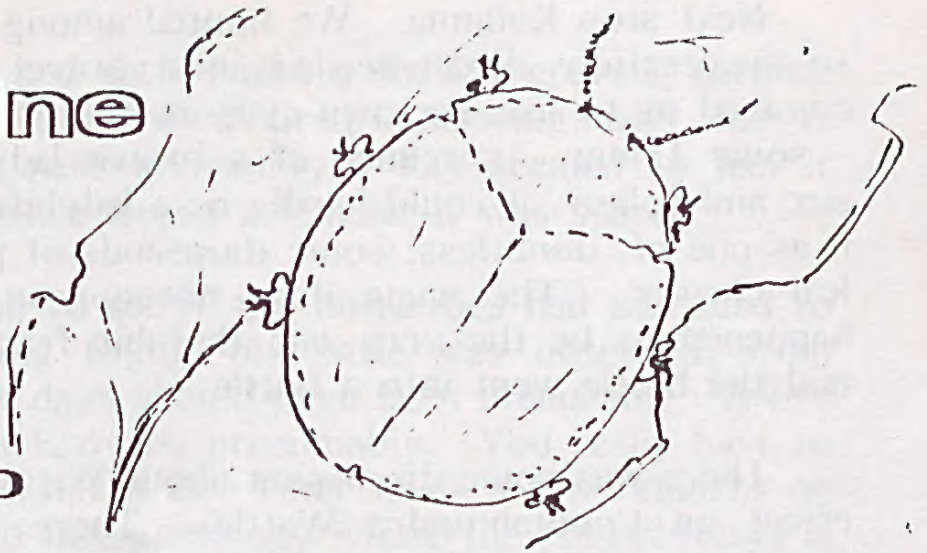


Castlemaine Naturalist



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Insect Excursion, March 5th 1995

By arrangement, our party met a contingent from Melbourne and Geelong at the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens at 10.30 on a warm Sunday morning. The southern contingent proved not numerous: Peter Cardamine, our leader for the day, plus Ray and Les. Peter represents the Entomological Society of Victoria, as I understand it - not a division of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, but a body in its own right.

Peter explained that the study of insects is rather too broad to allow anyone to be an expert in anything very much. There are 40,000 species of beetle, 2,000 of moths, goodness knows how many of ants and so on. Peter favours the study of butterflies. With a fairly obvious and accessible target, and species only to about 360 in Australia, there is some hope of passing for an expert in the field. (The beetle-ologist, on the other hand, practically has to confine himself to a single genus in order to get anywhere, and his answer to most inquiries about beetles will be "I don't know".)

Our tour began with a visit to the haunt of the Eltham Copper butterfly, near the Bursaria in the northern corner of the Gardens. No butterflies were seen haunting. It was late in the season, and the drought had left the vegetation in a poor state. Not even traces of the butterfly were turned up; Peter had to content himself with showing us a few pupal cases of the cup-moth. The cup-moth? It turns out that the cup-moth itself has many species. A cup-moth larva was actually found feeding on one of the few shrubs still showing green, and I must say it did look a bit different from the ones that fall off the Red-box at home. After warning us against the sting, Peter produced an important item from his field tool-kit, a slim artist's paint brush, and stimulated the larva into erecting its defensive hairs.

The day was not shaping up as one of numerous incredible discoveries. Harry Butler finds wonders under every rock, because first he goes round and puts them there. In real life there is a lot of patient digging, scratching and looking. And we do have the drought.

Next stop Kalimna. We hunted among the Wirilda which have been so successfully direct-seeded in a gravel patch on the hilltop. Peter enjoined us to use our own eyes as well as his. I chanced to see a large - some 15mm - specimen of a brown ladybird-shaped beetle. In that size and colour, it could hardly be a ladybird, of course. Peter identified it as one of, doubtless, some thousands of possible beetle genres, and a leaf-chewer. The name does not appear in my notes, but the type happened to be the very one that his friend the beetle-expert studies, and the beetle went into a bottle.

There was some discussion about Wirey Mistletoe and its restraining effect on Cootamundra Wattle. There is a type of blue butterfly, *Ogyris amaryllis*, whose larvae feed on the mistletoe. Ray, who had produced a large net, spotted some about and took some specimens. A black-and-yellow caterpillar of some 30 mm was also seen feeding on the mistletoe; it was the larva of a day-flying moth of colouring similar to the larva. Since Peter has no mistletoe at home to feed it on it remained on the tree.

