

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



August '95

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Birding on Mt Alexander

On the last June Sunday, I was delighted to be introduced to several birds new to me on a Sutton Grange Landcare Bird Walk in from the North Gap Road on Mt Alexander. Our leader, Nigel Harland, had been enthusiastic about this area because he had listed 41 species in about an hour and a half in an earlier reconnaissance. On the walk, before and after noon on a grey cold day, our group listed 24 but still had not spotted Mistletoe Birds which Nigel had assured us he had previously seen here in numbers. In the last tree as we were just moving to the cars - there it was - everybody could see it - except me!!!! In my anxiety, my spectacles fogged up, my frozen fingers fumbled with the binocs and my ability to follow directions reached an abysmal low. Still the bird and we persevered and I at last located and identified by first Mistletoe Bird. We also had great views of the activity of Golden Whistlers (male), my first observation, but were unable to locate a visible female which I believe are somewhat similar to a Grey Shrike-thrush.

The following day we were quite stunned to find a male Golden Whistler cavorting in and out of a large Box tree beside our house fence. It was perhaps feeding on airbourne insects? It was most agile in movements of twisting and turning between perching twig, in the open just above grass height, and a new perch. Although I raced for the binocs they were not necessary as the bird came close, to the house fence wire, and to a Gum in the garden as we watched.

At the same time we were treated to the spectacle of a White-plumed Honeyeater bathing by flying from the dam gate into the dam about 5 - 10 metres from the edge and causing a tremendous splashing in the deep (and cold?) water before flying back to fluff and preen on the gate, fence or nearby gum twig. I've previously observed this honeyeater bathing in the shallow bird bath next to the house.

On the same day, I had by best view ever of wild Wedge-tailed Eagles in flight. We know when they are about because the local mobs of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos wheel and scream with a particular alarm

call. As I went to open our carport gate an enormous number of cockatoos "alarmed" overhead and I searched on high for the eagle I'd be likely to see there. The first eagle was very low (below tree top and below cockatoo height). It flew right over my head and kept pace with the last group of a mob. It turned, and a second eagle appeared between the "half way up" branches of nearby Box trees. It, too, flew right over my head, but much lower than the first, then gained a little height to keep position with the white birds. Although I watched both eagles 'til they were out of sight because of the surrounding trees, they did not seem to be attacking or being hassled. I estimated that at times they were less than a couple of flying bird widths from the nearest cockatoos,. I thought maybe they were keeping the mobs "on the move"?

**Sutton Grange Landcare Bird list for 25/6/95
North Gap, Mt Alexander**

Galah	Striated and
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Yellow Thornbills
Crimson Rosella	Varied Sitella
Brown Falcon	Goldfinch
Little Eagle	Grey Fantail
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Silvereye
White-faced Heron	Golden Whistler
Magpie	Superb Fairy Wren
Australian Raven	Masked Lapwing
White-eared Honeyeater	Red-browed Firetail
White-plumed Honeyeater	Scarlet Robin
Buff-rumped,	Mistletoe Bird
Yellow-rumped,	

(We failed to identify duck and lorikeets that we also spotted.)

Margaret Hunter.

To Broome in June

Tropical palms in this thirsty region? Lord McAlpine's passion for palms has infected the locals and they are at first glance the most striking feature of the Broome urban landscape. However, this is not rain-forest country but the edge of a plain of hot dry bush, the pindan that extends as far as the Kimberly. Last year only 5 mm of rain fell over eight months. It is during the short steamy wet of summer that most activity on the nature scene takes place. The bush blooms, scrub birds nest and the shore birds collect in their thousands around Roebuck Bay, Australia's most significant site for waders. The mature birds leave in April, some travelling as far as Siberia, where they breed in the brief northern summer before returning in September. The R.A.O.U. Broome Bird Observatory is a half hour's drive from town and has camping sites and cabins. The wardens are busy with counting, banding and research

and run a series of courses and outings for visitors.

Eco-tourism (in varying degrees) is well established in the West. A 5 hour Broome environs tour with George Swann was great value. At 7 am, just behind the historic main shopping area - Chinatown - we ducked under a cyclone wire fence straight into the mangrove mud flats, the colour and consistency of wet concrete. Eleven different varieties of mangroves grow around Broome, now mainly regrowth. They were cleared earlier to provide access for the many pearling luggers which used to ride into the channels at high tide and shelter during unfavourable conditions. Now the mangroves are back in favour as a source of mud crabs and a breeding ground for young fish. We had a close-up view of a White-bellied Sea Eagle as it swept back and forth across the channel, also Red-headed Honeyeaters and the almost familiar Mangrove Grey Fantail, Golden Whistler and Yellow White-eyes.

