

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



OCTOBER '94
205 Vol 18.9

Spring Madness?

There he was out into the middle of the tiny reservoir on his own, swimming round and round in small circles. As he went a loud "kerplonk" sound echoed out across the water and a giant spurt of water shot up behind him. Then he lifted his spiny tail over his back and fanned it out, a huge swelling ballooned under his chin, and he proceeded to swim up and down. Over and over again this extraordinary behaviour was repeated. No other bird in sight. It was the most incredible sight I have seen since I started birdwatching - the male Musk Duck in Spring.

Margaret Willis

Three Volcanos of the Western District

The highlight of our few days in Hamilton in May was our visits to three of the nearby volcanos, Mounts Eccles, Rouse and Napier. Mt Napier we visited twice because I had left my camera in the car the first time. I left it in the caravan the next time! But I did have the small camera with me and at least got photos, but the views and features at the top were worth something better.

Hamilton is situated on the northern edge of a huge and very interesting basalt plain - described by one pamphlet as a "vener of basalt". There are about 200 points of eruption on the plains ranging in age from several million years to 7,000+ years. After visiting the volcanos, having very little information at the time, I obtained some of the above and following information from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in Hamilton and the Hamilton Tourist Information office. As in all things geological, times do not always agree, according to the method of dating I gather. One paper has Tower Hill the youngest at 15,000 years, while another dates Mt Eccles at 7,000, while another gives Mt Napier the same age as Tower Hill at 7,300 years! The Mt Rouse flow is dated at 1.8 - 2 million years - but I don't think that includes the volcano itself, which might be where the apparant discrepancies lie.

Our first visit was to Mt Eccles near Macarthur. For most of the way we could see the mass of Mt Napier, and determined to visit there sometime too. At Mt Eccles we set off on the walk around the crater rim. The first part of the track was easy because it has been set up for

disabled people to enjoy the area too, but once we got beyond the paved track we were glad of stout boots. It was quite rough in places and very steep sometimes. When the wind gusted towards the crater we wondered if we might wind up far below in Lake Surprise.

Mt Eccles is the youngest of the three volcanos, the first volcanic flows occurring about 20,000 years ago, and according to the National Parks information sheet, the last eruption occurred 7,000 years ago. The lava because of this is not very weathered. To quote from the same sheet - "There are some fascinating geological features in the park, including a scoria cone, lava canal, craters and stony rises", to say nothing of the lovely lake that is at the bottom of the main crater. There are several walks in the park to take in some of these features - the one we took around the rim, one around the lake, one down the canal, starting at the cave on the side of the track, and two to the Natural Bridge which is itself a lava cave. It is good bird area, too, but we saw only a few because it was so windy, but we did see a koala and watched him for quite a while. I'd like to go back sometime and follow the lava canal which is a collapsed lava tube and which is supposed to be the best bird area. We did follow it for a short distance and the impression was that of walking along the bed of a creek with rocky bed and walls.

Later on in the day we were returning to Hamilton on the other side of Mt Napier when we decided to visit Peshurst and perhaps climb Mt Rouse if it wasn't too hard. We had afternoon tea in a cafe and were warned that there were three sets of steep steps up to the lookout tower. I think the proprietess wasn't feeling very energetic the day she climbed them because they weren't too bad at all. There's a winding road up to a parking spot and the walk up the steps to the lookout tower was well worth the effort. The views were across miles of stony rises, with a circular paddock at the farm below to the south. I'd love to know why it was cleared and planted as it was. Perhaps there was a circular spot without rocks to start with? To the north we could see some of the lakes which are apparently associated with the northern edge of the lava plain. Behind them was the blue of the Grampians. In all the other directions were other volcanos in the distance.

Mt Rouse is a very interesting volcano as it is the oldest of the three, and serves as a useful marker, distinguishing the younger volcanic activity of the whole area from the older - it is considered to be about half-way along the time-scale. The lava flow from Mt Rouse is unusually large, and is in two sections joined by two narrow flows, one of which is only 200 metres wide at one place and averages 1 km wide for 5 kms. The southern block enters the sea at Port Fairy, the front of the flow being about 14 km wide at that point, after a journey of 60 km from the volcano itself. The stony rises which typify the flow are interpreted to mean that the flow was laid down by a lava tube mechanism. To quote from the paper "Lava Flows of Mount Rouse, Western Victoria" by C.D.Ollier, and published Dec.1985, "Swanson

(1973) indicated that lavas within tubes flowed virtually isothermally, cooling at a rate of only about $1^{\circ}\text{C.km}^{-1}$. Malin (1980) suggests that such tube-fed flows, if limited only by cooling could possibly produce flows up to 200 km long, a mechanism quite adequate for the 60km Mount Rouse flow.