From there to Skydancers. I had had my doubts about the value of the artificial environment, but I must concede that it is part of a successful and interesting biological experiment. It is true that many of the showy specimens have no place in the normal landscape of Victoria, but the effort of acclimatizing them to breed, if only over one or two generations is instructive. Gary Sobey is nothing if not enthusiastic, as interested in his food-plants as in his butterflies. The unusual environment forces many species to alter their food habits in a few generations; having been raised on such-and-such a food plant. some of the parent butterflies learn to choose it for egg-laying. The others don't propagate. Some of the exotics perish in a vain attempt to fly up to the sky for a mating flight. Again, some of them change their ways, and live to breed. And so it goes.

Gaarsch's Rd., North Harcourt: a somewhat degraded environment, this, with deep roadside trenches filled with briar rose, belladonna and rabbit warrens. Peter was aghast at Pampas grass popping up everywhere. An unpleasant odour indicated that there might have been a recent 1080 campaign against rabbits. But Ern rates the area of moderate environmental interest, because of natives such a Silver Wattle and Grey and Wirey Mistletoe. Leslie saw Wirey Mistletoe growing on Grey. Peter produced more of his field kit and started poking with a screwdriver at the base of a Silver Wattle. Sure enough, scratching among grass at the bottom, he turned up an *Ogyris amaryllis* just emerged from pupation. I do not lie and he did not put it there. Producing his artist's brush, he separated the wings to show the emerging blue-and-black design. This is the butterfly did not overly

like. It crawled up the trunk and settled into a shallow crevice, turning to one side and showing the cryptically-coloured underwing; with that, it gave us an object lesson in near-invisibility. Ray seemed to feel it should go into a bottle, but, since it was a female, it was spared.

Mt Alexander: a brief stop to see if any butterflies had ascended to the mountain-top for a mating flight, but little was observed, even though the succession of warm days should have been favourable. A few Browns were noticed; common Browns, presumably. You really have to catch your butterfly to know what it is. Peter made a few remarks on identification. This is one field in entomology where the picture-book is as useful as the microscope. All butterflies can be successfully identified by studying the wing pattern. Given that the broad classification into colours is also a good guide to family division, anyone can become an efficient classifier by leafing through a book. Moths, on the other hand, are a problem, as this writer well knows. (The student is required to study mouth parts in order to work through the keys. And moths seem to go down to gnat-size.)

Possibly a remark or two on distinguishing between moths and butterflies are in order; Peter referred to the subject in passing. The butterfly's antennae are - usually - club-ended; the butterfly is colourful, has well-developed and well-exposed fore- and hind-wings, folds its wings upward, flies by day. All this is well known; but exceptions are common, and classification can be uncertain. One distinction which I had not known of is that the butterfly pupates in its bare skin, while the moth makes a cocoon.

Sutton Grange: We ended the tour beside Margaret Hunter's farm. A passing water-race, a principal supply to Bendigo, spills enough of its contents to relieve the local drought somewhat. Flocks of White Cockatoos and Long-billed Corellas arose screeching, contrasting with a paucity of bird life earlier in the day. The matter of interest was the field of *Ghania radula*, Thatch Saw-sedge, which grows outside Margaret's fence under some Candlebark. "Tough enough to trap a goat", Margaret says. Peter said he raised a patch of it at home, but his tom-cat ate it all up. Some laxative. Some cat. At any rate, Thatch Saw-sedge patches are a favoured haunt of Skipper-type butterflies. The caterpillar uses its silk to draw the tip of a leaf downward against a nearby stem, forming a characteristic loop, and makes a shelter between the two surfaces. It crawls out at night to feed. It makes a larger shelter when it grows, and finally pupates there. (Does this mean it pupates in a cocoon, and is not a Real Butterfly?) Now, we found any number of these shelters, but were too late to find live caterpillars. The diagnostic head-cases and indistinguishable fragments of silk and pupal skin were all that remained. A few sightings of white butterflies were

made, but Skippers come in any colour but white, more or less, and so the sightings were put down to Caper Whites.

Thanks to Peter Cardamine for his energies and eloquence, and to Margaret for her hospitality, by way of cool drinks and ices at the end of a hot day.

Bob Webb.

