so until the surviving Mallees reach their former size.

Some of the birds we sighted at Scotia included White-fronted Chat,

Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Chestnut Quail Thrush, Banded Plover, Galah, Raven, Tawny Frogmouth, Emu and Black-eared Miner.

David Attenborough described the Scotia Endangered Mammal Recovery Project as "a vitally important project for Australia and the planet". We certainly enjoyed our visit to Scotia.

Photos Geraldine Harris: Bridle Naitail Wallaby; Soft release pen for Stick-nest Rats; Rufous Hare Wallaby (Mala).

## Anne Paulson 1808 - 1866

Anne Paulson was born in Papplewick, England in 1808. She arrived in Australia in 1858, and died in Castlemaine in 1866. She was a botanical artist, working in watercolours, iron gall ink and pencil.

Local art expert John Jones was given the task of cataloguing a number of her works in a book which is now in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, having been donated to the gallery. John was kind enough to give me a list of the works from the book, many of which were done in the Castlemaine area. What follows is a list of the sketches, spelling and use of upper case exactly as it was.

| Species                | Date | Locality       |
|------------------------|------|----------------|
| Tetratheca Ciliata     |      |                |
| Carraca Virens         | 1860 | Fryers Ck Road |
| Droona Peltata         |      | Sutton Grange  |
| Persoonia Rigida       | 1860 | Specimen Gully |
| Dillyonia              |      |                |
| Cyologynes             |      |                |
| Swainsona primumbeus   | 1860 | Joyce's Ck (&  |
| Ravenswood)            |      |                |
| Bursaria Spinosa       |      |                |
| Pterostylis            | 1860 | (Illegible) Ck |
| Stackhousia Monogynia  |      | Sutton Grange  |
| Diuris Glongatu        | 1860 | Mt Alexander   |
| Acacia pycnantha       |      |                |
| Lobelia Giblosa        | 1860 | Eureka Reef    |
| Caladenia Patersonia   |      |                |
| Eryngium Obinum        | 1861 | Bald Hill      |
| Celarephabris Citrinus | 1860 | Wattle flat    |
| Burchardia Umbellata   |      | Spring Ck      |
| Hylidium Grandiflorum  |      | Sutton Grange  |
| Caladena Patersonia    | 1860 | Eureka Reef    |
| Grevillia Latrobii     | 1860 | Specimen Gully |

|                        |      |                 |
|------------------------|------|-----------------|
| Eriostemon Verrucosium | 1860 | Fryers Ck Road  |
| Banksia Australis      | 1859 | Myrtleford      |
| Eucalyptus Viminalis   | 1859 | Fryers Ck Road  |
| Thelmitra ixioidis     |      | Spring Creek Ra |
| Arthrophyum laxum      |      | Joyces Plains   |
| Carraca Speciosa       |      | Amherst         |
| Acacia Cuspidata       | 1859 | Chinamans Ck    |
| Macrotyloma humilis    |      |                 |
| Claytonia Australis    |      |                 |
| Acacia Aspera          |      |                 |
| Pimelea glauco         |      |                 |
| Grevillia riparia      |      |                 |
| Veronica pergoliata    |      |                 |
| Caladenia Barbata      | Sept | Fryers Ck Road  |
| Goodenia Reticulata    |      |                 |
| Diuris Maculata        | Oct  | Bald Hill       |
| Caladenia              | 1859 | Fryers Ck Rd    |
| Grevillea Dallachyana  | 1859 | Fryers Ck Rd    |
| Diuris                 | 1859 | Ravenswood      |
| Gladsodia Major        | Oct  |                 |
| Kennedia prostrata     | 1859 | Newstead        |
| Bulbine Bulbosa        | Oct  |                 |
| Grevillea pinnatifida  | 1859 | Creek Road      |
| Dillwynia              | 1859 | Creek Road      |
| Velleya paradoxa       |      |                 |
| Honea Caterophyllia    | 1860 |                 |

Some names will be familiar, but one can only guess what others refer to.

Included in the inscription on the endpaper was:

"Forwarded to Henry Christophers, Esq. Castlemaine, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1861 for the International Exhibition London in 1862"

George Broadway

## **Bull Gully Aboriginal Rockwells**

These rockwells were constructed by Aboriginal people prior to European settlement. They were dug into the sandstone to gain full advantage of the natural catchment formed by the rock ledge. They may originally have been covered and have never been known to dry up.

Photo: G Harris (photographed on our excursion with the Maryborough FNC)



## Paddies Ranges State Park 24/8/08. Richard Piesse

Plants in flower: \*\*\* a nationally threatened species *Pterostylis deceptans* Lowly Greenhood (usually flowers in late in spring but a fairly certain sighting). Also *Acacias acinaceae*, *paradoxa*, & *pycnantha*, fields of *Cyanicula caerulea*, *Drosera whittakeri* ssp *alberanns*, *Eucalyptus tricarpa*, *Hakea decurrens*, *Pterostylis nana*, *Ranunculus* sp, *Rhytidosporum procumbens*.

