

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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Bush Rat

EXCURSION TO LITTLE WHIPSTICK

An advantage of being a member of a field naturalists' club is that it gives an opportunity to visit places that would otherwise be missed, such as the Little Whipstick and Bostock Reservoir.

First stop on the excursion on September 4th was to the Ballan Mineral Springs. I have often seen the sign on the way to Brisbane Ranges, but have never taken the detour. The springs are in a lovely spot in an arm of the Moorabool River. The day was overcast, but there were signs that this would be a first rate birding spot in sunnier weather.

The springs are next to the Bostock Reservoir. Here we went for a walk before lunch. Some Silver Wattles were festooned with mistletoe, which was identified as Drooping Mistletoe. We were delighted to see a Mistletoe Bird feeding in one of the clumps.

Near the spillway we found a copse of Swamp Gums. These trees had a more fibrous bark, and smaller, more rounded buds and fruit than the Castlemaine variety. The trees were identified as Yarra Gums, which were once thought to be confined to the Yarra Valley. Over recent years they have been recorded in many localities in the Ballarat district.

The signs at the reservoir were a cause of some amusement. A battery of signs, each prohibiting some activity or other, in some cases defied interpretation. During lunch the mist rolled in, to reduce visibility and make bird watching more difficult.

After lunch we went on to the Little Whipstick, also known as the Bungai State Forest North. Access is not at all obvious. Some of the access roads are waterlogged and impassable by ordinary cars, and the entrance we took is through the centre of the Egerton Horse Ranch (on the Ballan-Mt Egerton Road). We did not find the reason for calling the forest the "Little Whipstick". The trees we saw were mostly Messmate and Narrow-leaf Peppermint, with some Manna Gum and Candlebark Gum, and not at all like the mallee eucalypts.

Wattles were abundant. Those in flower included Narrow-leaf Wattle (*Acacia mucronata*), Prickly Moses (*A. verticillata*), Hop Wattle (*A. stricta*), Silver Wattle (*A. dealbata*), Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) and Thin-leaf Wattle (*A. aculeatissima*).

It was a delight to walk through the forest, seeing it for the first time, and looking for plants to add to the plant list for the forest. Two species of the early-flowering greenhoods were found. These were the early greenhoods - Tall Greenhood and Nodding Greenhood.

We had another walk near the northern edge of the forest. But by now it began to rain steadily, and it was time for afternoon tea.

Verdict: A most enjoyable excursion. Our thanks to Pat and Bill Murphy and other members of the Ballarat Field Naturalists Club. E.P.

THE ANGLESEA NATURALISTS' CAMP

Three members of the Castlemaine F.N.C. attend the camp. Here are some reports from club members.

Spotlighting at Moggs Creek

Spotlighting at Moggs Creek is a story of recent discovery and monitoring of Yellow-bellied Gliders. It is not known if there were populations of these animals flourishing in this area before the 1983 fires. By chance, a naturalist from Wonthaggi enquired about these animals when he met some local club members in the Moggs Creek car park. He showed a tree he had noticed which bore a heart-shaped gnaw pattern, typically made by gliders. An evening visit confirmed that it was indeed used by live gliders. This was in 1990! Since then other trees have been discovered with the tell-tale feeding spots cut into the bark and regular observations of the feeding animals have been made. Ironically, one of the most used trees, bearing many v shaped cuts happened to be in the picnic area! Best observations have been made on full moon in January. Night after night, in one spot, a male and female would leave their nesting (dead) tree and volplane to a nearby feeding tree to cling to the bark sucking the sap from active cuts. Sometimes they would be accompanied by a large offspring. Both species will use the same tree cuts. Gliders arrive first and stay feeding for about twenty minutes, followed by the Yellow-bellied.

