

# CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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## THE PLATYPUS - A GREAT SURVIVOR

In recent years there have been so many depressing reports on the near-extinction of various species of our fauna that it is encouraging to read some more cheerful news on the ecological scene.

During 1992 a paper published by T. R. Grant (School of Biological Science, University of N.S.W.) has summarised a report on a study commissioned by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, on the historical and current distribution of the platypus.

According to this study, they are still found in most of the river systems of the north-east and south-east drainage divisions of Australia - east and south of the dividing ranges from Cooktown in Queensland to the Victorian border with South Australia.

In Victoria, the species is said to be widespread, being found in 26 out of 31 river systems. Generally reports are common in the highland areas of the dividing ranges, and on the slopes of the ranges. They are less common on the plains areas to the north, and uncommon in the lower reaches of the western tributaries of the Murray, including the Murray itself. Along the coastal areas they are also reported to be widespread - recorded from 16 out of the 19 river systems on the east and south coasts.

The conclusion reached is that except in South Australia where the species has never been common, the distribution and status of the platypus has changed very little during the period of European settlement.

S.P.

## SANDON IN JAN 1993.

Seen at the bird bath

Crimson Rosellas (4 eggs in nest box above 'lake' 9/1 Now appears abandoned.	White-throated Treecreeper	Brown-headed Honeyeater
Grey Shrike-thrush	Brown Thornbills	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Wrens	Buff-rumped Thornbills	Spotted Pardalotes
	Yellow Thornbills	Silvereyes
	Striated Thornbills	Magpies

## On the Property

Australasian Grebe (pr). All 5 young survived it seemed.	Galahs	Scarlet Robin (pair)
White-faced heron (pair)	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Hooded Robin (pair)
Pacific Black Duck (pr).	Eastern Rosellas (pair)	Rufous Whistler (pair)
Mother & 5 chicks on 'pretty' dam 31/1	Red-rumped Parrot (pair)	Willie Wagtail (pair)
Maned Ducks (flock of 42 on 'lake' on 31/1)	Shining Bronze Cuckoo	Grey Fantail
Little Eagle (pr)	Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo	Speckled Warbler
Brown Falcon (pr)	Fantailed Cuckoo	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Masked Lapwing (pr)	Owlet Nightjar (heard)	Varied Sittellas
Black-fronted Plover (pr)	Kookaburra (pair)	Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters
Common Bronzewing	Welcome Swallows (pair)	Diamond Firetail
	Richard's Pipit (pair)	White-winged Choughs
	Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike	Grey Currawong (pair)
	Blackbird (orchard)	Australian Raven

In the November bird list, the Grey Shrike-thrush was nesting in the Sandon Area (S) in a friend's shed!

Our Owlet Nightjar came back today - this time in the possum box.

The Mistletoe Birds spent 2 weeks in the quince tree in December denuding the fruit of down. It surely wouldn't take so long to line their nests. And how would they carry it? They left two mistletoe seeds attached to the tree and they are sprouting. S. Starr

[I look forward to reports of the progress of the mistletoe on the quince tree. Can it survive a winter? EP]

## OBSERVATIONS

**PLATYPUS** has been seen in Barkers Creek at Harcourt. (BE). So Platypus seem to be present in our own river system. (BE)

**RAINBOW BIRDS** have been seen at Barfold and Metcalfe Forest (EP)

**HYACINTH ORCHIDS** have been seen, in numbers, at the Garfield Wheel (FD)

**CITRUS BUTTERFLY** seen in Wheeler Street was a large, dark-coloured butterfly with a white patch on the fore-wing and a larger white patch on the rear wing. They are supposed to be common in S.E. Australia, but are not often seen in Castlemaine. The butterfly usually feeds on citrus. (GB)

**WALLABIES.** Two large wallabies have been seen at the corner of Eddy St and Wheeler St. (GE)

**INDIAN MYNAHS** Two were seen near Sawmill Road/Blakely Road corner. They provoke a reaction from the local magpies. (RM)

## BIRD LIST FOR TULLAROOP RESERVOIR

Afternoon excursion on Sat 12 Feb. Fine and warm.