"The Mount Rouse flow indicates by its length and its stony-rises morphology that it was a tube fed flow" "If this is so, it was probably emplaced in a relatively short time, perhaps only days or weeks. The fluidity of the lava flows is further indicated by the apparent ease with which the lava divided into several different flows which re-united further downstream after they had flowed around obstacles."

The third (and fourth!) volcano to be visited was Mt Napier. It is older than Mt Eccles, and close to the same age as Tower Hill, viz. 7,300 years (Edmund D. Gill and I.K.M. Elmore, Vict. Naturalist, Nov. '74). It doesn't have any facilities other than a picnic table along the track in the reserve. That can't even be seen from the gate with its sign EMERGENCY VEHICICLE ONLY (sic) because of the eucalypts, mostly Manna Gum, and Blackwoods and Bracken Fern. We followed the track which becomes quite steep, after 150m or so, and we made sure that we had a staff each the second time we visited. There was little to see but the forest (and a few birds) until we really started to climb and began to get glimpses of the countryside through the spaces starting to open through the trees. We finally puffed our way up to a flat spot which proved to be one of the parasitic cones. We spent a little time here getting our breath back and admiring the view to the west, which included the lava barrier, and then we tramped on up to the top(s). There's a series of craters up here, but because of the terrific wind, both times, we didn't try to follow the very narrow ridge around to the rocky outcrops on the other side of the main crater. They looked quite strange, almost as if they had only oozed out a few years ago. The 360° view to the far horizons was quite breathtaking - what breath the wind had left us, anyway!

Some extracts from the article in the June '74 Victorian Naturalist, "Importance of the Mount Napier Volcanic Complex near Hamilton, Victoria, Australia" by Edmund D.Gill and I.K.M.Elmore tell of the importance of this facinating mountain and its surrounds. "Mount Napier is not simply an interesting eruption centre - it is a whole complex of volcanic phenomena of world importance. Tourists are paying millions of dollars each year to see exactly the same kinds of features in other parts of the world. It is time we realized the volcanic marvels that exist in Victoria, including the Mount Napier complex." In a farewell speech after a tour of the area in 1945 by 50 Victorian and overseas geologists, the late Professor Griffith Taylor is quoted in the same article. "I have visited all the main volcanic areas of this globe....What impresses me so much is that there is such a diversity of volcanic features in this one lava

field in Victoria."....."I know of no basaltic field in the world that has so great a range of volcanic phenomena in so limited an area."

Field Naturalists' Clubs took the responsibility of watching over this important area, and local action saved some exceptionally fine lava cones from being bulldozed for roadmetal. There is one small quarry just outside the reserve, however.

The Mt Napier system seems to be better known and appreciated overseas than in Australia.

Another part of the complex which we visited was the Byaduk caves to the west of the mountain. These are lava tubes which have collapsed in places, so that, as you walk through the rocks of the stony rise area, you come on these great gaping holes in the ground. The roof seems to be from about 2 to 4 metres thick (I wasn't game look too hard!) and the floor of the open area is covered in ferns and such. At each end of the hole is the cave itself, with openings from 3 to 6 metres high. As far as I could see there was no way in. I'm afraid I'm no caver, no matter how interesting they are, and I was very glad to get out of the area, especially as I kept spotting little gaps between rocks which went a long way down. Some were covered by wire netting to stop sheep from falling in!

For anyone interested in geology, or magnificent views I'd recommend this area any time. Mt Eccles has plenty of facilities, including camping, picnic and toilets, Mt Rouse has toilets and picnic facilities and Mt Napier has only a picnic table among the trees, a rough track in from the quarry road, and a Major Mitchell memorial plaque at the trig. point on the summit.

