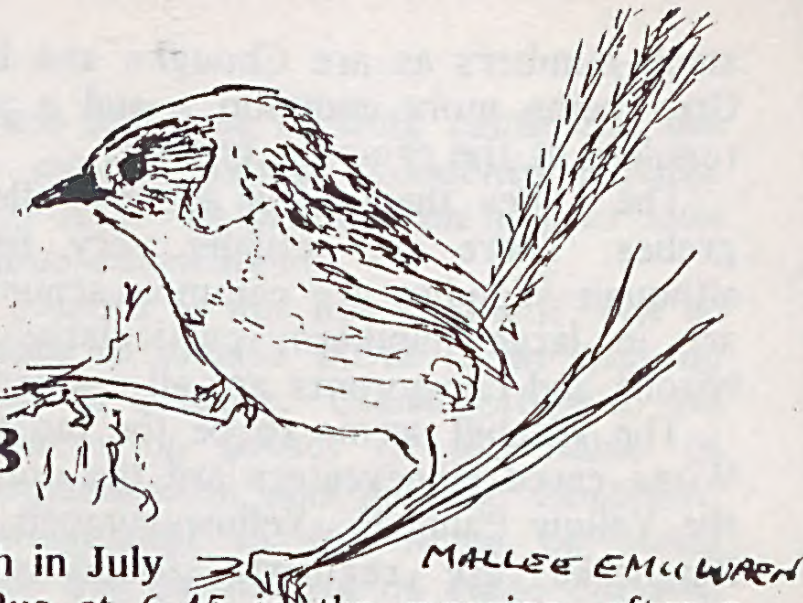


Castlemaine Naturalist

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Hattah in July

MALLEE EMU WREN

As I stepped off the V/Line Bus at 6.45 in the morning, after a virtually sleepless 6½ hour journey, I could hardly believe I was at last away from Ballarat, which isn't the most exciting place in July.

I faced a 6 km walk to the camping area with 3 days clothing, cooking utensils, a camera, a bird book, 2 days food and a tent on my back - not easy on 20 minutes sleep - but I was there by nine and the very second I stepped onto the path to the information centre I was attacked by thirty hungry Apostlebirds. This was quite a shock as I didn't realise Apostlebirds were even at Hattah much less regulars, but for the next four days they accompanied me at every meal, along with one or two Grey Butcherbirds, a few Kookaburras (if meat was on the menu), Noisy Miners and about a dozen Choughs.

Hattah has plenty to offer for a nature buff, with Mallee and Porcupine Grass associations, River Redgum forests, sandhills of Buloke and Cypress-pine (some of which are now dominated by hop-bush, *Dodonaea*, species) and, of course, the lakes which currently have plenty of water.

The highlight of this trip would have to have been the three Mallee Emu-wrens on the Nature Trail. They flitted from clump to clump of Porcupine Grass and promptly disappeared without trace after five minutes. Seeing the male's glistening blue throat in the morning light is one spectacle I won't forget.

The Emu-wrens were a first, as were the several frenzied Black-tailed Native Hens that scampered from bush to bush in a dried lignum swamp near Lake Bulla. I also finally saw the Crested Bellbird on the Nature Trail.

Other interesting sightings were an Owlet Nightjar hunting in the camping area, (it wasn't at all shy), a young Sea-eagle over Lake Hattah, and small numbers of Little Correllas in the Redgums.

I saw Red Kangaroos on the Nature Drive and a couple of water rats, one at Lake Hattah and another at Lake Mournpoul, and I was surprised at just how few Western Grey Kangaroos I saw.

The Redgum Woodlands at Hattah are dominated by Noisy Miners (there's hardly a Greenie in sight) and also harbour considerable numbers of Yellow Rosellas and Regent Parrots. Blue-faced Honeyeaters are in

small numbers as are Choughs and both species of Butcherbirds - the Grey being more common - and a pair of Pink Cockatoos which were regulars at the camping ground.

The Lakes themselves are patrolled by lots of Pelicans, and a few grebes. There are actually very few ducks (most were Grey Teal) although Woodies are common around the edges of the lakes. Darters are in large numbers, particularly at Lake Mournpoul, and Egrets, herons and cormorants are all easily found.