### Observations

- Denis Hurley brought a sample of Bridle Creeper he was pulling up at home - densely matted below ground. New mats grow on the old and Roundup spray has only a temporary effect.
- Bruce Donaldson reported Mountain Brushtail Possums (Bobucks) at his place in Macedon. Their leavings look just like Koala dung. They eat ferns and fungi, and "just about anything I plant in the garden"
- At Cassinia Rise near Fryerstown a pair of Fan-tailed Cuckoos, and since Friday 22/8 a very loud Horesfield's Bronze-cuckoo calling at dawn and dusk and also during the night (the first report of these for some years) and 26/8 an Eastern Spinebill, and Masked Lapwings with a pair of Wedgetail Eagles souring overhead. ZOe Thomas
- 160 Spiny Rice Flower *Pimelea spinescens* ssp *spinescens* plants located on the Plateau section of Natasha Harris's land at Guildford this month – also two platypuses in the Loddon 25/8. N Harris
- *Diuris pardina*, *Cyanicula caerulea*, *Pterostylis nutans*, *Craspedia variabilis*, *Wurmbea dioica*, *Hovea heterophylla*, *Drosera whittakeri* ssp *alberanns*, *Pterostylis nana*, *Caladenia fuscata*, *Rhytidosporum procumbens* and *Daviesia ulicifolia* flowering at Muckleford. N Harris
- White-faced Herons in Blakely Rd – possibly a pair. Rita Mills
- Deer crossing road at Gower School. Richard Lee.
- *Acacia lanigera* var *whanii* along race at Taradale. George Broadway
- *A pycnantha* and *A dealbata* have been a picture along railway line at the entrance to Castlemaine for past two months. Richard Piesse
- *Drosera Whittakeri* ssp *alberanns*, and *A pycnantha* in flower in Golf Links Rd and an extremely dense crop of 4-5 ft high *Acacia pycnantha* seedlings flowering in area where thinning has occurred. Hans van Gemert
- Big numbers of Spotted Pardalotes close to Morgans Track. Also *Drosera whittakeri* ssp *alberanns* and *Wurmbea dioica*. Chris Morris
- Unusual siting of a Striated Heron at Batemans Bay. H van Gemert.

## **Swift Parrot Survey Results 2-3/8/08**

- John Alexander's group saw 3 in the Muckleford bush and 6 to 8 male Flame Robins at Welshmans Reef. Other group made no sightings.
- 30+ Swift parrots at Harris's in Barkers Creek for a number of days - appeared to be feeding noisily in the mornings and then after a period of feeding they would settle quietly in the canopy of a large Grey Box with their heads tucked under their wings.
- 27/8 Swift Parrots still present at the Castlemaine Golf Course but numbers are reducing. Debbie Saunders, the Swift Parrot Recovery Officer from Queanbeyan NSW, has been down to visit the site with Debbie Worland.

## **From the Business Meeting 28/808**

- Suggestion that some working parties be held at the 'Broom area' of the Botanical gardens in place of Roadside Cleanup activity that has been abandoned due to excessive "red tape".
- Suggestions for speakers and excursions for 2009 welcomed from members over the next few months – the aim is to provide a complete programme at the beginning of the new year.

## **Coming Events**

\*\*\*Friday, September 12. Our speakers for September are Andrew Skeoch & Sarah Koschak of Listening Earth. For a preview of their wonderful photography and nature recordings go to <http://www.listeningearth.net>

**Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks** commence September 17. All welcome. Looks like a promising season. See p8 for details.

**Monday, September 18. - Chewton Town Hall 1.00 – 4.00 pm**  
**Connecting Country - Planning And Priority Setting Workshop**

Purpose of the workshop is to share information on environmental values and landholder/community group conservation work across the Shire, to discuss and identify areas (at local and landscape scale) that form a focus of future activities in the next phase of Connecting Country and to identify other activities and projects that can support the future on ground actions. [www.connectingcountry.org.au](http://www.connectingcountry.org.au)

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## September 2008

**Fri Sept 12 meeting:** Listening Earth Presentation –“Appreciating our local bird song.” Andrew Skeoch & Sarah Koschak.

**Sat Sept 13 field trip:** Morgans Track Walk – Leader George Broadway.

**Wednesday evening wildflower walks:** These walks will depart from the Duke St car park at 4pm sharp and return at 5.30pm.

**Wed Sept 17 Leader:** Rita Mills.

**Wed Sept 24 Leader:** Geraldine Harris

**Wed Oct 1 Leader:** Noel Young

**Wed Oct 8 Leader:** George Broadway

**Fri Oct 10 meeting:** ANN trip to NT May 2008.

**Sat Oct 11 field trip:** Mt Alexander. Leaders: Geoff and Geraldine Harris

**Wed Oct 15 Leader:** Natalie de Maccus

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**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.

### 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.

### 2007 Committee

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