Sandon Birds, February

Sacred Ibis	Buff-rumped,
Brown Falcon	Yellow-rumped
Masked Lapwing	Yellow and
Galah	Striated Thornbills
Crimson Rosella	Varied Sittella
Red-rumped parrot	White-throated Tree-creeper
Kookaburra	Red Wattlebird
Welcome Swallow	White-eared,
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Yellow-tufted
Scarlet Robin	Fuscous,
Eastern Yellow Robin	White-plumed and
Jacky Winter	Brown Headed honeyeaters
Golden Whistler	Spotted Pardalote
Rufous Whistler	Striated Pardalote
Grey Shrike-thrush	Silvereye
Restless Flycatcher	Red-browed Firetail
Grey Fantail	Diamond Firetail
Willie Wagtail	White-winged Chough
White-browed Babbler	Australian Magpie-lark
Wrens	Magpie
Speckled Warbler	Grey Currawong
Weebill	Australian Raven
Brown,	

Susanna Starr

Observations for Jan/Feb

* On the day of the Insect excursion a number of different species of birds were seen at Marg Hunter's at Sutton Grange - Dusky Woodswallows, Willy Wagtail, White Naped, White-plumed and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Tree Martins, Wrens, Red-browed Finches and a Wedgetailed Eagle soaring overhead, apart from the cockatoos and corellas already mentioned. L.P.

* A large flock of Spinetailed Swifts was soaring just above the trees in an orchard at Harcourt. Welcome Swallows were also flying and the difference in size was very obvious. G.B.

* On the same day another large flock of Spine-tailed Swifts was seen at Campbells Creek close to the patio of the house on a hilltop. J.H.

* After the rain a large peppercorn tree in Greenhill Ave. had a limb split away from the trunk and inside was a whole nest of bees. On another evening a dead mantis was seen being eaten by ants and European wasps - poetic justice, George felt. G.E.

* Large numbers of trees are dying up on Mt Alexander; Manna and Messmate in particular, and not only saplings but some of the larger trees, too. The trees on the hills around Maldon are in about as bad condition. E.P. A report from S.P. re Mt Tarrengower area emphasised this.

* A flock of Rainbow Bee-eaters with juveniles minus the black markings on the throat were seen near the toilet block at the base of Mt Tarrengower hunting for insects in the canopy of eucalypts. A mature pair escorted Shirley down the track for a distance away from the juveniles. A very large feral cat was seen sleeping nearby, but soon disappeared once it realised that it was no longer alone! S.P.

* Six female wrens in a bush in the garden at Gaulton St. M.O.

* A flock of about 100 ravens were seen turning clods of earth over in a ploughed paddock, indicating that they were after Corbi, or Cockchafer grubs. S.B.

* A Wedgetailed Eagle was seen hunting over Guildford Plateau. S.P.

* An unusual number of Dingy Swallowtail butterflies have visited a small cumquat tree in Hunter St. this summer. S.P.

* The pair of Boobooks are back in the gardens early this year. S.P.

61 Hunter Street in March

The banksia is now in full bloom and the New Holland Honeyeaters have taken over. The Eastern Spinebills have been driven away. There are battles between New Holland Honeyeaters and Sparrows feasting on the adjacent grape vines. They seem to suspect the honeyeaters are threatening their food supply. Silvereyes and Red Wattlebirds are enjoying the fruit at the top of the fig tree, but there is enough for us all. Few small birds are in the garden at present - Silvereyes and thornbills visit the bird bath regularly, and even share it with the sparrows occasionally. A solitary Magpie bathes there regularly.

The Common Bronzewing Pigeon has transferred from the wattle to the allocasuarina pusillas on the nature strip in the street, to feed on the seeds. A pair of kookaburras entertain us noisily each morning, and the regulars such a Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, ravens, Blackbird, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas and the Rufous Whistler are still with us.

A pair of Golden Whistlers, a first for our garden, flew across from the neighbours' garden into our fruit tree on the last weekend in March, making up for the quietness over the Summer.

Shirley Parnaby

MELALEUCA PARVISTAMINEA

This melaleuca was first described as a separate species in 1984. Before that, it was sometimes known as *Melaleuca sp. aff. ericifolia*. It is native to Gippsland, Healesville and the Graytown district. At Graytown, it is abundant along the creeks. A good place to find it is next to the Compton Creek bridge, on the Heathcote-Nagambie Road, just before Graytown. This is extending the size of the Castlemaine district somewhat, but then, it is an interesting plant.

At Healesville, *M. parvistaminea* is colonising areas disturbed by earthworks, and so it may be a suitable species in local vegetation projects.

Some of the differences between it and *M. ericifolia* are:

- it is smaller, being about half the height (2-3 m)
- it does not sucker (although it is often found in clumps)
- its leaves are smaller (4-11 mm long compared to 7-15 mm in *M. ericifolia*)
- there are prominent oil glands in the leaves
- the bark is rough, not papery
- the bottlebrush flowers are narrower, but longer
- there are fewer stamens per flower.

