

# Castlemaine Naturalist

December 2008

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Masked Lapwing

photo Noel Young

## **The Argentine Ant – a high risk to our environment?**

Denis Hurley

After observing the disappearance of the native red meat ant from around my Castlemaine property, I began to notice a huge increase in the presence of a small, blackish brown ant with very aggressive tendencies. These ants appear to attack birds and kill nestlings.

I have seen them running up the legs of my resident magpies while the birds are foraging, distracting them so much that the birds move away. I have seen them attacking the Pardalotes in the nesting box and the parents desperately trying to stem the flow of their attack to protect the young.

They cover a huge area with their rapidly expanding colonies, and I am sure they are taking all forms of falling seed, including from our diminishing native plants. They have infested recently watered pot plants, looking for cool, above ground nesting sites. They remove soil from around the root ball and you suddenly observe that the plant is dying. If you lift and tap the pot, suddenly hundreds of little ants come pouring out of the drainage holes. By this time, the plant has lost the damp, nutrient rich soil with which it lives and breathes. Vale another plant.

One positive arises during winter firewood splitting, when the revealed ant eggs provide a feast for blue wrens.

Trying to work out what these little Sebastians might be, I have found an excerpt in *Australian Ants Vol. 3* which I think describes them:

Only a single species of *Linepithema*, *L. humile*, also known as the Argentine ant, is known to occur in Australia. It can be very common in both urban and some rural areas, with single colonies having many large nests connected by distinct foraging trails. They are known to cause damage to native plants (Bond and Slingsby 1984) by interfering with the germination and survival of young plants. They can also reduce the numbers of many native ants near their nests by dominating food sources and preventing other ants from feeding or nesting (Ward 1987). With very large colonies and rapid recruitment, they can monopolise food sources before others can find them, or overwhelm those that might have found them first.

In urban areas, these ants can be a significant pest. They establish large foraging trails into houses, seeking food and water, and can rapidly recruit large numbers of workers to newly found food sources. They can also establish small satellite nests indoors in potted plants, wall cavities, power points and almost any other small, suitable cavity. Their numbers can be reduced by removing all potential food sources, but generally complete elimination is almost impossible.

*Shattuck, Steven O. (1999). Australian Ants: their biology and identification. CSIRO, Collingwood, pp. 76-77.*

Have other Castlemaine residents observed these ants preying on their environment? Have you been able to control them in such places as compost bins and pot plants?

**Notice of Annual General Meeting**  
**Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.**  
(including a Special Item of Business)  
Friday 13 February 2009 at 8.00 pm.  
Uniting Church Hall, Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine

**Special Item of Business:**

**to adopt a new Statement of Purpose (see below)**

Usual Items of Business:

- receive Annual Report on activities
- receive Annual Report on Finances
- elect Committee for the ensuing year
- deal with any other business of which due notice has been given

## **The need for a new Statement of Purpose**

Earlier this year, the Committee discussed the need for a revision of our Constitution and the accompanying Statement of Purpose as there was some uncertainty under which version we were operating since becoming incorporated in 1984. We have now established that our present Constitution is the one published by Consumer Affairs Victoria as the "Model Rules". The Committee recommends that the Model Rules be retained for the time being, as they cover all of the important aspects of running an organisation. They are sufficiently flexible that we can formulate additional provisions under a set of By-Laws.

However, the Statement of Purpose that was lodged at the time, was considered too brief to be usable. A new version was drawn up by the Committee and published in the June Newsletter with the request for members' comments or suggestions. No feedback of any kind was received. The Committee is therefore proposing that it be adopted in the form as published:

***"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."***

To be adopted, it is necessary that the statement be passed by a three quarters majority at a Special General Meeting called for the purpose. Members wishing to vote but unable to be present at that meeting can obtain a proxy form from the Secretary, appointing another person or the Chairperson of the meeting to vote on his/her behalf. That form must be returned at least 24 hours before the meeting.