Our spotlighting group consisted of 24 keen naturalists armed with enthusiasm, three red spotlights and an assortment of torches. (The red light is reported not to disturb these nocturnal animals.) The night was extremely still, a half moon and stars shone through the canopy of predominantly ironbarks, and the track absorbed the sound of our many boots. The feeding tree (Blue Gum) in the picnic area bore many cuts of different sizes, the largest having "arms" of approx 15 cm. Bull ants were moving about a cut, so it was considered to be "running" or active for the gliders. No furry visitors there, so we set off in crocodile along a forest path, stopping from time to time in known favourite glider haunts to listen and look. For most of the walk the only sounds were the constant dull roar of the ocean breakers and the occasional click of torches as naturalists just could not control their desire to see the quarry*. At one stage a screech, believed to be that of a glider, was heard but no animal was located. Bats whizzed silently through torch beams too fast to identify. A wallaby was heard coughing .. no gilders!!! An enjoyable walk though.

Eventually the circuit led back to the car park where local club members produced thermoses and fruit cake, with apologies that their usual spotlighting supper of hot damper and billy tea was not being served.

One sensible person wandered out of the group of suppering chattering Nats and had the pleasure of seeing a Sugar Glider alight and scramble up the trunk of a tree at the edge of the picnic clearing! As she alerted the group, it disappeared.

Moggs Creek is a magic place for either day or night walks. Orchid enthusiasts will be well rewarded. It is reported that it has the added advantage of being less populated by humans than the other areas of easy access. Well maintained and marked paths with timber bridges and board walks over creeks and swampy parts makes for easy walking,. Slopes are gentle. Even so, maybe next time I'll just stick to the car park for my glider observation spot.

Marg Hunter

*I thought children were compulsive flashers but Nats are equally unable to leave torches OFF if they have them in hand.

Mammal survey session.

John Aberton, a Research Fellow at Deakin University, has been conducting animal studies in areas about Anglesea for some years now. Our activity involved meeting John and students as they checked 120 mammal traps set the evening before. The area was heathy-woodland, previously burned in the massive fires of the 80s. One plot had been reburnt in recent control burns. Traps had been set on the ground in positions marked by numbered tape on convenient shrubs. In the thicker scrub, the positions were visited along narrow "trails" originally made by the first trap-setting person, but subsequently used for access by researchers, wallabies and foxes. As well as mammal data, information is also collected on the type and number of insects, spiders and arthropods which may be available as a food source to the insectivorous and omnivorous. Simple traps for this are made by sinking plastic disposable drinking cups into the earth to their brim, half-filling with a killing fluid and adding a raised plastic cover held in place by a twig. The target wild life fall in and are all ready for counting. This obviously does not give a comprehensive cover for all food available but when supplemented by microscope studies of droppings which have been ground in a mortar, some idea of preferred and available tucker can be gained.

Mammals previously caught in traps have been examined for size, condition, parasites etc and have been marked by clippings on the ears. A simple numbering system is used where a v or o piece taken from the top, middle or bottom of one ear indicates 1,2,3,4 etc. Clips on the other ear are used to indicate 10,20,30 .. so a combination makes any desired number. The clippings may be used for D.N.A. studies.

The traps used were simple "Elliott" style, made of 4 rectangles of light hinged aluminium, with two ends designed with springs so they may be pushed in for human access. An animal, on entering a set trap, walks over the "door" releasing it to spring shut. An oatmeal peanut butter mixture is a strong attractant for mammals and thus a convenient bait. Sometimes rats can gnaw their way out of metal traps. As we noted, many traps were tumbled well out of their set position. This was the result

of wallabies trying to get at the bait. Wallabies also shredded and spread the plastic "insect" traps. Releasing a trapped animal involves placing a mesh orange bag over the door, and gently pushing the door inwards while pushing the other end in sufficiently to blow into the trap, and the rat or whatever, runs into the orange bag which is whipped off and quickly knotted. The mesh is gentle on the animal, and, used with caution, prevents the animal biting the nearest finger. The ears are easily "read", sex determined, condition noted and when required, fleas etc can be seen and collected. When released from the bag, the animals scuttle off into the grass and disappear within seconds.

