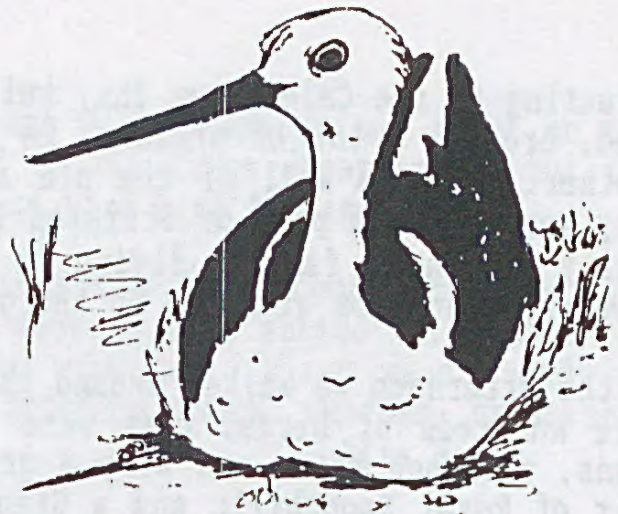


CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



March 1992

No 176

A SHORT BREAK IN THE SOUTH-WEST

Having decided we needed a short break, we decided that the South-west involved least hassles as far as driving was concerned, and the best possibility of cooler weather, so we settled on Port Fairy for the first two nights. The caravan park was well set out with lawns and mostly native trees, but its resident birds were mainly Sparrows, Starlings and Blackbirds! We took the opportunity this time to walk around Griffiths Island, which has a Mutton Bird colony. We didn't see any live Mutton Birds, but continually came across dead ones. I wondered whether there weren't enough fish, or they were exhausted after their migration, or whether dogs come onto the island over the causeway, although they are officially banned. The outstanding plant on the island, which is mostly covered by a rough grass, is a saltbush with clusters of crimson berries. Near the lighthouse there are quite a few large shrubs.

On the south side of the island there were hundreds of birds, mostly sheltering behind the reef out of the strong wind - Silver Gulls, Terns (Crested and Marsh, I decided), with an occasional Australian Gannet, Masked Lapwings, a number of Greater Black and Little Pied Cormorants, while there were Singing Honeyeaters and Wrens on the low scrub.

That evening we drove to Killarney Beach and were nearly blown away, but we did see Ruddy Turnstones and a female Red-capped Plover.

Next day we headed off for Portland, with a stop-over at the Craggs, about 12 Km out of Port Fairy for morning tea and a short walk. The area is a fascinating one but what took my interest most were the numbers of tracks in the fine sand of the footpath. One in particular looked as if it could have been that of a broad-footed marsupial.

We also detoured past Yambuck Lake, stopping at a backwater just before Yambuck township, where there were dozens of Grey Teal and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, as well as Yellow-billed Spoonbills and Red-necked Stints.

The caravan park in Portland had the constant noise of Purple-crowned Lorikeets, New Holland Honeyeaters and Little Wattlebirds.

An outing to the Caledonian Inn, built in 1858 - a museum on the Heywood road, brought a lot of pleasure to Doug for one reason, and myself for another. In the wall of the old inn under where additions were made many years ago, a pair of Striated Pardalotes had found a hole and were busily raising a family, flying in through a gap in the outside wall. There were numbers of birds in the garden too.

In the afternoon we walked around the lagoon in the town. Although there were hundreds of birds, they were mainly Silver Gulls, Grey Teal and Swans, although there was also a group of Masked Lapwings as well as a pair of Royal Spoonbills and a Greater Egret. Afterwards we headed out to Cape Nelson lighthouse, and followed the scenic road back. I finally persuaded Doug to stop at a spot where a track led down to the cliff and found that we were crossing a part of the Great South West Walk, so the next day we returned and took another track to the G.S.W.W. so that we could at least say that we had followed it for a short distance. We had to head back towards Portland because there was a steep cliff path the other way, and my knee was playing up, and I didn't really fancy being stuck down there, unable to get back again! We saw and heard lots of birds, but didn't manage to identify many as they dived back into the bushes. We did see Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, Southern Emu-wrens and an Elegant Parrot. The atmosphere along the walk was lovely, with birds calling and the scrub each side of the path with tall lobelias, paper-barks, Banksia, a daisy bush and winged sphyridium in flower.