If any members would like a copy of the "Model Rules", please contact Hans van Gemert on 5472 1082.

## **AUSTRALIAN NATURAL HISTORY MEDALLION**

Natalie de Maccus

Congratulations to **Ern Perkins** for having been selected by the judging panel to receive this prestigious award for 2008.

This annual award, which began in 1940, has been presented by the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria to a person who has helped to build up a body of popular or scientific knowledge in the area of Natural History over the preceding 10 years. Ern's commitment to the subject has been far in excess of that time requirement. Well done, Ern!

Ern is now in the company of such luminaries as Jean Galbraith, Trevor Pescott and Graham Pizzezy.

### **The Trees have it !**

Chris Morris

A recent Australian National University report states that intact native forests and bushland store far more carbon than previously estimated. The study has found that natural forests have a larger and more reliable carbon stock than commercially logged plantations. And, logging our forests releases unwanted carbon into the atmosphere, shrinking the size of our carbon stores and contributing to global warming - making the impact of climate change far worse.

Plantations currently supply 80% of the timber industry raw material and generate most jobs. If the price advantage shifts to carbon storage under proposed Emissions Trading Scheme then logging is likelier to shift back to native forests, because native forests are more carbon dense than plantations

This would cause a net increase in Australia's green-house emissions. So the protection of our native forests is a vital part of the climate solution and should play a much larger part in plans to tackle climate change.

### **A note for the diary: Sunday March 1; Mt Cole**

A BFNC group which has been active in pressing for a National Park along the Murray to save the Red Gums is now turning its attention to remnants in central & western Victoria and will be seeking information in due course. They are planning a family day at the Mt Cole forest on Sunday March 1, with bush walks led by knowledgeable people and a couple of scientists from ACF and VNP to give short talks. The location will be Richards Camp Ground at or on Mt Cole, and they are expecting at least five FNC's, including Maryborough and Ararat.

## Ladybird Survey – Alison Rowe

The ABC TV program “Catalyst” is promoting a national research program on ladybirds. You can participate by identifying the species of ladybirds you find, photographing them and uploading the photos and details online at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/ladybirds/>



## New life in the avian world

Noel Young

While we have been concentrating on our all too short wildflower season, the birds have been busy. A short walk in the bush recently revealed lots of our feathered friends fully occupied with their new families. Among fledgelings of several species I was entertained by the aerial ballet of Welcome Swallows feeding their perched charges. (above)

Down on Lake Joanna, a pair of Grey Teal have nested, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> November were proudly escorting six small chicks, shown below. A week later there were only four.



## Field trip to Pilchers Bridge 15.11.08 Leader Chris Morris

Report by Natalie de Maccus

Rita warned us that Pilchers Bridge was a region rather than a specific location. Nevertheless some of our party of eight were expecting to find that possibly non-existent, elusive structure. Although we visited four different locations the closest thing we could find to a bridge was a ford with a four-metre high water marker.

Not to be defeated by such minor matters we turned our attention to flora and fauna. We were well rewarded in the former category, although not so well in the bird department which boasted Rufous Whistler, White-throated Treecreeper, Kookaburra and Buff-rumped Thornbill. Our first stop was by far the most abundant with flowering plants. The Blue Finger-flower was prolific and showy.

