

Castlemaine Naturalist

March 1995

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Mungo National Park

One of the most unforgettable weekends I have spent was during last November when we travelled with a small tour group out to Lake Mungo. Aboriginal people believe they have always lived in Australia. Certainly by 36,000 years ago, Aboriginal people were living in Mungo when the lakes were full and fresh with the Willandra Creek spilling into the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers. The continuous archaeological record of Aboriginal occupation of the Willandra Lakes from at least then up to the present day can be seen there. The life of the aboriginal people fluctuated with the rising and falling level of the lakes, a story read from the shore line middens and stone tool assemblages. These relics helped to reveal the general lifestyle of the inhabitants. They showed the aboriginal peoples' diet included Golden Perch Murray Cod, shellfish, Emu eggs, wallabies and Rat Kangaroos. When the Lakes dried up (15,000 years ago) the aboriginal people depended more on foods gained from gathering and hunting in the Mallee and surrounding vegetation. Large numbers of campsites have been found on the lake floor. Evidence occurs as fragments found where erosion has taken place. The most significant was the finding of well preserved human skeletal material over the past 30 years leading to it becoming a World Heritage area in 1981. Animal remains and other archaeological evidence have all been well preserved over a long period in the Mungo lunette known as the "Walls of China". As we walked over the dunes, material dating back to 40,000 years could be seen scattered across the sand. As we gazed across the Lake I was filled with the wonder of this history; our Australian history. At night when the full moon came up over the lunette, Mungo filled me with the awe of it all.

Swift Parrots and Grey-crowned Babblers

A Swift Parrot census is coming up this winter and it has been suggested as many of the Club as possible take part. The birds fly across the strait from Tasmania and over-winter in Victoria.

Also information about Grey-crowned Babblers is required, to find the extent of their range. It is known there is one colony of these uncommon birds at the Castlemaine Golf Club, but if you have information of other colonies please let us know.

EXCURSION TO HARCOURT NORTH RESERVOIR

Spreading Sneezeweed. Common Sneezeweed, as the name suggests, is a common and widespread plant, and is found on damp flats. It is abundant at Harcourt North Reservoir, where it grows thickly on the exposed bed of the reservoir.

It is a much-branched plant to about 10 cm high, with toothed leaves which are 1 to 2 cm long. The stalkless daisy flowers are like small green buttons, and tucked into the leaf bases.

On the Club's excursion to the reservoir on February 11th,, a different species of Sneezeweed was evident, growing amongst the Common Sneezeweed. This other species was weaker and more spreading, with smaller, stalked-leaves, and cottony-hairy (rather than hairless).

This is a new record for the Club's plant list. Scientific name is *Centipeda minima*. *Centipeda* refers to its likeness to a centipede, from its habit of growth. *Minima* refers to the smallness of this species, compared to others in the genus. The Common Sneezeweed is *Centipeda cunninghamii*, named in honour of the explorer. Both species are native.

Whistling Kites. Seven largish birds of prey were in the air. There was some discussion as to their identity. Were they Little Eagles or Whistling Kites? The vote went to Whistling Kites. Reasons included

- the relatively long tail
- the pale leading edge to the wing
- the whistling call, heard by some of the group
- the wing span, which head on, appeared like a very shallow inverted W
- the marked black fingers on the extremity of the wings

The water birds seemed to take little notice of the circling hawks, except when they flew very low over the water. The hawks appeared to be fishing.

Masked Lapwings were very plentiful. A flock of 50 plus was feeding on a grassy rise, at the north end of the reservoir. Some were also feeding at the water's edge.

Small Mudnat was in flower, forming a green and purple carpet on the recently exposed bed. The plant is quite prostrate, and has tiny leaves and flowers. It is a member of the veronica family.

Bird list was

Australasian Grebe	Musk Duck	Masked Lapwing
Hoary-headed Grebe	Wood Duck	Black-fronted Dotterel
Great-crested Grebe	Shelduck	Swallow
Little Pied Cormorant	Black Duck	Fairy martin
Large White Egret	Grey Teal	Blue Wren
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Hardhead	Noisy Miner
White-faced Heron	Black Swan	Striated Pardalote
Whistling Eagle	Eastern Rosella	Magpie-lark
Peregrine Falcon?	Coot	Australian Raven
Goose		

Peregrine Falcon? A fast-flying hawk flew over, and amongst the hubbub from the other birds, caught a bird in flight - perhaps an unlucky Lorikeet. The hawk went too quickly for positive identification, but from its size, general shape and colour may have been a Peregrine Falcon.