Next, we drove to an open road just north of Broome, where the sky was a changing pattern of raptors, from Black Kites to Wedge-tailed Eagles. Ospreys nest in any convenient high structure about town.

Overlooking Roebuck Bay, George set up the telescopes and we had a small taste of the wader colonies. A patchwork of immature birds stood in groups on the rocks, edged by a row of Eastern Curlews like sentinels in the shallows behind. At one stage we had four different Terns in view through the lens. Nearby, on slabs of sandstone, was a succession of the large dinosaur footprints that have been discovered in various locations around the Broome foreshore.

Climbing up a scrub-covered dune we had a good view of a group of Grey-crowned Babblers, my first close-up look at one of our endangered locals. I was surprised that our long bird list for the day included many familiar but obviously adaptable species like the Grey Shrike-thrush, Rufous Whistler and Restless Flycatcher.

Next day was at a slower pace - a bushwalk with Paul Foulkes, another Englishman. The 14 km long Cable Beach lies on the ocean, with white sand, 4 wheel drive vehicles, and, at the lowest tide, a two km walk out to the water. The beach is backed by two lines of dunes; the first, of white sand, is still being formed, while further in, a more ancient system of deep orange sand reflects the colours of the pindan. Lying sheltered between these two ridges is the 'Hidden Valley', where remnant temperate rainforest Gondwanaland plants still survive under changed conditions at this southern-most limit of their range. The Gold-and-Silver tree, *Gyrocarpus americanus*, is a typical relic, with shining faceted bark and leaves that are shed over the dry months. When a branch drops, the wound heals over to a pronounced smooth

knob. Most of the local plants have a tradition of aboriginal use, either as food or medicine. Paul is convinced that the thirsty town palms are lowering the water table and further stressing these distinctive ancient remnants.

During the few pleasant months of the year, Broome's population of 10,000 expands to 40,000 and, judging by the town map, new subdivisions have recently doubled the permanent population.. The saving grace is that most of the new buildings echo the appropriate style of the early colonial dwellings with deep cool verandahs sheltering under sweeping roofs and shaded by dense plantings.

Hot, historic Broome is, for better or worse, definitely on the tourist circuit.

Susanna Starr.

W.V.F.N.C.A August Campout
Boundary Bend
18, 19, & 20 August
Host club - Mid-Murray

Accommodation alternatives include bush camping in O'Brees' Mallee Fowl Reserve (toilets only provided), Boundary Bend Caravan Park, (cabins and on-site vans available, also showers for non-residents at \$3), Hotel/motels at Tooleybuc, Robinvale and Euston.

Meals are B.Y.O everything except for Saturday tea which will be catered by Boundary Bend Hall - B.B.Q., salad and sweets, cost in weekend fee. Cost for the weekend is \$15.

The program includes excursions to see Mallee flora and fauna, and an illustrated talk on propagation native plants by cuttings.

For full details and registration form see Secretary, Margaret Willis or Rita Mills or contact the secretary of Midmurray F.N.C. direct on (050) 302812.

**Volunteers are needed to take part
in the Roadsides Survey Around the
Shire.**

If you are able to help, even as a driver, please contact Ern Perkins. The Roadsides Survey of the Maldon Shire has been distributed as a broadsheet, and Ern is to be congratulated on his part. It's easy to follow, instructive, and quite impressive.

EXCURSION TO BULLARTO RESERVOIR

Excursions held in conjunction with Field Naturalists Clubs from other districts are usually enjoyable, and the excursion to Bullarto reservoir on July 16th was no exception. As well as Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club members, we had a mini-busload and a small convoy of cars from Geelong, the Newstead branch of the Maryborough F.N.C., and the leader, Garry Cheers from Maryborough. The weather forecast was not very promising, but apart from some mist on Wombat Hill, the weather was good, and the rain held off.

Garry thought that it might be too cold for much fungi to be in sight, but a surprising number of species were found.