I do not know of anyone who has grown *M parvistaminea* in a garden. It seems that it would be a hardy plant, and its small size could make it suitable, where space is limited. With more space, a clump could be considered. In the Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants, it is described as "Useful for screening, hedging and background planting. Responds very well to pruning or clipping. Hardy to most frosts. Insects are attracted to the flowering plants."

Flowering time is said to be from June to January. I have not seen the Graytown plants in flower.

As often happens with newly described species, it does not have a common name. The species name, "parvistaminea" refers to small stamens, but a literal translation, "Small-stamened Paper-bark" seems to be lacking in style.

E.P.

EXCURSION TO GLENLUCE SPRINGS

Nine members of the CFNC and U3A went to Glenluce Springs on a warm sunny morning, on March 16th. Birds have been scarce in the district during the drought, and there was some speculation about how many we would see along the Loddon.

The river was not completely dry. The deep pools still had water, but at a lower level than usual. Birds were rather scarce, and some, often seen in flocks, were seen as single birds. Most of the observers finished with a small list, but overall the list was surprisingly large, with 24 species for the vicinity of the springs.

Galah	Grey Fantail	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Long-billed Corella	Grey Thrush	Eastern Spinebill
Crimson Rosella	Blue Wren	Spotted Pardalote
Kookaburra	Southern Whiteface	Striated Pardalote
Yellow Robin	White-browed Scrubwren	Silvereye
Golden Whistler	Striated Thornbill	Red-browed Firetail
Rufous Whistler	Brown Thornbill	White-winged Chough
Eastern Shriketit	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Australian Raven

E.P.

EXCURSION TO DARGILE

The excursion to Heathcote and Dargile was on a warm day, on March 11th. Because of the dry conditions, we did not expect to see wildflowers, or many birds.

At the Pink Cliffs, the rare and endangered Ausfeld's Wattle was well into bud, and a good show can be expected in spring. Birds were much harder to find, however.

Next stop was to the lookout rock, overlooking the township. Here, one sharp-eyed observer spotted a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles, soaring high above the bare ground of the Heathcote tip. Their ascent was quite rapid. However, they did not have the skies to themselves, and were swooped from above by another hawk (a Little Eagle?). The swooping hawk rose still higher, and appeared to disappear into the clouds. We lost sight of them, still rising, high in the sky.

Next stop was Dargile. Some of the plantations looked very healthy, and did not appear to be affected by the dry weather. Highlight was finding of a beautifully coloured Red-capped Robin. He was obliging, and sat on branches in full view of his admirers.

A small flock of White-browed Babblers was active in the shrubs on either side of the roadway.

E.P.

AUSTRALIA DAY BIRD COUNT

The count was for birds on, or over, our house block in doveton Street, for an hour, from 7.00 am to 8.00 pm. It was a fine sunny morning.

The count is not easy. The sun is still low, and birds are hard to identify against the light. It is also hard to know whether or not a bird has been previously counted.

Red Wattle Bird - 1 flew over	Musk Lorikeets - 1 flew over
Domestic pigeons - 78 in flight, overhead	Musk Lorikeets - 3 flew over
Red Wattlebird - 2	Crimson Rosella - 1
Red Wattlebird - 2	Musk Lorikeets - 2
Blackbirds male - 2	Musk Lorikeets - 4
Starlings - 2	Starlings - 5
Blackbirds female - 2	Sparrow - 1
Musk Lorikeets - 2 flew over	Thornbill - 1, flew over
	Thornbills - 5

E.P.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street at 8pm.

Wed April 19 *An invitation from the Camera Club to join them in viewing Top Nature Photography by Neil Anderson and David Galt - videos, slides, prints and demonstration of equipment used. Meeting Room 7 at Mt Alexander Hospital, Cornish St. at 7.45 pm.*

Thurs April 20. Combined U3A/FNC bird outing. Meet 9.30 Cont. Ed. car park. Glenluce Springs. Leader B. Maund.

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 is C Morris. Leave CHIRP 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm sharp.

*Note change of date.

Fri May 12 Aquatic Life Speaker is Peter Johnson.

Sat. May 13 Terrick Terrick. All day excursion.

Fri June 9 The Campaspe River Catchment. Speaker is Ern Perkins

Sat June 10 Reservoirs on the Coliban River. Leader is E. Perkins.

Fri. July 14 Some District Birds . 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, B Maund, 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 - 1995. 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.