The O3A/CFNC excursion on the following Thursday saw most of the birds still present, although only a few of the Whistling Kites were seen. The big flock of Lapwings were in the same rise. Another two cormorant species, a Brown hawk, and a Straw-necked Ibis were seen.

EP.

INDEX FOR CN

An index for the Castlemaine Naturalist, from issue 100 to the current issue, is available on request from E. Perkins. Earlier indices were published in previous issues of the Castlemaine Naturalist.

ROADSIDE PLANT LISTS

Plant lists for all of the roadsides in the new Mt Alexander Shire are in the process of being compiled. This will be a large project, and the assistance of club members is sought. Any records, of any plant, no matter how common, would be welcomed. Give lists to E Perkins.

BROOKER'S GUM - A LITTLE KNOWN EUCALYPT

Eucalyptus brookeriana, or Brooker's Gum, is one of the swamp gum group, and could easily be mistaken for an ordinary Swamp Gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*).

Swamp Gum is fairly common in the damp gullies south of Castlemaine, and is quite common near Woodend and Trentham, both along creek flats and on the low-lying sections of the volcanic plains. They also grow in the gullies around Mt Alexander.

Swamp gum is fairly easily recognised. Its trunk is smooth barked, with the exception of possibly a small amount of rough, flaky bark at the base. The trunk is usually a browner colour, and the leaves broader than the other gums, such as Candlebark and Manna Gum, and the leaf-edges are wavy, not flat. The buds are double-conical, and the fruit flat topped with a conical base. The juvenile leaves are fairly large, stalked and oval.

Brooker's Gum usually has a several metres of rough bark at the base. This bark is more fibrous than that of Swamp Gum. The juvenile leaves are like those of Swamp Gum, except that they are slightly toothed. Its overall height is usually less than that of Swamp Gum. The Tasmanian population has discoloured leaves (i.e. the undersurface than the upper surface), but this is not evident in the local species.

Brooker's Gum is abundant in Tasmania, and grows in the Otways and near Glenlyon. A good place to see some growing is along the Daylesford-Trentham Road, about 50 metres west of the turn-off to Glenlyon. There are some specimens between the road and the railway.

Brooker's Gum may be more common than is at present realised. An examination of the local swamp gums is needed.

EP.

December 1994/January 1995 in Sandon

D = December J = January, n = nesting

Little Pied Cormorant	D	Wrens	D,J
White-faced Heron	D,J	Speckled Warbler	D,J
Sacred Ibis	D,J	Weebill	D,J
Wedgetailed Eagle	J	Brown,	D,J
Little Eagle	D,J	Buff-rumped,	D,J
Brown Falcon	D,J	Yellow-rumped,	D,J
Masked Lapwing	D,J	Yellow,	D,J and
Common Bronzewing	D,J	Striated	D,J Thornbills
Galah	D,J	Varied Sitella	J
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	D,J	White-throated Tree-creeper	D,J
Crimson Rosella	D,J	Red Wattle-bird	D,J
Eastern Rosella	D	Yellow-faced	J,
Red-rumped Parrot	D,J	*White-eared	D,J,
Kookaburra	D,J	Yellow-tufted	D,J,
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo	D	Fuscous	D,J,
Welcome Swallow	J	White-plumed	D,J and
Tree Martin	J	Brown-headed	D,J Honeyeaters
Richard's Pipit		Mistletoebird	D,J
Blk-faced Cuckoo-shrike	D,J	Spotted Pardalote	D,J
Scarlet Robin	D,J	Striated Pardalote	D,J
Eastern Yellow Robin	D,J	Red-browed Firetail	D
Jacky Winter	D,J	Diamond Firetail	D,J
Rufous Whistler	D (n),J	Olive-backed Oriole	D
Grey Shrike-thrush	D,J	White-winged Choughs	D,J
Restless Flycatcher	D,J	Australian Magpie-lark	D,J
Grey Fantail	D,J	Magpie	D,J
Willie Wagtail	D,J	Grey Currawong	D,J
White-browed Babbler	D,J	Australian Raven	D,J

*This is the first year (over the 4 years I have been making a bird list) that the White-eared Honeyeater has been seen here at this time. Usually it is recorded only from March until September or October.