On our visit, four species were trapped - Bush Rat *Rattus fuscipes*, Swamp Rat *Rattus luteolus*, (easily distinguished in the bag as the Swampie squeals loudly when touched or stroked on the back - Bushie is silent), White-footed Dunnart *Sminthopsis leuopus*, and Brown Antechinus *Antechinus stuartii*. To our delight, one of the female Antechinus had nine pink hairless jelly-bean sized young on her nipples on her lower abdomen. The animal was in the barest heath country we worked in. John would have expected her nest to be in one of the only two eucalyptus trees with arm-sized trunk close by (4m approx). She would thus probably be retrapped frequently as her foraging ability with nine young aboard would restrict her territory.

Later in the week it was reported that a house mouse had turned up in a trap. John was a little, disappointed he was not able to show us a Swamp Antechinus *Antechinus minimus*. He has collected these thriving populations near Portland and has been introducing them into the Anglesea sites with varying success. Early releases of *minimus* were fitted with radios and tracked. One intrepid animal led them a merry dance, travelling over a kilometre each evening directly towards its original Portland home!

One of the research areas is concurrently a site for Cinnamon Fungus research. We observed its fatal effect on many plants, but it seems particularly devastating to grass trees. Its incidence is highest along track and road edges but it is obviously spreading its deadly powers widely. The main research area will in the future, be under water, as a new sewerage treatment area is planned for Airies Inlet, and will have large settling ponds right here.

M Hunter.

The wetlands group.

Those attending the camp could choose between coastal dunes, ironbark forests, heathy-woodlands or wetlands. I chose wetlands. Our job was to survey some wetlands, and report back. The way this was to be done was up to the group, possibly using information learned during the weekend lectures. We decided to do linear transects. That is, place our tape measure out, and count all of the species within a metre of the tape. This proved to be quite a challenge, as it was a little early in the year for many of the swamp plants to be in flower, but very interesting, as in such a procedure we needed to look intently for as many species as we could see.

That night, we discussed our methods, and decided to divide the survey up, depending on interest. One member volunteered to do mapping, a couple were most interested in quadrat work, another water quality and aquatic life, another two on bird surveys, and another two on a general plant survey of the whole area.

A room at the camp had been set up with a range of text books and dissecting microscopes. The wetland group were big users of this facility, still at work at 11 pm (most of the others in the camp were in bed shortly after 9, or earlier), and at work again by 6 in the morning. In between the wetlands group identified plants for other groups, where they needed help.

Next morning we were assigned to heathy-woodlands, so we decided to do 2 metre square quadrats. We counted all of the species in the first, then in the adjoining quadrat, and then the next and so on. After a while, the number of new species found in each levelled off, which gave a good idea of the total number of species in this particular heathland.

The afternoon was free for our group. We could do as we liked, such as go shopping at K Mart in Geelong, or sleep, or whatever. What could be better than another wetland, this one about the size of a basketball court. Another very interesting area.

On Wednesday we had a half day at the coastal dunes, but we finished our this early, and went back to our two swamplands, to continue the survey.

On Thursday we went to the Painkalac outlet at Airies Inlet. The creek was at a higher level than the ocean, and so quite a large lake had formed. On Wednesday evening the outlet had been breached to drain the lake. We walked over the drained flats with Mary White. Quite a different plant population here to the swamps further inland. Many small fish had been stranded, to the delight of large flocks of herons. In the afternoon Mary took us to a former sphagnum bog, burned in the fires, so that now there was only an ash bed, which had been colonised by eucalypts and melaleucas.

I had to return home on Thursday, so missed the last part of the camp. But a most enjoyable few days. I am glad I chose wetlands. E.P.

FURTHER TO THE FURORE AND FUTURE OF WOMBAT FOREST.

On the positive side the federal government is reported to be considering the formation of an independent monitoring agency to ensure that the forest industry abides by its code of practice; coupled with implementing a policy of phasing out woodchip exports from natural forests by the year 2000. Although tardy and as yet unratified this at least shows some awareness of the need of an independent forest inspectorate, as a consequence of the failure of the forest industry to regulate itself.