References:

1. "Lava Flows of Mount Rouse, Western Victoria" (paper) by C.D.Ollier, PROC. R. SOC. VICT. vol 97, no.4 167-174, Dec 1985
2. "Importance of the Mount Napier Volcanic Complex near Hamilton, Victoria Australia" (article) by Edmund D. Gill and L. K. M. Elmore, Vict. Nat. Vol. 91 June 1974.
3. ".Mt. Eccles National Park" (information sheet) Dept for Conservation and Natural Resources, Oct.'84, revised June '89.

My thanks go to the Hamilton branch of the Department for Conservation and Natural Resources and the Hamilton Tourist Information office for their help.

Rita Mills



Sandon, August '94

Australasian Grebe	Wrens
White-faced Heron	Speckled Warbler
Pacific Black Duck	Weebill
Little Eagle	Brown,
Brown Falcon	Buff-rumped,
Masked Lapwing	Yellow and
Galah	Striated Thornbills
Long-billed Corella	White-throated Tree-creeper
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Red Wattlebird
Crimson Rosella	Yellow-faced,
Eastern Rosella	White-eared,
Red-rumped Parrot	Yellow-tufted,
Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo 24/8	White-plumed,
Sthn. Boobook Owl (h)	Brown-headed and
Kookaburra	White-naped Honeyeaters
Welcome Swallow	Spotted Pardalote
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Striated Pardalote
Scarlet Robin	Silvereye
Eastern Yellow Robin	European Goldfinch
Jacky Winter	Red-browed Firetail
Crested Shrike-tit	Diamond Firetail
Golden Whistler	White-winged Chough
Grey Shrike-thrush	Australian Magpie-lark
Restless Flycatcher	Magpie
Grey Fantail	Grey Currawong
Willy Wagtail	Australian Raven
White-browed Babbler	

Also - Common Brown Snake
and Red-bellied Black Snake, both on 28/8

From Bob's Diary - A male Wood Duck in breeding plumage, on water and calling with a soft note and head bobbing. A female flew low over the dam but landed on one nearby. Playing coy? Her call is louder than the male's.

Bob commented that, according to the bird books, Wood Ducks are on water only for courting and mating.

Susanna Starr, Bob Webb

Observations for September

*Five Kookaburras, two White-faced Herons at the dam and Pied Currawongs eating crumbs on the verandah. P.M.

*White-faced Heron pecking at it's reflection in a window.

*A Crested Bellbird seen at Spring Gully Reservoir by E.P. It completely ignored him as it went about its business.

*Hylacolas were seen at Gower School. One of the party actually touched one. B.M.

- *A live Lewin's Rail was seen in the area where the dead one, reported last month, was found. M.H.
- *A Koala was seen crossing the Newstead-Maldon road at Welshmans Reef, just near Trudgeons Road. S.S.
- *The Restless Flycatcher is still being seen all over the same area it was earlier reported.
- *Two Black-tailed Native Hens seen at the picnic spot on the creek just out of Campbells creek on the Daylesford Road. C.M.
- *Lots of Pied Stilts as well as many Coots and Darters near the railway bridge at Joyces creek on Cairn Curran.
- *New Holland Honeyeaters and a pair of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes at Harcourt. B.M.
- *Many more Crimson Rosellas appearing on the western side of town. S.B. and M.W.
- *Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos are back at Littlehampton again. A number of White Ibis were seen near Castlemaine, but at Littlehampton it was the Straw-necked that were there in numbers. There were also 14 Indian Mynahs at Littlehampton. S.B.
- *Margaret Willis and her husband spent 10 days away in the Hopetoun area visiting some of the nearby national parks. One of the highlights for her was at Pink Lakes. While they sat and had a cuppa two Mulga Parrots went on quietly feeding nearby.
- *A Wattlebird was seen at North Castlemaine with a smaller bird clasped firmly in its claws as it flew over. The small bird appeared to be dead.
- *Birds seen on the U3A/FNC outing to the area near the Garfield wheel at Chewton on Sept. 15 - Grey Shrike-thrush, Fantail Cuckoo (h), Yellow-faced and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Scarlet Robin, Yellow Robin, Buff-rumped, Brown and Yellow (Little) Thornbills, Shining Bronze-cuckoo, Superb Blue Wren, Red-browed Firetails, White-throated Tree-creeper, Australian Hobby, Welcome Swallows, Striated and Spotted Pardalotes.