Flowering plants seen were:		Location
<i>Dianella admixta</i>	Black-anther Flax-lily	1,2
<i>Austrostipa</i> sp.	Spear-grass	1,3,4
<i>Ozothamnus obcordatus</i>	Grey Everlasting	1,2,4
<i>Brachyloma daphnoides</i>	Daphne Heath	1,3,4
<i>Cheiranthra cyanea</i>	Blue Finger-flower	1,2,3,4
<i>Xerochrysum viscosum</i>	Sticky Everlasting	1,2,3,4
<i>Wahlenbergia</i> sp.	Bluebell	1,2,3,4
<i>Brunonia australis</i>	Blue Pincushion	1,3
<i>Pimelea humilis</i>	Common Rice-flower	1,3
<i>Goodenia blackiana</i>	Black's Goodenia	1,4
<i>Leptorhynchus tenuifolius</i>	Wiry Buttons	1
<i>Pelargonium rodneyanum</i>	Magenta Stork's-bill	1
<i>Tricoryne elatior</i>	Yellow Rush-lily	1
<i>Hypericum gramineum</i>	Small St. John's Wort	1
<i>Pultenaea largiflorens</i>	Twiggy Bush-pea	2
<i>Hibbertia exutiacies</i>	Spiky Guinea-flower	2
<i>Joycea pallida</i>	Red-anther Wallaby-grass	4
<i>Austrodanthonia carphoides</i>	Short Wallaby-grass	4
<i>Arthropodium strictum</i>	Chocolate Lily	4

If you wish to know the locations referred to in the above numbers please check with Chris.

## Observations

- ◆ At the last meeting, Penny Garnett passed on an observation by Felicity Saye of an Azure Kingfisher at the old bridge on Campbells Creek.
- ◆ Natasha Harris noted a Long necked Turtle a long way from water, and up to three Pelicans on the dam at Muckleford for a month; a Sacred Kingfisher and three pairs of Rainbow Bee-eaters at the Guildford farm
- ◆ Anne van Gemert passed around a deceased Black-eared Cuckoo that had collided with a window.
- ◆ Two Blue faced Honeyeaters at the Golf Course over several days – Debbie Worland
- ◆ George Broadway observed Green vegetable bugs, and tiny eggs on a blade of grass
- ◆ Rita Mills saw a Sand Monitor near Nhill
- ◆ After substantial rain on Thursday, Denis Hurley observed today (14<sup>th</sup>) at 10:30am, a Wolf (?) spider hole with the cap tipped open – by 11:30, a stained looking egg case being dried out. And a Spotted Pardalote tunnel cleaned out today may also have suffered flood damage overnight. In the afternoon, a pair of Speckled Warblers (not seen since earlier this year) busy gathering 'critters' in the dry grass near the front of the house, including a small skink.
- ◆ A Powerful Owl seen roosting in the Botanical Gardens on Nov 10<sup>th</sup> - no pellets were evident, and no sightings since: I am wondering if prey is becoming scarce in the gardens. On the same date I noted a solitary Nankeen Night Heron on the island, which had gone the following day. On the 18<sup>th</sup> I discovered a family of Grey Teal (six tiny chicks) and a Little Pied Cormorant on L. Joanna, but by 26<sup>th</sup> the Teal family were down to four. There is now a flock of 50 or more Musk Lorikeets around Wesley Hill – Noel Young
- ◆ A show of Blue Pincushions between Elphinstone and Taradale – George Broadway
- ◆ Burgan *Kunzea ericoides* in the Pine plantation – Rita Mills
- ◆ Male Golden Whistler singing every morning from 6 am outside the bedroom window – Hans van Gemert
- ◆ S.C. Cockatoos attacking our green plums already – Chris Morris

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

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## December 2008

**Fri Dec 12 meeting: Members Night.** Members' "Show and Tell". Share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. Slide and digital projector available for use (jpeg or Power Point format on CD or use USB key). UCA Hall, 8pm. Bring a plate of supper to share

**Sat Dec 13 Christmas outing:** Wombat Reservoir 3pm. BYO food and drinks

**2009**

**Sat Jan 10<sup>th</sup> January Breakfast:** Expedition Pass Reservoir 6 am on – meet at the Pass. BYO breakfast, chair and binoculars.

**Fri Feb 13. AGM. Election of Office Bearers and Committee.**  
Speaker: Trevor Pescott.

**Sat Feb 14. Field Trip:** Crusoe Reservoir, Bendigo

### 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 Natalies; 65 Johnstone 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

### 2008 Committee

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