First stop was on Babbington Road, a few hundred metres north of the main road. Along the gully to the east, Brooker's Gum (*Eucalyptus brookeriana*) was noticed. Brooker's Gum is a member of the Swamp Gum group. Distinguishing features are the slightly crenulate (toothed) juvenile leaves, which are slightly paler on the undersurface, and the basal bark which is fibrous, giving an appearance not unlike that of a Mountain Ash. The buds are slightly beaked, rather like those of a Red Stringybark.

A small daisy bush, with small toothed leaves was abundant in the vicinity. The leaves are a shiny green on the upper surface, and a felted white underneath. It was identified as Moth Daisy Bush (*Olearia erubescens*). In flower it would be unmistakable, as the flowers are few-petalled, looking rather as if they had been used for an unfinished game of tinker, tailor.....

Rushes, as could be expected in such a damp environment, were abundant. Four species were fairly common. *Juncus procerus* was the largest, and can be distinguished by the very soft, easily crushed stems. Second in size was the Pale Rush (*J. pallidus*). It has stout rigid stems. *Juncus flavidus* is a medium-sized rush and has smooth, shining stems. The stem ridges are hard to see, even with a magnifying glass. Smallest of the rushes was loose-flower Rush (*J. pauciflorus*). It is a slender, elegant rush, with widely separated flowers.

At the second stop, patches of Handsome Flat-pea (*Platylobium formosum*) were noticed. The form seen was the prostrate form, with leaves that are stalked and alternate.

Nearer the reservoir, a patch of Dwarf Cherry (*Exocarpos strictus*) was noted. It is generally similar in appearance to our Cherry Ballart, but is smaller and more bushy, and the branchlets are flattened.

Birds were not abundant, but we had a good view of a pair of White's Thrush.

There was some discussion as which river system the reservoir is part. Maps show that Babbington Hill, near the reservoir, is on the divide, and that the reservoir is south of the divide, and part of the Lerderderg catchment.

Plant and fungi lists for the excursion are available.

Sandon Birdlist for June

Pacific Black Duck	Speckled Warbler
Masked Lapwing	Weebill
Galah	Brown,
Long-billed Corella	Buff-rumped,
Crimson Rosella	Yellow-rumped
Eastern Rosella	and Striated Thornbills
Red-rumped Parrot	White-throated Tree-creeper
Kookaburra	White-eared,
Welcome Swallow	Yellow-tufted,
Scarlet Robin	White-plumed,
Yellow Robin	White-naped and
Crested Shrike-tit	New Holland Honeyeaters
Golden Whistler	European Goldfinch
Grey Shrike-thrush	White-winged Chough
Restless Flycatcher	Magpie-lark
Willie Wagtail	Grey Currawong
White-browed Babbler	Australian Raven
Wren	

Susanna Starr

Observations for July

- * A bat-box of a new design has been erected at Sandon and is proving to be successful as it is being used by bats. R.W.
- * A flock of 50 Goldfinches were seen flying in Kennedy St, and later a flock of 7 were seen feeding on railway land at the end of Doveton St. on 23/7. Masked Lapwings are nesting beside the railway line at the bottom of Doveton St. Lots of birds have been noticed in urban Castlemaine lately. That crazy Bluetongue is still appearing in the garden. B.M.
- * A Silver Gull was seen flying across Campbell St. on 2/7. R.M.
- * Tall Greenhoods and Hardenbergia were in flower early in the month. G.B.
- * Fairy Martins were seen flying around the house on McKenzies Hill, and a fox was seen in Ray St. I.P. A fox family lives in Ray St. M.O.
- * Six male crimson Rosellas were seen fighting around the chimney pots in Gaulton St. early in the month. Three Whistling Kites were seen at Walmer. M.O.
- * Portland F.N.C. reported Royal Penguins moulting on the rocks in their area. Report from the Nelson W.V.F.N.C.A. campout in March.
- * Mt Alexander was a sight to be seen covered with snow. B.E.
- * Six Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters in the almond tree in Campbell St. being harrassed by Wattlebirds, but they weren't very concerned and kept doubling back to the tree. K.T.
- * A New Holland Honeyeater was seen picking the threads off twine on

a bean frame in Gaulton St. M.O.

* Spinebill, Scarlet Robin and White-eared Honeyeater seen at Little Bendigo, and the Black-tailed Native Hens were seen again at the memorial picnic spot on Campbells Creek between the township and Yapeen. C.M.

* Long-billed Corellas have been seen over the town. M.O.

