

Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2006
Vol. 31.4 #332



Castlemaine Field Naturalists - 2006 - Celebrating 30 years

Journal of an Antarctic Voyage - Chris Morris

Sun. 26 Feb. Day 1

Ushuaia, (Terra del Fuego); guided tour of National Park taking in flowering Bauer Trees, old mans beard and edible fungus on trees. Peat-bogs over 9000 years old to reach present depth. Three species of Nothofagus related to *N.gunni* and *N.cunninghami* in Tasmania and other Beech Trees in Australia and New Zealand, part of Gondwanaland. Torrent Ducks, Flying Steamer Ducks, Black-necked Swans, Lapwings, Upland Geese, local Parrots and, of all things, active Beaver Lodges an exotic pest imported from North America along with Rabbits and Foxes (Zorros).

Boarded "*Aurora Expeditions*" 'Polar Pioneer' 2000 tonnes Russian Crew and 54 expeditioners. Out into Beagle Channel, (55 degrees south) heading for the dreaded Drake Passage of the Southern Ocean passing Cape Horn en route to the Palmer Archipelago of the Antarctic Peninsular. According to local forecasts this should be a fair weather passage but it isn't working out that way. A deep depression develops overnight right in our path and the ship is soon battling a force 9 strong gale.

Mon. 27 Feb. Day 2

Not many people for breakfast but the seabirds very much in evidence. Black-browed Albatross, Southern Giant Petrel, Sooty Shearwaters, Blue-eyed Cormorants, South American Terns, Kelp Gulls and at last the noble Wandering Albatross with wingspans of 11.5 feet, ranging 12,000 kms in search of feeding grounds (30,000 such seabirds caught and drowned each year by rouge longline fishing boats).

Tues. 28 Feb. Day 3

Out of the Roaring Forties, into the Fearsome Fifties and now the Screaming Sixties. The ship battened down handling the conditions well but not many intrepid voyagers seen on deck! But still many more oceanic birds in sight. Wandering, Grey-headed, Gibson's, Black-browed Albatrosses, Cape Petrels, Diving Petrels, Prions, Wilson's and Black-bellied Storm Petrels, Snow Petrels, Slender-billed Petrel, White-chinned Petrel .

Wed.1st Mar. Day 4

At first light sighted Tabular Iceberg 6 degrees south. Humpedback and Minke Whales blowing. Now calm water in the lee of the Peninsula but what a sight! Massive jagged snow covered peaks piecing storied layers of cloud with snow fields and glaciers all around. What a strange world as we anchor and take to the Zodiacs for our first run ashore in amongst Gentoo and Chinstrap Penguins and a smattering of the rarer Adelie variety

Thurs. 2 Mar. Day 5

Into Lemaire Channel second landing alongside Gentoo Colony (very smelly). Bare rock slopes showing many colours from moss, lichen and iron oxide. Snow on avalanche slopes coloured red and green by algae. Abandoned huts. Fur seals lying out along shoreline in hundreds. Crabeater seals hauled out onto ice floes sunbaking. The silence and brightness of this different world is startling. Ice in a variety of forms now shapes our environment. Air temp +3 degrees C. Back to the ship in snow flurries and white out. Ticked Antarctic Fulmar, Sheathbill, Skuas.

Fri. 3 Mar. Day 6

Motored into the caldera of Deception Island, active volcano that last erupted in 1970. Abandoned whaling station, rusting steel tanks and boilers, graves, bleached whalebones; in all a reminder of the violence of these killing fields when there were 12 factory ships, 77 whale catchers and 3000 rotting carcasses along the shoreline for flensing in 1912-13. Onto Robert Point in the South Shetland Group. Our first close encounter with Elephant seals and Leopard seals. Not a comfortable spot once rain set in so back to the ship.

Sat.4 Mar. Day 7

Elephant Island of Shackleton fame came up early after a fast run overnight. A forbidding place with seas crashing on steep rock pillars rising sheer out of the water. The swell put paid to landing as we worked our way along the coast looking for Cape Wild where the marooned men of the 'Endurance' set up camp until rescued 4 months later. A sheltered anchorage allowed us to put out the Zodiacs to have a closer look for the sandy spit now after 90 years more boulder strewn than sandy and reoccupied by Chinstrap, Macaroni Penguins plus Light-mantled Sooty Albatross above. How did they stay sane! (the men that is). Another thing they recorded snow slopes no longer evident. Is this further evidence of greenhouse warming?.