Our next three nights were at Warrnambool. One highlight for me was a walk along the Lake Pertobe walking track. Thirty years ago this was a rather unpleasant, smelly saltmarsh, but it has been cleaned up and improved out of sight, with a play area and barbecues between the road and the lake, sports areas, and a wilder area where the walking track is. It was along here that we saw Black-winged Stilts, Red-kneed Dotterels and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers as well as Grey and Chestnut Teal, Grebes, Swans, Royal Spoonbills and an Intermediate Egret, still with its plumes. There were a lot of other birds too.

The other highlight was an hour or so at Tower Hill. The best bird spot being the water trough near the toilets! Here we saw a lot of White-naped, Brown-headed and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters coming to drink along with Red-browed Finches, a couple of Emus and a male Satin Flycatcher. A Stumpy-tailed Lizard managed to get a drink without falling in head-first. We also went to the hide on the bird pond, but all we saw there was a lone White-faced Heron!

On the way home we decided to go through Colac, stopping at the Floating Islands for a while. We didn't see many birds but we heard lots. We really needed to be able to spend more time there. North of Beeac I got Doug to stop the car as there were thousands of birds on the shallow end of the lake. They proved to be mainly Mountain Duck with quite a number

of Swans. Suddenly I realised there was a lone Brolga and chick on the edge of the water. Once they spotted us the chick disappeared, but the adult quietly stalked away, watching us from time to time.

It was a pleasant week away, very windy the first couple of days, and cold and overcast quite a lot of the week, but it suited us, if not the swimmers. I identified 87 species for the week, which wasn't bad, as quite a bit of the time was spent in antiques shops, museums, or asleep!

Rita Mills.

SANDON IN DECEMBER

Birds seen drinking at the bird bath were

Crimson Rosellas	Brown-headed Honeyeater
Grey Fantail	Spotted Pardalote
Thornbills -Striated, Buff-rumped and Brown	Silvereye Magpie

Birds seen on the property were

Australasian Grebe (nesting pair- four young)	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Pied Cormorant - immature	Hooded Robin (pair)
White-faced Heron	Scarlet Robin (pair)
Yellow-billed Spoonbill -immature	Rufous Whistler (pair)
Little Eagle (pair)	Grey Shrike-thrush (pair)
Brown Falcon	White-throated Treecreeper
Galah	Red Wattlebird (pair)
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Eastern Rosella	Southern Whiteface
Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo	Mistletoe Bird
Kookaburra (pair)	Diamond Firetail
Welcome Swallow (pair)	White-winged Choughs
Richard's Pipit	Grey Currawong (pair)
	Australian Raven

Contributed by S Starr.

NOTES FOR MARCH

DOMESTIC PIGEONS AND CORELLAS A mixed flock of Domestic Pigeons and Long-billed Corellas was observed feeding on the ground in Mary Street on Feb 9th. There were several dozen pigeons and about five corellas. (EP). Ravens have been seen feeding with White Cockatoos at Little Hampton (SB), and a mixed flock of Little Ravens and Galahs were seen feeding at Eddington on the February excursion.

KOALA has been seen at Chewton (LJ)

HARLEQUIN MISTLETOE was seen on Feb 4th, in flower in the main picnic area of Melville Caves. (EP)

SWAMP HARRIER was seen dead on the road at Sandon. A cat's carcass was nearby. Perhaps it was a road victim while feeding on the carcass. (BW)

RAVENS have behaved boldly at Maldon. A dead raven placed on the ground had proved a deterrent, and a month later no ravens had returned. (GS)

BROWN SNAKE had been found under an outdoor chair in Guildford (BPr)

LARGE-HEADED TREE-CRICKET. A large-headed pale green grasshopper, but without strong back legs, has been identified as a Large-headed Tree-cricket by staff at Kyneton Secondary College (SB)

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLES A pair had been seen on the U3A outing to Guildford Plateau. (LJ)

BIRDS SCARCE?. Some reports of the scarcity of small birds at present e.g. few honeyeaters have been seen at Sandon. Other reports of birds being plentiful, particularly near water. e.g. Black-chinned Honeyeaters at Maldon.