Susanna Starr

Observations

*Gang Gang Cockatoos seen at Sandon. It was noted that they are often seen in the Daylesford area, but a sighting at Sandon is rare. S.S.

* Musk Lorikeets were roosting on and off over a three week period at North Castlemaine. They were settling down in pairs, and the first pairs were settled for the night at least an hour before the last. R.M.

* Albert Golden of Lauriston has seen and filmed a young Pallid Cuckoo being fed by a Spinebill and a White-naped Honeyeater too, just outside his verandah. The two pairs appear to have been feeding it. The phenomenon is known to the R.A.O.U. but this is the first time

it has been filmed or photographed. (He'd asked a friend of his to take slides, too.) S.B.

* Blue butterflies have been seen flying around wattles where the Wirey Mistletoe is flowering. J.H.

* Indian Mynahs have been seen along Forest Creek in Greenhill Ave. A happier report was the sighting of two Lyrebirds, a male and a female, in the Kinglake National Park. Also seen was a young Rufous Whistler being fed by the mother. On the way from there a call at a friends' lovely house brought a surprise. The outside walls had been draped in wire netting - to stop the White Cockatoos from taking it apart board by board! G.B.

* It was noted that the bark from the eucalypts is falling early this year. M.O. (and in great quantities. Ed.)

* Platypus have been seen in the Coliban at Metcalfe. (M.H.) They were also seen in the headwaters of the Coliban several months ago, and in a dam on Daniels Creek, a tributary of the Coliban. (S.B.)

* Two small hawks, thought to be Australian Hobbies, have been seen over several weeks at Kaweka St. Before 8 o'clock each morning they have been quite noisy, and flying around over the house and street and up to Kaweka reserve. F. & E. B.

* Mistletoebirds at Barkers Creek have been festooning the clothes line with mistletoe berries. Don't like their chances of growing. H.T.

* Masked Woodswallows have been seen at Mount Alexander, and a Southern Boobook owl was perched in an almost leafless poplar, solemnly watching Margaret H. as she studied it, book in hand, to identify it. The woodswallows were playing for about an hour in the garden where the sparrows have their dustbaths before just disappearing. M.H.

* Silvereyes were noted pecking aphids from rosebuds. B.M.

* Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Yellow-rumped, Brown and Yellow Thornbills, New Holland Honeyeaters, a Grey Fantail and Rufous Whistler were all seen fighting to get under the sprinkler which was just spraying gently in the garden. G.B.

* Grey Currawongs are stripping the garden at Little Bendigo. * A Kookaburra was seen at the lunch break on the Great Dividing Trail walk, perched on a branch over the creek at Tipperary Springs. It suddenly dived into the creek, caught a yabbie and proceeded to smash it against the branch until it was ready for eating. C.M.

* A flock of about 200 Banded Stilts, with a few Pied Stilts and other waders, were seen near Geelong. K.T.

* A few trips to the Botanical Gardens to feed the ducks has shown a big difference in their behaviour from the Moor Hens'. The ducks just grab and gobble down anything that comes their way, but the Moor Hens are more altruistic, and take some of the bread and share it with certain others in the group. E.P.

* While birdwatching from a hide at Lake Pertobe in Warnambool,

George B. had been watching stilts, Greenshanks, sandpipers and other waders when another bird appeared but he was unable to get a good look before a Marsh Harrier appeared, and all the rest disappeared. Early next morning he was at the hide again, and this time the bird, with two others, appeared in full view of the hide - three Buff-banded Rails. A Japanese Snipe was also seen. There were also lots of Chestnut Teal and a number of Shovellers. G.B.

* A pair of Common Bronzewings was seen in Campbell St. on the evening of the business meeting. C.M.

A quote from St Augustine -

"What do I love when I love Thee? Not beauty of bodies, not the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers and ointments and spices, nor manna and honey, nor limbs acceptable to embracements of flesh. None of these I love when I love my God - the light, melody, fragrance, meat, embracement of my inner man; where there shineth unto my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breath dispenseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not. This is that I love, when I love my God

"And what is this? I asked the earth and it answered me, 'I am not He', and whatsoever things are in it confessed the same. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the living, creeping things, and they answered, 'We are not thy God; seek above us'. I asked the moving air, and the whole air with its inhabitants answered, 'Anaximenes was deceived; I am not God'. I asked the heavens, sun, moon, stars, and they say 'Nor are we the God whom thou seekest.' And I replied unto all the things which encompass the door of my flesh, 'Ye have told me of my God that ye are not He; tell me something of Him', and they cried out with a loud voice, 'He made us'. I asked the whole frame of the world about my God; and it answered me, 'I am not He, but He made me'.