Sun. 5 Mar. Day 8

We are in "Iceberg Alley". As far as the eye can see hundreds and hundreds of icebergs of every shape and size as we make our way east across the face of the Weddell Sea. The extra factor could be the collapse of the Larsen Ice Shelf spawning more bergs drifting out into the Scotia Sea. Huge Tabular Icebergs – hundreds of feet high and kilometres long could easily cover Melbourne CBD. We are privy to a sight seldom scene – icebergs all around us all day – large and

small, grounded and floating, castellated and capsized – cathedrals of crystal under a clear blue sky.

Mon. 6 Mar. Day 9

Heading East to pick up Laurie Island in the South Orkney Group in the Scotia Sea. A windless clear blue sky with just the occasional berg now in sight. Put into the Argentine Station, Orcadas, the longest continuously manned base since the Scottish Expedition under Bruce set up shop here in 1903-04. Can get down to minus 44 degrees C. Studied graves, Penguins, blonde Fur Seal pups and the Argentineans. Then turning away from the Great White South Continent set course for South Georgia and more Shackleton odyssey.

Tues. 7 Mar. Day 10

Nothing to report just lots of turbulent sea while running the eastern down putting more Voyagers to grief.

Wed. 8 Mar. Day 11

Early morning fog lifted to highlight majestic peaks as we inched our way into King Haakon Bay in better weather than the Boat's crew of the 'James Caird' experienced in May 1916. Went ashore at Peggatty Beach so named by Shackleton and the start point for the mountain, snowfield, glacier crossing to the Whaling Station at Stromness. Ten of our qualified climbers set off on this grand traverse to be picked up on the other side of South Georgia three day's hence. The rest of us visited Cave Cove, the first landing of the Boats Crew 90 years ago, and nothing seems to have changed judging by the description. The Albatross's and Giant Petrels are still nesting there engaging in wonderful aerial courtship displays. Pintail Ducks - quite unfussed on the tussock-bounded tarns. Again it is possible to measure the then and now of the glacier tongues as the retreat is quite apparent judging by the mounds of moraines and the records. This was our first encounter with beached Elephant seals in their mud wallows happily burping and belching, snoring and snorting and stinking to high heaven – best to keep your distance. Likewise very mean looking Leopard Seals following our boat.

To be continued

March Observations around Maldon – Rose Watson

Mass flowering of Grey Box continues to encourage lots of nectar eaters - particularly flocks of Brown-headed, White plumed, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters Musk Lorikeets, & Eastern & Crimson Rosellas. On the ground seed eaters comprised of flocks of Red-browed Finches, thornbills & Southern Whitefaces, Red-rumped Parrots & Bronzewing & Crested Pigeons. Other birds sighted include a small group of Rainbow Bee-eaters, various raptors including Brown Falcons, Whistling Kite, & Wedge-tailed Eagles. On one of our dams, a pair of Australasian Grebes built a nest & are raising four chicks.

Reptiles seen around our yard include Olive Legless Lizard, Tree Dragons, Sand Goannas & various skinks.

******* New CFNC Observers Group *******

Alison Rowe has generously set up a new email group for CFNC members who wish to exchange local natural history observations and questions with each other "as they happen". The aim of the group is to keep each other up-to-date with sightings of flora and fauna in the area around Castlemaine, and to help each other learn more about the natural history of our district. Observations of particular interest may be published in the monthly CFNC newsletter.

Those interested in joining can e-mail Alison at amrowe@impulse.net.au and she will issue e-mail invitations which will give instructions how to join. Alternatively go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CFNC_Observers/ and follow the joining instructions there. Thank you, Alison.

A Weekend in the Victoria's Northeast – Richard Piesse, April '06

Saturday was spent walking various tracks around the Bright township. While there were almost no native plants in flower, I saw literally millions of Ovens River Wattles *Acacia pravissima* on all the tracks I walked. I saw lots of birds including Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, Gang Gangs, Crimson Rosellas, Eastern Yellow Robin, Wattlebirds, Galahs, Wagtails, Flycatchers, Brown Tree-creeper, Plovers, Magpies, Mudlarks, Pied and Grey Currawongs. I also saw a large wombat in a park right in the town area, grazing quietly on the green grass.

Sunday was spent up on Mt Buffalo – 71/2 years after my last visit and just over three years after the damaging 2003 fires. My bird list included Scarlet Robin, Magpie, Grey Shrike-thrush, Wattlebirds, Crimson Rosellas, Kookaburras, Grey Currawongs and three Lyrebirds! A male crossed the road approximately six kilometres above the Park entrance gate; and two hens were scratching in leaf litter close to the track.

Following the 2003 fires there were billions of Sallow Wattle *Acacia longfolia* seedlings on all the tracks I walked. There were lots of varied everlasting-type flowers including Hoary Sunray, Cut-leaf Daisy and several others. I also saw Mountain Tea-tree, Mountain Gentians and Musk Daisy-bush.