* A large flock of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos have been frequent visitors at north Castlemaine, and have been eyeing off the Galahs' nest hollow, which wouldn't really be suitable for them as there isn't a "landing platform". R.M.

Great Dividing Trail Public Walks.

Programs for Sun. Aug 13 and Sat. Sept 23 are in CN212.

(from the G.D.T. Winter Newsletter)

Sunday Oct. 9 Lerderderg Gorge. A loop walk on the Lerderderg following the river downstream from O'Briens Crossing to the Whisky Creek Junction for lunch, then up the Spanish Onion ("cos its hot work!") track, cross country to O'Briens Rd. and back to the Crossing. Meet - O'Briens Crossing via Blackwood

Leader - Ed Butler

Distance - 20km

Late October, Early November Long Distance Walk

Suggestion 1

Not for the faint hearted; a stroll from Daylesford to Castlemaine in a day, following the newly completed trail all the way. Start practising now! Details later. Approx 50km of easy, if demented, walking.

Suggestion 2

Much the same as 1 above but spread over 2 days and camp on top of the ranges somewhere. This could easily include the Franklin Gorge as well. We could arrange a camping spot that was accessible to a car to transport out those less inclined to camp, and to bring in camping gear for those not wanting to lug their own along. If you are interested contact the committee and we will make a final decision before the next newsletter.

Address - Great Dividing Trail Association

PO Box 429

Daylesford. 3460.

Phone - Ed Butler (053) 48 3059 (a.h.) (053) 48 2367 (b.h.)

Swift Parrot Survey

There is a statewide Swift Parrot Survey taking place on the weekend of the 19th and 20th August. The Club is taking part as a group on Sunday 20th (see programme, back page) but if you wish you can take part at any time over the weekend. Place, time, weather and number of birds all have to be taken into account. Results to Chris Morris or Secretary.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street. .

Fri Aug. 11 **Antarctica**. Speaker is John Bradfield. Continuing Ed, 8pm.

Sat Aug 12 **Reservoirs on the Coliban River**. Take warm clothing, binoculars, small change for entry to some reservoirs. BBQ lunch. BYO food and drinks. Leave 27 Doveton St. at 10.30 am.

Thurs 17 Aug. **U3A/FNC Birdwatching**. Meet Cont. Ed. car park at 9.30am.

Sun. 20 Aug. **Swift Parrot Survey** (Part of the statewide weekend survey) Take lunch. Meet at 27 Doveton St at 10 am. Leader is C Morris.

Fri Sept 8 **Conservation of Grassy Woodlands** . Speaker is Elvyne Hogan.

Sat Sept. 9 **Middletons Creek Track**. Porcupine Ridge area. Leave CHIRP, 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm Leader is E Perkins.

Sun Sept. 10 **A Walk in the Spring Forest** with Maldon Land Care Group. Bring Thermos and picnic lunch. Meet near the Maldon tip entrance at 11am on the track along the railway line at Maldon. There will be a talk beforehand to tell what to expect.

Sat. Sept. 23 Excursion to Castlemaine by the Botany Group of Field Naturalists Club of Victoria.

Each Wed. in October. **"Naturalist Rambler"** A ramble in the spring bush close to Castlemaine, from 4 - 5.30 pm, in conjunction with U3A.

Fri. Oct 13 **"Albatrosses"** and **"Flora of the Royal Botanic Gardens"**. Speaker is Dr Phillip Moors.

Sat Oct 14 Excursion with Maryborough F.N.C. to **Muckleford and Smiths Reef**. Leaving 27 Doveton St., Castlemaine at 11 am. Leader, E. Perkins.

Sat. Nov. 4 at 10am. **Kalimna Walk** with the Gardens Festival.

Fri. Nov 10 **Pond Life** Speaker is Alan Reid.

Sat. Nov. 11 **Bells Swamp**.

Fri. Dec. 8 **Members and Visitors Night**.

Committee: C. Morris (Pres.), G. Broadway (V.P.), M. Willis (Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), K. Turner (Prog.), R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, M. Oliver, S. Parnaby, M. Hunter, S. Bruton, B. Maund.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at **Continuing Education, Templeton St.** at 8 pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. **All Members are invited to attend.**

Subscriptions - 1995

Ordinary Membership: Single \$14, Family \$20

Pensioner/Student: Single \$10, Family \$16. Supporting: \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.