<i>At the dam</i>	Kookaburra	Mudlark
White-faced Heron	Welcome Swallow	Magpie
Little Black Cormorant	Willie Wagtail	Australian Raven
Black Cormorant	Restless Flycatcher	<i>On route</i>
Mountain Duck	Superb Blue Wren	Hoary-headed Grebes
Musk Duck	Little Thornbill	Pacific Heron
Grey Teal + young	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Little Pied Cormorant
Black Swan	White-plumed Honeyeater	Sacred Ibis
Whistling Kite	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Black Duck
Long-billed Corella	New Holland Honeyeater	Coot
Musk Lorikeet	Diamond Firetail	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Red-rumped Parrot	Red-browed Finches	Richard's Pipit
Black-fronted Plover	White-winged Choughs	R.M.
Kookaburra		

## ADDITIONS TO THE PLANT LIST

### A NEW CHOCOLATE LILY *Arthropodium Sp 2*

Planting and weeding round our newest and lowest dam has led to a greater awareness of the plants (and birds) which are at home in this poorly drained area of heavy silt. The most striking new plant is a large Chocolate Lily, 45 cm high, which didn't fit the key to any of the four local *Arthropodium* species. It flowers in late November - December when the common Chocolate lily (*A. strictum*) is already setting seed and the Nodding Chocolate lily (*A. fimbriatum*) is in flower. On drier, higher ground, the branched flowers-stalks arise from a thick clump of 8 mm wide 30 cm leaves. The paired buds are erect and pointed, the 12 mm long petals arranged like those of a Chocolate Lily, surround anthers and appendages of deep purple.

A couple of days after sending a pressed specimen with notes to the Herbarium, I received a reply identifying it as *Arthropodium sp 2*, "at present languishing without a name. It is quite widespread, mainly in Northern Victoria, and is frequently co-extensive with *A. strictum*."

The botanist requested that, if sending specimens for identification, a detailed location be included i.e. something more specific than just 'Sandon'.  
S Starr.

### PAMPAS LILY OF THE VALLEY \**Salpicroa organifolia*

This is another species recorded during surveys of the Metcalfe Roadsides. It is a garden escape. It is a scrambling plant that is able to smother other vegetation. It has sparsely-hairy diamond-shaped leaves. The small white tube-flowers are constricted at the top. It was recorded from Blackfellows Gate Road.

**PUSSY TAILS** *Ptilotus spathulata*

Pussy Tails were found growing last summer at Chewton by Ian Higgins, and inadvertently not included in the 1992 editions of the plant list.

**LONG-HEADED POPPY** *\*Papaver dubium*

Long-headed Poppy has a bright brick-red flowers. The seed capsule is almost cylindrical (and hence "long-headed"). It grows along the Midland Highway just south of the Mt Franklin turnoff.

**WIRY DOCK** *Rumex dumosus*

Wiry dock is intricately branched - much more than the other docks found locally - sometimes it forms a roly-poly bush. The fruiting valve is irregularly toothed, and without a tubercule. It was found growing near the corner of the Metcalfe-Kyneton Road and the Malmsbury East road. I have seen it before growing in Northern Victoria (e.g at Tang Tang swamp) but this is my first local sighting.

**PALE WOOD-RUSH** *Luzula flaccida*

This wood-rush was found growing at Humboldt, near Malmsbury. It differs from the more common wood-rushes in having pale creamy-green seed cases, and the perianth has a red-brown stripe.

**SLENDER MINT** *Mentha diemenica*

Slender mint is a small plant (about 10 cm in height) and clusters of blue flowers at the ends of the branches. It was found growing in the southern part of Porcupine Ridge.

**SMALL GRASS-TREE** *Xanthorrhoea minor*

Small Grass-trees were found growing is Diss Road (west of Turpin's Falls) by members of the Metcalfe Shire roadside survey. Small Grass-tree is fairly common further south, for example at Mt Beckwith and in the Enfield Forest. It is smaller than the Grass Tree and does not have a trunk. Like the Grass Tree, it flowers heavily after burning - a few years ago the Enfield Forest was spectacular with thousands of Small Grass-trees in flower. The location in Diss Road just comes into grid N3 - the boundary would be only a few metres to the west.

**PINK FINGERS** *Caladenia fuscata*

This was formerly a variety of Pink Fingers. *C. fuscata* is a smaller version of *C. carnea*. It has been recorded at Muckleford Forest, but is probably more common than this. A project for the coming spring would be to determine the relative abundance of each.

**FRAGILE OAT** *\*Gaudina fragilis*

Fragile oat was found growing near the intersection of the Metcalfe-Kyneton Road and the Malmsbury East Road. Fragile Oat has a superficial resemblance to Rye Grass. It has a slender, rigid stem, with the flowers in alternate notches. The inner husks (the lemmas) have fine awns which are about as long as the outer husks (the glumes).

**STERILE OAT** *Avena sterilis*

Sterile Oat has been recorded for the Maldon district. Sterile Oat has larger flowers than the more common Wild Oat. In Sterile Oat, the glumes are more than 25 mm long and the awns more than 5 cm long. Unlike Wild Oat, the two florets do not easily separate.