Summer-Autumn 2006 at 61 Hunter Street – Shirley Parnaby

This has been a season of cicadas and Common Bronzewing Pigeons. Early mornings and evenings for the crooning pigeons, and black cicadas shrilling around the old pepper tree as they emerged and dried out in the heat of the day. The Rufous Whistler returned to breed in the "Buda" garden and visit our bird baths with offspring. By February young Striated Pardalotes were chirping in the nest box and Mistletoebirds appeared as soon as the Box Mistletoe on the peppermint eucalypt produced flowers.

New Holland Honeyeaters were breeding and on one occasion there were eight of them trying to fit into one bath – water flying in all directions. A family of five Yellow-faced Honeyeaters likewise. Flocks of Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Silvereyes, Blackbirds, an Eastern Spinebill family and a solitary but very confident, juvenile Grey Fantail all visited. The fact that the garden at “Buda” is just across the road, and the Parker Street East section of bush behind us, seems to be the reason for such a variety of birds with juveniles visiting our birdbaths (they certainly don’t nest in our garden).

Two groups of Tasmanian Silvereyes came through during March – much larger numbers than last year. The usual flurry of activity at the baths was followed by feasting at the large old fig tree before they continued on their journey north.

The latest report for April is a family of Blue Wrens, and Grey Currawongs feeding on the grape vines.

Revegetation Sites on the Guildford Plateau – 8/4/06 - G. Harris.

Maurie Dynon, Vice President of the Guildford/ Upper Loddon Landcare Group and long term Project Manager for Plateau Corridor Project, used maps to show us the extent of the corridors as he explained the evolutionary nature of the project. Maurie’s initial job was to convince the primary producers in the area to give up some of their land and Maurie is obviously a very persuasive and dedicated man

When the project started it was the first corridor project in central Victoria and the only obvious remnant vegetation in the area were a few large eucalypts and some Tree Violets (*Hymenantha dentata*). They sourced their first plants from “anywhere and everywhere” and the Loddon River Prisoners crew and a Green Corp crew put up fencing and planted the corridors – five rows of trees two metres apart. This first attempt was a disaster. About this time Loddon River Crew set up a nursery to grow native plants, endemic to the area and that has been a great success.

Funding came from the North Central Catchment Authority (NCCMA). Most of the trees have been hand planted. A small strip was planted with mechanical assistance and another area across the highway was done by direct seeding. The trees were watered as they were planted but not afterwards. They were protected with plastic sleeves (recycle 3 times) and stakes (recycle twice). The corridor now has 22km of corridor and there is more planned. Nine landholders have been involved.

Some farmers who were initially reluctant to allow corridors to be 10-20 m wide now wish they had given permission for their corridors to be wider. One farmer has not lost one lamb to frost since his corridors were put in place. Phalaris and thistles, rabbits, and an occasional sheep invasion when dogs attacked have been

the main problems. Community members and students have helped too and one farmer expressing surprise at the success of the whole project was heard to say, "I never thought I would have people planting trees on our place, and people I don't even know!"

Historically there would have been River Red Gums up the escarpments and The Plateau would have been open wooded grassland. Mining was carried out on the plateau and miners would have cut down many of the trees. Today 22 species of wildflower have been recorded on the plateau, including the rare Spiny Riceflower (*Pimelea spinescens ssp spinescens*).

The Plateau Project has been such a success the group has been asked to oversee and advise on the Jim Crow Creek Restoration Project which aims to fence off the length of the creek and allow only occasional short term grazing along the creek in spring to control weeds. Some off stream watering is permitted from gravity fed tanks on the hills. Natural vegetation is returning in some wet areas – Red River Gums, Blackwoods, River Bottlebrush and Tea - trees. \$52,000 has been granted to continue this project which could involve up to 200 families and 40-60 farmers.

After Maurie's most informative talk we went for a walk along one of the corridors and did a bit of bird watching. A wonderful example of community co-operation and endeavour.

Observations

- 6/4/06 A Rose Robin has returned to the Silver Birches in the garden. Last year his colouring was indistinct but this year he arrived a week later, looking much more striking and he has a mate! Cathy Newing, Macedon.
- On the three-day walk from Daylesford to Castlemaine – Black Cockatoos at Vaughan and Gang Gangs closer to Daylesford. George Broadway.
- First Sighting at their new house of an Eastern Spinebill, in the Pineapple Sage. Marjorie Cross
- Virginia Bartlam also had a Spinebill in her garden - this time in a Buddliah.
- Robyn van Smeerdijk came across the "still warm" body of a Nankeen Kestrel that had been killed on the road. Robyn was so moved by the beautiful colouring and markings of the feathers that she took him home and has him in her freezer! The term "nankeen" originally described a cloth colour.
- A massed "ball" of ants floating on the water in an outside bowl. Their thoraxes had a tint of red about them and they appear to have taken over the meat ants' nest. Rita Mills
- The Boobook owls are back in the Botanical Gardens. George Broadway
- 9/4 After the second rainfall this month, fifteen Parsons Bands Orchids emerged on the hard beaten concrete-like track along the bank above the

overflow creek at Expedition Pass. Tiny and fragile, it seems a miracle they had actually broken through. Shirley Parnaby