There is supposedly a national forest statement in place to ensure sustainable yield strategies but does it go far enough to make sure old growth forests aren't logged and that saw logs aren't woodchipped?

Woodchippers should have to grow or buy their own timber from plantation forests. In New Zealand there is already an export ban in place on native woodchips from private or public land and clear felling of publicly owned forests ceased in 1984 with private native forest estate protected in a large measure by the Forest Accord.

On the subject of old growth forests we now learn from a study into size and age parameters of hollow-bearing eucalypts used for nesting by four species of parrot and one species of cockatoo in S.W. Australia that the lowest average estimated age of nest trees recorded for any of the parrot species was 275 years and 446 years for the cockatoo species. In view of the current timber production strategies and management policies for the remnants of native vegetation it is obvious that 80 year tree harvesting cycles will never provide the nest hollows in the future for wildlife to breed successfully. Because many parrots and cockatoos are long-lived we will see them flying about without knowing whether or not there is any recruitment until the old population dies out.

While primary products derived from forestry and agriculture are important to our economy, the policies and methods employed to obtain them remain questionable.

Chris Morris.

SANDON IN SEPTEMBER

Australian Grebe	Scarlet Robin	Varied Sittella
Little? Pied Cormorant	Jacky Winter	White-throated Treecreeper
White-faced Heron	Rufous Whistler 2/9	Red Wattlebird
Pacific Black Duck	Golden Whistler 10/9	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Brown Falcon	Grey Shrike-thrush	White-eared Honeyeater
Masked Lapwing	Restless Flycatcher	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Galah	Grey Fantail	Brown-headed Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Willie Wagtail	Spotted Pardalote
Crimson Rosella	Wrens	Striated Pardalote
Eastern Rosella	Speckled Warbler	Silvereye
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo	Weebill	Red-browed Firetail
Shining Bronze-cuckoo 10/9	Brown Thornbill	White-winged Chough
Australian Owlet-nightjar (h)	Buff-rumped Thornbill	Magpie
Welcome Swallow	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Grey Currawong
Richard's Pipit	Yellow Thornbill	Australian Raven
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Striated Thornbill	

2 baby tortoises were found in a small hole about 10 m above a dam - shell 4 cm. 8 were found last year, 4 km south of Newstead.

Leafy Templetonia were found on 6/10. Two large plants growing under yellow gums in unpromising bare country. Area 1, grid N1.

OBSERVATIONS

CRESTED PIGEON seen at Chewton. (BM).

BLACK AND WHITE BLACKBIRDS. There are now two of these, near Barkers Creek. MW

SHINING BRONZE-CUCKOOS - two along the creek near Gaulton St. MO.

YELLOW-FACED HONEYEATERS have been seen at Harcourt. BE.

CUCKOOS FIRST HEARD AT SANDON	1994	1993	1992
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo	24/8	20/7	29/7
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	10/9	19/8	1/9
Pallid Cuckoo	10/10	13/10	5/9
Fantailed Cuckoo	not yet h	21/8	5/9
Black-eared Cuckoo	not yet heard	4/9	-

WHITE-BROWED WOODSWALLOWS. A flock has been seen at Walmer. MW.

BIRD LIST FOR 61 HUNTER ST.

Oct 1994.

A pair of Eastern Rosellas have won the contest for the nesting box, and have moved in. The Crimson pair are still visiting on a daily basis, but have resigned themselves to the inevitable. In the dry conditions the bird bath has been a hive of activity, with visitors both large and small. The Rufous Whistler has returned - also a pair of Goldfinches.

White-faced herons (in transit)	Welcome Swallows	New Holland Honeyeaters
Eastern Rosellas	Rufous Whistler	Eastern Spinebills
Crimson Rosellas	Superb Blue Wren ?	Spotted Pardalote
Galahs	Grey Shrike-thrush	Silvereyes
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Striated Thornbills	Goldfinches
Common Bronzewing	Weebills	Mistletoe Bird
Kookaburra	Red Wattlebird	Magpie
	Yellow-faced Honeyeaters	Ravens

S Parnaby.