**RED CLOVER** *Trifolium pratense*

Red Clover is the most spectacular of the clovers that I have seen. It is more robust than other clovers, and has large showy red flowers -it could make a suitable garden plant. Some specimens were found along the Fryerstown Road during surveys of the Metcalfe Shire. It is uncommon in this district, but is often seen elsewhere e.g. at Falls Creek, in Melbourne suburbs, and in southern districts generally.

(to be continued. E.P.)

**METCALFE ROADSIDES**

Interesting plants found along the roadsides of Metcalfe Shire include-

Rare and Endangered Plants

**BULOKE** *Allocasuarina luehmannii* A single, not very shapely, specimen of Buloke was found in Leafy Lane, (Harcourt North). Bull-oak is on the list of Rare and Endangered Plants. No fruit were seen on the tree, so likelihood of regeneration is low.

Plants of local significance

**SMALL GRASS TREES** (*Xanthorrhoea minor*) Growing in Diss Rd, Langley. This is the only record for Sector K of the North Central Study Area (see A.C. Beauglehole, "The Distribution and Conservation of Vascular Plants in the North Central Area, Vic" 1982). The Small Grass Trees are facing competition from introduced grasses.

**SILVER-LEAF STRINGYBARK** (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*) Several were found at the western end of Mactier's Lane, south of Metcalfe. Silver-leaf Stringybark is moderately common in parts of Southern Victoria e.g. Croydon district. It is very uncommon in northern Victoria, and very uncommon in this district.

**SILVER BANKSIA** (*Banksia marginata*) Banksia grows along Blackfellows Gate Road, and along Byrne's Road (Richard's Road), near the aqueduct. Silver Banksia now has a very restricted distribution in the district.

**SNOW GUMS** (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*). The Snow Gums are centred on the intersection of Elphinstone-Metcalfe Road and Elphinstone-Sutton Grange Road e.g. North end of Pott's Road, Metcalfe Road (near Pott's Road) and the east end of Pollard's Road. They are growing with Candlebark, and can

be distinguished by the almost parallel leaf veins, the thick leathery leaves and the strap-shaped juvenile leaves. The juvenile leaves of Candlebark are round, bluish and in opposite pairs.

### Interesting Species

**HOARY SUNRAY** (*Helipterum albicans*). This is a showy everlasting daisy. There are some good stands of it along the Midland Highway and Calder Highway near Harcourt.

**WHITE BOX** (*Eucalyptus albens*) This is one of the less common eucalypts in the Shire. It was found on

- Chewton Faraday Road, opposite Expedition Pass reservoir
- Calder Highway, 1 km south of Faraday School
- Pyrenees Highway, opposite the Chewton Cemetery
- Hooper's Road, southern end.
- Whitehorse Road, southern end
- Fryers Road, near shire boundary (i.e. near Wattle Gully mine).

**SWAMP GUM** (*Eucalyptus ovata*) Swamp Gums are found on some of the low-lying valleys, particularly to the south. They are not very common along roadsides. Some of the occurrences found in the survey include

- Old Drummond Road (southern end)
- Calder Highway, Taradale (about a kilometre north of Conlan's Road)
- Faraday-Sutton Grange Road (about 100 m west of Mt Alexander Turnoff)
- Robertson's Road, near Mactier's Lane.

**DROOPING SHE-OAK** (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) Drooping She-oak is found scattered through the Shire. However, the dense stands on Jennings Hill Road are noteworthy. Drooping she-oak differs from Bull Oak in that the former has much longer and larger cones, drooping and more slender branchlets

### **FROM THE COMMITTEE**

**BOCA - BIRDS AND WATTLES SURVEY** The Bird Observer's Club is conducting a survey of the use of wattle trees by birds. Some birds, such as parrots, are known to eat acacia seeds, but the species of bird and the species of wattle eaten, are poorly recorded. The BOCA is also interested in other ways in which birds utilise wattles: for instance getting insect larvae from branches or trunks, obtaining nectar exuded from the glands on the leaves, feeding underneath wattles, utilising the flowers etc. More information about the survey, and recording sheets, will be available at the next meeting.

**LONG SWAMP APPEAL.** Long Swamp has been purchased. The cost has been shared (\$10,000 each) by Vic Conservation Trust, Dept CNR and local community groups. DCNR have also paid for survey, fencing and legal fees. There is a balance of \$2000, which Vic Cons. Trust has paid out of its

own funds. A local appeal to help repay this \$2000 has been launched. The Club will donate \$50 to the appeal. Some members may wish to add to this amount. [Long Swamp is on the Castlemaine side of Tullaroop Reservoir.]