The Weebill seems to be the most common bird in the mallee areas. White-eared Honeyeaters are the dominant honeyeaters, bossing around the Yellow Plumed. Yellow-rumped Pardelotes are common and Mallee Ringnecks are regularly found eating seeds, accompanied by a surprisingly large numbers of Yellow Rosellas

The Hopbush and Buloke/pine areas are home to great mixed flocks of thornbills and Whitefaces, as well as babblers and a few Variegated Wrens - not to mention Emus!

Hattah is easily accessable and highly recommended as a place to see birds not easily seen in other parts of the State.

Simon Kennedy

Letter to the Editor

A Sad Story from the Sticks

There seems to be something particularly nasty going on in our forest backyard - sanctioned by Governments past and present.

The Wombat Forest on the Dividing Range around Blackwood, Trentham and Daylesford must be just about the closest mixed wet and dry sclerophyll forest, with localised bird and plant species specific to that habitat. Timber cutting and torn up ground has been noticed on walking trips but naively we assumed that Governments and Departments, as the land public managers on our behalf, knew what they were doing, never realising that the Wombat Forest was being logged to oblivion for woodchips - to make paperbags in Japan! The woodchip companies cut out, then burn and lay waste to 2/3 of the available forest for woodchips exported without any value added benefit to Australia. In fact by the time we pay for the infrastructure it's probably a net loss to Australia.

We are culpable for letting it happen. The Wombat Forest harvestable timber regrows at 97,000 cubic metres per year but it is being logged, burnt and wasted at the rate of 265,900 cubic metres per year. Now you don't have to be Einstein to work out that this means it's being cut out at three times the rate it can regrow. How can anyone call that sustainable harvesting?

One wonders if the Department or the Minister responsible can produce independant audited figures to prove otherwise. It seems they may have some difficulty because more than 800 people have joined the Wombat Forest Society to try and stop this scale of

destruction.

The Federal Government is no less to blame as they could end the destruction by not renewing the annual export woodchip licence instead of just lecturing our Asian/Pacific neighbours on how to save their tropical forests from rapacious sawmillers.

It might be argued that saving forests is not our business, but as Field Naturalists we have a mandate to ensure there is an ongoing habitat for native plants and wildlife to survive. Clear felling is the method of laying waste large tracts of forest in the name of economic efficiency by habitat fragmentation and genetic isolation.

A past practice of forest management in the name of stand improvement has been to accelerate the harvesting of trees capable of forming nesting hollows. The younger more vigorous trees that result are now being logged before any hollows can form. Meanwhile 33% of birds and 58% of mammals in the forest need tree hollows for nesting, breeding and species survival.

To counter criticism of the adverse effects of intensive forestry on faunal diversity there is always the apologist who highlights selected species which benefit from habitat changes after clear felling. A sort of land fit for Galahs and Corellas syndrome.

One of the actions we might take as a Field Nats' Club (aside from anything we might do as individuals such as joining the Wombat Forest Society, writing letters, etc.) is to arrange a field trip, away from roadside buffer zones, to see for ourselves the size, type and extent of timber going to woodchippers and how they leave the forest floor and whether they conform to logging codes.

(Signed) Chris Morris

Tennyson Outing

Although the weather was anything but promising on the Friday night, the outing the next day was blessed with fine weather, with lots of sunshine and cumulous cloud and a warm welcome from the property owners, Ivy Douglas and son John, which not even the cold breeze could dispel. Plenty of birds were seen, including a large flock of 80 to 100 magpies in one paddock on the Kamerooka road, and a large number of Eastern Swamphens on the property, also a small flock of Black-tailed Native Hens, but the Whistle Ducks were nowhere to be seen, which was a disappointment to both us and the farmers. They have found over the years that when the Whistle Ducks stay good rain will follow.

The bird list for the property on the day was -

Darter (imm.)	Black Duck
Little Pied Cormorant	Grey Teal
Little Black Cormorant	Shoveller
Straw-necked Ibis	Brown Falcon
Australian Shelduck	Black-tailed Native Hen

Eastern Swamphen
Coot
Masked Lapwing
Black-fronted Plover
Galah
Red-rumped Parrot
Welcome Swallow
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Rufous Whistler

Willy Wagtail - lots
Noisy Miner
White-plumed Honeyeater
Striated Pardelote (h)
Mudlark
Magpie
Little Raven

Bill Flentje who, with his wife Betty, joined us at the lunch spot, pointed out Kookaburra nesting hollows which he identified by the white trails of droppings from above the nests. Ivy Douglas took some of us under the bridge over the salt drain to show us a collection of Fairy Martin bottle nests - not in use as yet. The spider webs were still over the mouths of the nests.