Birds at 61 Hunter Street, September '94

Signs of increasing activity as pairs of Eastern and Crimson Rosellas investigate a recently erected nesting box in our ancient pepper tree, but no decisions appear to have been made as yet.

We are on the flight path of a solitary Grey Currawong as he moves from the garden at Buda to the Kalimna bush each day. The flock of Pied Currawongs have moved on elsewhere.

Across the creek in the eucalypts a pair of Fantail Cuckoos have been trilling daily, and on some occasions have been heard at 10 pm!

Another member of the cuckoo family was being harassed by a flock of indignant thornbills as it perched on the apricot tree close to the house. At first I thought it was a Starling because of the iridescence of the wings in the sunshine. On closer inspection through binoculars it

was obviously a cuckoo, but difficult to identify because the feathers were ruffled and head kept well down (on the defensive). Unfortunately it did not utter a sound to help me to a decision, but I have been informed by more knowledgeable bird observers that it was probably a Horsefield's Bronze. Eventually it flew off with the thornbills in hot pursuit.

Eastern Spinebills are still finding plenty of feed around the garden - the latest attraction being the green blooms of euphorbia.

Other visitors observed -

Welcome Swallows

Magpie

a pair of Blackbirds

Ravens

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos

Red Wattlebird

New Holland Honeyeaters

Yellow-faced Honeyeaters

Striated Thornbills

Sparrows

Starlings

Silvereyes

Mistletoebird

Kookaburra.

S. Parnaby

From "Land for Wildlife News"

There are now 576 species of environmental weeds recognised in Victoria.

A naturalised plant is one that has been introduced (deliberately or otherwise) and which has subsequently become established beyond the likelihood of natural extinction

Matt White, C.N.R.

Susanna Starr and Bob Webb have recently had their property as Sandon designated as Land For Wildlife.

Contributed, Barbara Maund.

Apropos the letter regarding the Wombat Ranges in last month's C.N.

These are some extracts from an article in the "Age" newspaper Thur. 20 Sept. '94, writer Hugo Kelly, environment reporter. It seems the Government has at last begun to listen to concerned groups.

"The Federal Government is considering the formation of an independent monitoring agency to ensure that the forest industry abides by its code of practice.

"The move follows a State Government audit that found that up to 30 per cent of Victoria's logging industry breached the code."

"Breaches discovered by the audit included the felling of trees into a reserve of rare protected *Astellia* lillies, trees felled into streamside reserves and inadequate road construction."

"Under the Federal Government's export woodchip licences, exporters must abide by the code."

Contributed, Chris Morris.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

Note that the general meetings are now held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street.

Fri. Oct 14 "Some Reflections of a Famous Naturalist's Castlemaine Relatives"
Speaker is Daryl Fleay. 8pm at Continuing Education.

Sat. Oct 15 Mts Barker and Alexander, and Sutton Grange, looking for raptors. Leader C. Morris. Leave from 13 Mostyn St (CHIRP) at 1.30pm.

Thurs Oct 20 U3A/FNC Birdwatching Meet in Cont. Ed. Car Park at 9.30am.
Leader S. Bruton.

Sat. Oct 29 Festival Walk – Kalimna Walking Trail. Meet at the beginning of the walking trail on the tourist road, 1.5 km north of the east end of Lyttleton St, at 10 am.

Sat. Nov. 6 Festival Walk – Wattle Flat Forest Walk. Turn right at the end of Walker Street into Richards Road, take the road straight ahead at Wattle Flat Reserve, and continue on that road where it takes a sharp turn left 'til you come to Youngmans Track on the edge of the forest on the right hand side. Park over on the left hand side of the road. Meeting time is 2 pm.

Fri. Nov. 11 yet to be finalised

Sat. Nov. 12 Clay Pits, Campbells Creek. Leader, K. Turner.

Thurs Nov. 17 U3A/FNC Birdwatching Leader from U3A

Sat Nov 19 Peacock Track. All day excursion to Talbot/Almherst area with Maryborough F.N.C. Leave 27 Dovelon St at 11am. Meet Maryborough F.N.C. at 12 noon on the corner of the Maryborough/Talbot road, and Blacksmiths' Gully Road.

Fri Dec 9 Members and Visitors Night.

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

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 – 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.