JUVENILE SPINEBILL. A spinebill-shaped bird with a rusty coloured breast was seen feeding on a Fuchsia (JO). Thought to be a juvenile Eastern Spinebill.

PLANTS IN FLOWER in the bush include hyacinth orchid, spreading wattle, lightwood, lemon beauty-heads, Mitchell's wattle and magenta storksbill.

YELLOW-TAILED BLACK COCKATOOS. A large flock of 50-60 were seen at the end of the Gisborne Bypass. From a distance, they looked to be a flock of ravens. (CM)

ZEBRA FINCHES. Three were seen on a fence, about 5 km north-east of Elmore on Feb 17h. (EP)

DAWN CHORUS AT GLENLUCE

A fine dawn chorus was the reward for those members of CFNC who took part in the dawn excursion to Glenluce on 16th February. The songsters were invisible in the darkness, but were thought to be Fuscous Honeyeaters. When the light improved, a range of bird species were sighted. Some of the highlights were

- a small flock of Large Black Cormorants overhead.
- Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes *and* White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes. The latter obliged by sitting on a nearby limb in full sun, allowing a close look at its facial markings.

-breakfast of bacon and pancakes by some of the group.
 -a Bronze-wing Pigeon.
 -a small flock of Rainbow Birds
 The bird list for the Glenluce picnic area was

White-faced Heron	Rainbow Bee-eater	Superb Fairy-wren
Large black Cormorant	Black-f. Cuckoo-shrike	White-browed Scrub-wren
Sulphur-cr. Cockatoo	White-bellied Cuckoo-sh	White-thr. Treecreeper
Long-billed Corella	Tree Martin	Fuscous Honeyeater
Galah	Welcome Swallow	White-naped Honeyeater
Eastern Rosella	Eastern Yellow robin	White-plumed Honeyeater
Crimson Rosella	Jacky Winter	Spotted Pardalote
Red-rumped Parrot	Crested Shrike-tit	Dusky Woodswallow
Common Bronze-wing	Grey Shrike-thrush	Magpie
Kookaburra	Restless Flycatcher	Australian Raven

Other birds, such as White-winged Choughs and Red-browed Firetails were seen along the way.

EP

CFNC BIRDPWATCHERS IN ACTION

by Mary Turner



LAANACOORIE EXCURSION REPORT

Highlight of the excursion to the broken bridge on the Laanacoorie reservoir was the sighting of a White-breasted Sea-eagle. We were able to watch it soaring in the company of Yellow-billed Spoonbills. Another highlight was the view of a Water Rat, swimming across the reservoir. It reached a clump of water ribbons near the middle, before returning. Its white-tipped tail was very conspicuous as it dived.

Near Eddington we stopped to watch several willy-willies, moving across a plowed paddock. Nearby were a flock of Little Ravens, thought to be feeding on Cabbage White Butterflies in the paddock.

Other birds of interest were the flocks of Pelicans, seen at the edge of the reservoir, swimming, flying and perched on a dead tree; the Darters, seen perched and flying, and four species of cormorant. Clamorous Reed-warblers were particularly numerous.

The complete bird list for the excursion is

Pelican	Brown Falcon	Black-f Cuckoo-shrike
Darter	Dusky Moorhen	Grey Shrike-thrush
Great Cormorant	Swamphen	Willy Wagtail
Large Pied Cormorant	Coot	Clamorous Reed-warbler
Little Black Cormorant	Masked Lapwing	Superb Blue Wren
Little Pied Cormorant	Peaceful Dove (h)	Red Wattlebird
White-faced Heron	Crested Pigeon	Noisy Miner
Great Egret	Galah	White-plumed Honeyeater
Sacred Ibis	Eastern Rosella	Red-browed Firetail
Yellow Spoonbill	Red-rumped Parrot	White-winged Chough
Pacific Black Duck	Sacred Kingfisher	Mudlark
Grey Teal	Rainbow Bird	Dusky Woodswallow
Maned Duck	Welcome Swallow	Magpie
Whistling Eagle	Tree Martin	Australian Raven
White-breasted Sea-eagle	Richard's Pipit	Little Raven

Thanks to George Broadway for leading such an interesting excursion.