NAME CHANGES FOR PLANTS

VARIABLE GROUNDSEL. The true *Senecio lautus* is considered to be endemic to New Zealand. Our species (found in wetter climates, such as Daylesford) becomes *S. pinnatifolius*.

TREE LUCERNE changes back to the *Chamaecytisus* genus. It is now to be known as *Chamaecytisus palmensis*.

WOOLLY WATTLE has been split into three varieties. Local species appears to be variety *whanii*, which has branchlets with more or less sparse hairs, and linear-elliptic to linear-oblongate phyllodes.

SNOW GUMS. *Eucalyptus niphophila*, the alpine variety of Snow Gum, has been reduced once again to a variety of *E. pauciflora*.

GRAMPIANS GUM. The type specimen of *E. alpina* is now considered to be a hybrid. It is replaced by three new species. These are *E. serraensis* (from Serra Range), *E. verrucosa* (from Southern Serra Range) and *E. victoriana* (from Victoria Range). *E. verrucosa* is an illegal name (it has already been used), so there will be another name for this species.

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

C.F.N.C. PROGRAM

Excursions leave promptly at the times stated.

Fri 11 Nov. Bev Porteous "THE WOMEN'S SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION 1993 to the GREAT VICTORIA DESERT". 8.00 pm at Continuing Education, Templeton St.

Sat 12 Nov. THE CLAY PITS, CAMPBELLS CREEK.. Leader is K Turner. Meet outside CHIRP, Mostyn St at 1.30 pm.

Thurs 17 Nov CFNC/U3A Bird Watching. Meet Continuing Education car park, Templeton St at 9.30. Leader is M Oliver.

Sat 19 Nov. PEACOCK TRACK.. All day excursion to Talbot/Amherst area with Maryborough F.N.C. Leave 27 Doveton St at 11.00 am, to meet Maryborough F.N.C. at 12 noon on the corner of Maryborough/Talbot Road and Blacksmiths Gully Road.

Sun 20 Nov. MUCKLEFORD FOREST with Ballarat F.N.C. Ballarat F.N.C. is staying at the Horse Ranch in Rylands Road, and we meet at the ranch at 9.30 am. Leader is E Perkins.

Thurs 24 Nov. BUSINESS MEETING. 7.30 pm at 38 Campbell St.

Sat 3 Dec. MALDON ROADSIDES. Maldon Landcare Groups with Roadside Conservation Committee & E. Perkins. Will include a bus trip. C.F.N.C. members invited to attend. Probable time: 9.00 am at Maldon Hall. Duration 3-4 hours. Check with E. Perkins for more information.

Fri 9 Dec. MEMBERS AND VISITORS NIGHT. Members are asked to provide a short segment for the program. Possibly some slides, or display photographs, or a short talk or demonstration. Darryl Glover (C. & N.R. Ranger at Castlemaine) will give a short talk "Strategies for Fauna and Flora conservation in Bushland Reserves". A plate for supper too, please. Continuing Education at 8.00 pm.

Sat 10 Dec. WOMBAT FOREST. See at first hand the logging operations, and revegetation. Leaders are Chris Morris and Monty Kirby (a member of the Wombat Forest Society). 1.30 pm at Chirp, or 2.00 pm at Daylesford P.O.

Thurs 15 Dec CFNC/U3A Bird Watching. Meet Continuing Education car park, Templeton St at 9.30. Leader is E Perkins.

Thurs 19 Jan DAWN BIRDS. See the sun rise and the dawn birds, and have an early breakfast. Meet: 15 Gaulton St at 5.45 am. Leader :M Oliver.

Thurs 27 Jan. Business Meeting. 7.30 pm at 38 Campbell St.

Fri 10 Feb. ANNUAL MEETING

Fri 21 April. APRIL MEETING. This will be a week later than usual. Good Friday is the second Friday of the Month.

Disclaimer Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use, and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.

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This newsletter prepared by E. Perkins.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. Po Box 324, Castlemaine 3450