Other birds that I have seen on the property on different occasions have been -

Whistle Duck (Plumed?)
Hardhead
Black-shouldered Kite

Nankeen Kestrel
Dusky Moorhen
Barn Owl

Before we got to Tennyson we stopped for lunch at the Mulga Dam Picnic Area on the edge of the Kamerooka Forest. There wasn't a lot of birds there, (not that midday is the ideal time for birdwatching), but it does look a marvellous spot for botanists and there is a couple of walking tracks starting from the dam which takes its name from the Grey Mulga which abounds there.

Birds seen or heard at the dam were -

Jacky Winter
Willy Wagtail
Weebill (h)
Buff-rumped Thornbill

White-plumed Honeyeater
White-winged Chough
Grey Butcherbird (h)

Everybody seemed to enjoy the outing and a big "thankyou" was expressed to Ivy and John for allowing us to wander over the property and for making us feel so welcome.

Rita Mills

Birdlist for Sandon, July '94

Australasian Grebe
White-faced Heron
Pacific Black Duck
Little Eagle
Brown Falcon
Masked Lapwing
Common Bronzewing

Galah
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Kookaburra
Welcome Swallow
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

Scarlet Robin
Hooded Robin
Jacky Winter
Grey Shrike-thrush
Restless Flycatcher
Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
White-browed Babbler
Wren
Weebill
Brown,
Buff-rumped,
Yellow-rumped,
Yellow and
Striated Thornbills
Varied Sitella
White-throated Tree-creeper

Red Wattlebird
Yellow-faced,
White-eared,
Yellow-tufted and
Brown-headed Honeyeaters
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Silvereye
Red-browed Firetail
Diamond Firetail
White-winged Chough
Australian Magpie-lark
Magpie
Grey Currawong
Australian Raven

Also - Yellow-footed Antechinus
Susanna Starr.

A Snippet from the Past

from "The Honey Flora of Victoria", printed in 1922

This little book was put out by the Department of Agriculture. The illustrations were reproduced from J.H.Maiden's "Forest Flora of New South Wales" and von Mueller's "Eucalypts of Australia" with their permission. The information about the honeys and pollens came from beekeepers in the field from their own experiences.

THE RED BOX (*Eucalyptus polyanthemos*)

The Red Box, in some localities called Peppermint or Peppermint Box, or Lignum Vitae, is a tree of fair size, not often very straight in the trunk. It is generally found on rather poor land, on stony or gravelly rises and ironstone ridges in districts with a comparatively small rainfall. The bark is generally dark-grey, persistent, rough and furrowed, and continues right up to the small branches. The leaves are broad, oval, or egg shaped pointed, on rather long leaf stalks, the veins strongly marked, the marginal one removed from the edge, particularly so in the sucker leaves. The lateral veins oblique and distant. The flowers are generally on new growth, but also as laterals on the previous season's wood in umbells of 3 - 6 small flowers. The buds, which are roundish, appear from ten to twelve months before flowering, which occurs from September to November. It is fairly regular in flowering, some trees every year, a greater number every second year. The fruits are pear shaped. The blossom does not yield pollen to bees in any quantities worthy of consideration. The honey is one of the palest, but rather dull in appearance, very dense, and on this account very difficult to extract from the combs. It has generally, but not always a somewhat oily or

tallowy flavour, not noticed, however by palates used to it. When quite free from other honey it does not candy. Blended with other honeys it gives body and reduces the colour. When kept for at least twelve months the oily taste disappears.

The timber of this tree is hard, red in colour, the grain interlocked. It is a durable wood used to some extent for railway sleepers, mining props and firewood.

Contributed, Rita Mills

Observations

- *The Restless Flycatcher(s) is/are still making its/their presence felt, having been seen quite often by several people.
- *A flock of about six Sittellas at North Castlemaine. R.M.
- *Frogs are becoming more vocal again. A number of different calls being noted at North Castlemaine.
- *The second Boobook Owl is back in the Botanic Gardens, arriving a week or so earlier than last year. S.P.
- *A one legged Blackbird (sounds a regular pirate) was seen dunking pieces of white bread in the pond. B.M.
- *At Harcourt. A Cattle Egret, 2 White-faced Herons, one seen very close to the house, 8 White Ibis flying over the property, a Black Shouldered Kite hovering over the property, a pair of Yellow-rumped Thornbills building a nest in the Eucalypt again. B.E.
- *At Ivanhoe, a large flock of Black Cockatoos flying overhead with a screaming cry - Yellow-tailed most likely it was felt. K.M.