SANDON IN JANUARY 1992

Birds seen at the bird bath were

Grey Fantail	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Wrens	Spotted Pardalote
Striated Thornbill	Magpies
Brown Thornbill	Grey Currawong (pair)
Buff-rumped Thornbill	

Birds seen on the property were

Australasian Grebe	Welcome Swallow (pair)
White-faced Heron	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Sacred Ibis	Scarlet Robin
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Rufous Whistler
Little Eagle (pair)	Speckled Warbler
Galahs	White-throated Treecreeper
Sulphur-crested Cockatoos	Silvereyes
Crimson Rosellas	Diamond Firetail
Horsefields Bronze-cuckoo	White-winged Choughs
Kookaburra	Australian Raven

An immature Swamp Harrier was seen on the main road

S Starr.

HISTORY OF HORTICULTURE IN CASTLEMAINE AND DISTRICT.

The Heritage Festival Exhibition entitled "History of Horticulture in Castlemaine and District" will be held between April 5th and May 3rd in the Art Gallery. It will include the history of the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens, Victory Park, pleasure gardens and nurseries.

The organisers are seeking historical material. If you can help, please let the Art Gallery staff know.

In particular, there was a "Field Ramblers Club" in Castlemaine. Information about this group would be very welcome.

CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC PO Box 324, Castlemaine 3450.

SUPPER: Mar: R & M Holden April: L Perkins and K Mather.

COMMITTEE: Barbara Maund (pres), George Broadway (vp), Brenda Envall (vp), Maggie Oliver (sec), Chris Norwood (treas), Shirley Parnaby, Rita Mills (Newsletter & Pub officer), Kaye Turner (progams), Beris Perry, Chris Morris, Clodagh Norwood and Ern Perkins (asst newsletter).

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 38 Campbell St at 7.30 p.m. All members are invited to attend. Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.

SUBSCRIPTIONS 1992

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

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Excursions leave promptly at the times shown

Fri 13 Mar. NEAR AND FAR.

Management of trees near SEC power lines -Mr G Hocking and Mr J Perry.
National Parks of Queensland with Frank Duffin and
Maldon Roadsides with Ern Perkins. 8 pm at the High School.

Sat 14 Mar. BENDIGO SEWERAGE PONDS. Bird watching on the Bendigo Sewerage Ponds, Epsom. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 pm. Leader is G Broadway.

Thurs 19 March. BIRDWATCHING. A joint activity with Castlemaine U3A. Meet Continuing Education, Templeton St at 9 am. Leaders of this inaugural outing are M Oliver and C Norwood.

Thurs 26 Mar. BUSINESS MEETING 7.30 pm at 38 Campbell Street.

Fri 10 April. MISTLETOES. Talk by Malcolm Calder. 8 pm at High School.

Sat 11 April. MISTLETOE EXCURSION. Excursion to Gaash Road. 1.30 pm from SEC, Mostyn St. Leader is E Perkins.

Fri 8 May. CHILE. Talk by Helen Conn. High School at 8 pm.

Sat 9 May. MT ALEXANDER KOALA PARK A walk through the new koala park. 1.30 at SEC or 1.45 at Koala park entrance. Bring binoculars and bird books.

Fri 12 June. DESERT WANDERINGS AND DESERT PLANTS Talk by John Lindner.

Fri 10 July. LAMINTON NATIONAL PARK.

Fri 14 Aug. WILDFLOWERS AND BIRDS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA with Chris Morris

Extract from the Annals of Bendigo

Mr Thomas Dungey, who saw the junction of the Bendigo and Back Creeks before it was invaded by diggers, described the scene in the following terms;- "On the Sunday morning, a lovely day, we took a stroll to the junction of what have since been known as Back Creek and Bendigo Creek, and thought it the loveliest spot on earth, with water holes with water in them as clear as crystal, kingfisher birds flitting about in the silver wattle, whose lovely foliage almost hid the banks of the creek from view, with occasional splashings as the duck-billed platypus tumbled from the banks into water. But there was not a human being to be seen anywhere"