Contributed by Barbara Maund

Birds at 61 Hunter Street, Feb.'95

A quiet month with few of the smaller birds in evidence. The young Red Wattlebird has transferred from apricot to peach trees for food, but the abundance of fruit means he scarcely makes any impression. The parent birds have vanished. The Eastern Rosella family appear occasionally to do battle with a pair of Crimson Rosellas around the garden, but none of them have taken to the fruit trees, as I feared might happen when they were reared in a nest box in the garden.

Several juvenile Spinebills with parents have visited the tall spikes of Red Hot Poker blooms. New Holland Honeyeaters and Yellow-faced

Honeyeaters prefer the blooms of the *Banksia marginata*. Superb Blue-wrens, Silvereyes and Striated Thornbills make the most of the hose spray at watering time. The Rufous Whistler which nested in a large camillia in the garden at Buda across the road also seems to have left us.

Shirley Parnaby

A little bit of 80 year old information from
"The Honey Flora of Victoria"

Issued in 1922 by the department of Agriculture for 1/- (10c)
from information gathered between Oct. 1914 and Feb. 1918
and originally published in *The Journal of Agriculture*.

THE RED IRONBARK (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*).

Fig. 39.

The Red Ironbark, also known as Rough and Black Ironbark, grows chiefly on ironstone ridges and gravelly rises. It is not a very tall tree, except in East Gippsland, but sometimes attains to 5 feet in diameter at the base, usually upright in habit, but drooping in the outer branches of old trees, the large handsome flowers resembling fuchsias from a distance. The bark, which varies from dark-grey and brown to black, is deeply furrowed on old trees, very hard, and of great thickness. Leaves, flowers, buds, and fruits are almost identical with those of the Yellow Gum, but are usually somewhat larger. The flowers are white, occasionally pink. In most localities it blossoms between June and September. In the Inglewood and Tarnagulla districts, however, it appears to flower in February. It is in bud from five to six months. No pollen is gathered from the blossom. The honey is of fine quality, and candies with a fine grain much like that of Yellow Gum, great yields of it are harvested when the tree flowers during suitable weather and occurs in great numbers together.

The wood, which is red in colour, tough, hard, and strong, is one of the most durable and valuable of the hard woods. It is largely used for railway sleepers, telegraph poles, piles, waggon work, &c. While in leaf, flower and fruit, the Red Ironbark closely resembles the Yellow Gum till recently known as White Ironbark; it differs from it considerably in general appearance, the bark, and the colour of the wood. In the seedling and sucker leaves the two are quite distinct, as will be seen on reference to the illustration (Fig. 39). B and C represent seedling and sucker of the Red Ironbark, and G, H, and K the same of the Yellow Gum.



CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

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

Sun Mar. 5 **Insects** Excursion with Entymological Group of Field Naturalist's Club of Victoria. Meet at the Rose Gardens Car Park in the Castlemaine Gardens at 10.30am. Look for insects under guidance of members of FNCV. All CFNC members invited.

Fri. Mar 10. **Land for Wildlife.** Speaker, Peter Morrison. 8pm at Continuing Education.

Sat Mar 11. **Heathcote area.** Bring tea. Leader C. Morris. Leave from CHIRP at 1.30pm.

Friday ***April 21 Astronomy Night at Vaughan Springs.** Speaker and Leader, John Bradfield. Meet at Cont. Ed at 8 o'clock. Bring Binoculars, telescopes. Also if you have planispheres or any bits of astronomical equipment you want explained bring them too. If overcast the program will be at Cont. Ed.

Sat ***April 22 Reserves Walk and Survey.** Walmer area. Leader C. Morris.
* Note change of date.

Fri. May 12 **Aquatic Life.** Speaker is Peter Johnson.

Sat. May 13 **Terrick Terrick.** All day excursion.

Fri. July 14 **Some District Birds** Birds, and club members taking part, are - Rufous Whistler, G. Broadway; Babblers, C. Morris; Pardalotes, M. Oliver; Galahs, R. Mills; Grey Shrike-thrush, M. Willis; ?Honeyeaters, M. Hunter.

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

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

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

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, K. Meehan, 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.

*******Note - Subscriptions are now due*******

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
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