Birds at 61 Hunter Street, August.

This has been a quiet period except for (or, perhaps because of) a large flock of Pied Currawongs dividing their time between the Kalimna bush and Buda garden - and moving across into our property. On the occasions when rain threatened they were particularly vocal, which must have been intimidating for our usual smaller visitors.

Those brave enough to appear were the Starlings and Sparrows (permanent residents, unfortunately), Silvereyes, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Eastern Spinebills, Striated Thornbills, Eastern Rosellas, and Red Wattlebirds.

It was business as usual for the Kookaburras, Magpies and ravens, and a pair of Blackbirds which have moved in again this spring.

The *Grevillea rosmarifolia* has bloomed for many months now, which accounts for the continuing presence of the honeyeaters.

Shirley Parnaby

Flowering Periods of Victorian Wattles

The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria wants to collect information on the flowering periods of wattles in Victoria and are hoping that country members in particular will help them with information. They want

recorded the first and last flowering of different wattles over a 12 month period, and have provided a table to be filled in. There will be some available at the meeting. If you have difficulties with identification please send samples of the foliage and flowers to the FNCV office if someone in the local club can't identify them for you.

The Survey table has spaces for - Species (common and scientific names), Land Form, Site, Suburb/District/Post Code, First Flowering and Flowering Finished.

The F.N.C.V. address is -

F.N.C.V., The National Herbarium, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra., 3141.

It would be good if a number of members take part, as flowering time varies from one area to another, let alone from one district to another.

Rail Trails Victoria

A brochure has arrived from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the State Government promoting the concept of disused railway lines for recreation, conservation and tourism, pointing out the advantages (infrastructure, easy gradients etc.) and states "Community support is vital. If a disused line has recreation and tourism potential, local councils and other interested groups are best placed to take on the planning design and development process and convert the potential into a reality.

"Local Committees of Management, or similar bodies incorporated especially for the purpose, will be established to develop and manage each Rail Trail. The Committee of Management will take into account:

- * *the needs of adjoining landowners*
- * *conservation values*
- * *the interest of local councils and community groups*
- * *trail users*

"Committee membership should include representation from:

- * *municipal councils*
- * *the farming community*
- * *local interest groups*
- * *the Country Fire Authority*
- * *local service clubs*
- * *private tour operators*
- * *government agencies.*

There's much said about conservation values and such on the brochure, but the suggested committee structure strikes me as being weighted towards tourism, but at least the value of these old lines is being recognised and an effort is being made to create linear reserves from them. Where do we fit into the scheme of things? It has already been suggested that we should look at some of the disused lines within our own area - the Shelbourne line for one. I don't think the Maldon line quite qualifies, but a walking track along some of it might be possible.

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 Sept 9 Northern Australia. Pat Bingham. 8pm. Cont. Education, Templeton St.

Sat Sept 10 Norwood Hill using the F.N.C. Booklet for the area. Leader, C.. Morris. Leave 13 Mostyn St (C.H.I.R.P.) 1.30 pm sharp.

Sun. Sept. 11 Great Dividing Trail Walk For details see p.7, issue #203

Thurs. Sept 15. U3A/FNC Birdwatching. Meet in Continuing Ed. carpark 9.30 am. Leader C. Morris.

Sun Oct 2 Victorian F.N.C. outing to Castlemaine, taking in Kalimna, the Botanical Gardens and Kaweka. Meet at ¼ to 11 at the Market.

Sat. Oct. 8 Great Dividing Trail Walk. For details see p. 7, issue #203

Fri. Oct 14 "Some Reflections of a Famous Naturalist's Castlemaine Relatives"
Speaker is Daryl Fleay.

Sat. Oct 15 Mts Barker and Alexander, and Sutton Grange, looking for raptors. Leader C. Morris.

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

Sat Nov 19 Peacock Track. All day excursion to Talbot/Almherst area with Maryborough F.N.C. Leave 27 Doveton 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.