**BOCA SURVEY OF PIED CURRAWONG FOOD 1992.** There is evidence that the populations of Pied Currawongs are increasing, possibly due to planting and spread of introduced berry plants, which provide a winter food supply for currawongs. This may have a drastic effect on the breeding of small birds, because the currawong is a notorious nest robber. The 1992 survey produced some interesting results, and supported the belief that currawong numbers have increased, and breeding area has been extended. A larger sample size is needed, and the survey will be repeated in 1993. Information about feeding and breeding is sought. Survey forms are available from the Club.

**A CENSUS OF THE VASCULAR FLORA OF VICTORIA Ed 4** by J.H Ross, Royal Botanic gardens, Melbourne, has been recently published. Cost is \$18. It lists the naturally occurring plants of Victoria, with currently accepted name. There are two lists. One in family order, the other in alphabetical order. [My copy of Edition 3 is available, free, to any member wishing to have it. E.P.]

**FINANCIAL STATEMENT 1992**

<u>General Account</u>				<u>Publications Account</u>	
<i>Receipts</i>		<i>Expenditure</i>		<i>Receipts</i>	
Members subs etc	668.00	Speakers expenses	35.00	Sales	147.03
Suppers	59.10	Supper materials	35.21	Opening balance	<u>411.17</u>
Heritage Roses	150.00	Donation, Long Swamp	150.00	Total receipts	<u>558.20</u>
Miscellaneous	69.86	Misc.	30.00	<i>Expenditure (nil)</i>	
Bank Interest	24.79	P.I.D.	3.73	Closing balance	558.20
Opening Balance	98.35	Printing costs N/L	317.44	<u>Bank Balance</u>	
		Subscriptions	63.00	\$435.72+\$558.20=\$993.92	
		Closing balance	<u>435.72</u>		
Total receipts	<u>1070.10</u>	Total payments	<u>1070.10</u>		

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**Meetings:** Second Friday of each month (Jan excepted) at Castlemaine High School at 8.00 p.m. Business meetings on the fourth Thursday (Dec excepted) at 7.30 p.m. All members are invited to attend.

**Subscriptions 1993**

Single \$12, Family \$18, Student/pensioner \$8, Supporting member \$20  
 Newsletter posted: subscription plus \$6.

**Supper:** March: M Oliver and S Parnaby.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine 3450.

## **CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM**

Excursions leave promptly at the times indicated.

**Fri 12 Mar. CAPE YORK.** Talk by Chris Morris. 8.00 pm, at High School.

**Sat 13 Mar. TIPPERARY SPRINGS.** Bird watching and walking in the Tipperary Springs area. Leaders R Mills/C Morris. 1.30 from SEC, Mostyn Street.

**Thurs 18 Mar. BIRDWATCHING.** Joint CFNC/U3A birdwatching outing. Meet Cont Ed car park, Templeton St at 9.30 am. Leader: C Morris.

**Thurs 25 Mar. Business Meeting.** 7.30 pm at 38 Campbell St.

**Fri 9 April. NO MEETING** (Good Friday)

**Sat 10 April. GAASH RD and HARCOURT NTH RESERVOIR.** Birds and mistletoes. Leader: E. Perkins. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 pm. Take binoculars.

**Thurs 15 April. BIRDWATCHING.** Joint CFNC/U3A birdwatching outing. Meet Cont Ed car park, Templeton St at 9.30 am. Leader: K Turner.

**Sat 15 May. TERRICK TERRICK.** All day excursion. Meet 27 Doveton St at 10.00 am. Route via Eaglehawk Town Hall and Mitiamo. Leader: E Perkins or C Morris. This is a joint excursion with the Southern Riverina F.N.C.

**Thurs 20 May. BIRDWATCHING.** Joint CFNC/U3A birdwatching outing. Meet Cont Ed car park, Templeton St at 9.30 am. Leader: E. Perkins.

**Fri 14 May. To be arranged.**

**Fri 11 June ECOLOGY OF BOX-IRONBARK WOODLAND** Speaker is Doug Robinson. High School at 8.00 pm.

**Fri 9 July. WADERS OF AUSTRALIA AND OVERSEAS** Speaker is Mark Barker. 8 pm at High School.

**Aug 20-22 BARMAH CAMPOUT** Meeting of WVFNCA at Dharya Centre, Barmah. Bunkhouse accommodation with 2,4 or 6 persons/room.

### **Spring STIEGLITZ WILDFLOWERS**

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#### **COMMITTEE:**

B Maund (Pres), B Envall (VP), M Oliver (Sec), G Broadway (Treas), K Turner (Prog), R Mills (PO & asst N/L), E. Perkins (N/L ed), S Parnaby, C Morris and K Meehan.