- Parsons Bands Orchids have also been recorded at Muckleford, Barkers Creek and at the Van Gemerts' near the Castlemaine Golf Course during April.
- 18/4 Brush-tailed Phascogale, clearly silhouetted, in large Grey Box, at dusk, in Hagues Road, Barkers Creek. Geoff Harris
- 23/4 Three red-capped robins (1M, 2F) hopping around the garden this afternoon. We first saw one about three days ago - they always return some time in April. Alison Rowe
- Three Scarlet Robins were seen while walking with the U3A group along race to Eureka Reef from Poverty Gully Track. Rita Mills
- Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos about. Chris Morris
- Variable Midge Orchids *Corunostylis archeri* in bush paddock at Barkers Creek in April. Geraldine Harris

Extra Events for your Calendar

Thu 8 Jun. Newstead Lancare Group hosts author Rachel Legge talking about her wonderful childrens book "Leaf Litter" all about the marvellous biodiversity in one small patch of Box-Ironbark forest. Copies of Rachel's book will be available for sale and signing (\$25 – cheaper than RRP). Newstead Community Centre, 8-9pm. Gold coin donation. All welcome.

From The Business Meeting 27/4/06

- Welcome to new Member: Rachel Perry
- Letter of resignation from Jan and Neil Maling
- CFNC Observers Group (email group) to be set up by Alison Rowe(p.4,CN)
- Sat 20, Sun 21 May. Threatened Bird Network Swift Parrot Survey. Members needed to assist. Contact person: Rita Mills (see p.8 CN)
- VCAT Hearing re Pyrenees Trees. Request for 6 week postponement to extend hearing time from Fri 15 May, 11am, MASC Offices, 25 Lyttleton St. C'maine, to some time in July. No decision available at time of printing.
- CFNC will donate \$250 towards a Fire Photo Exhibition to be held in Castlemaine and Geelong in August. The photos were taken by Mary Thompson in the Brisbane Ranges after the recent fires to show the remarkable revival qualities of the Australian Bush. Money from the sale of the photos will go to the Castlemaine and Anakie Fire Brigades.

Correction: Membership due dates appear on your Castlemaine Naturalist mailing label. eg. "02/07" indicates that your fees are due in February 2007.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme – May 2006

General meetings (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the carpark opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 27 Doveton Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

Fri May 12. Dingo Farming. Tehree Gordon. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat May 13. Cobblers Gully. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 1.30pm sharp. BYO afternoon tea. Leader: Richard Piesse, Ph 5472 3191.

Sat 20, Sun 21 May. Threatened Bird Network Swift Parrot Survey. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 8am sharp. Contact: Rita Mills Ph 5472 4553. Details at meeting.

Fri Jun 9. Reconstruction of the Earth's Crust. Julian Hollis. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Jun 10. Walk with Julian - Loddon River Valley. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 1.30pm sharp. BYO afternoon tea. Leader: Julian Hollis. Contact: Richard Piesse, Ph 5472 3191.

Sat Jun 24. Roadside Cleanup. Meet at Tait Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 9am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact: Hans van Gemert, Ph 5472 1082.

Fri Jul 14. Antarctica. Chris Morris. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Jul 15. Terrick Terrick. Full day excursion. Leader: Rita Mills.

Sun Jul 30. Tree Planting Day – FN have ordered 200 trees.

Oct 13,14,15. SEANA Campout at Maryborough. Details later.

2006 Committee

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Rita Mills (Pres).....Ph 5472 4553 | Nigel Harland (Vice Pres/Griev Off) .. Ph.5474 8246 |
| George Broadway (Sec)....Ph 5472 2513 | Hans van Gemert (Treas/ Public Off).. Ph.5472 1082 |
| Em Perkins (Web).....Ph.5472 3124 | Noela Cain..... Ph 5470 6223 |
| Athol Dorman.....Ph.5472 4429 | Chris Morris.....Ph 9885 4221 |
| Richard Piesse.....Ph.5472 3191 | |

Geraldine Harris (Editor)...Ph. 5474 2244, PO Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450,
gedharris@castlemaine.net

Subscriptions for 2006 (Screensaver with each 2006 membership \$2postage)

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

Website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~cfnc>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc., PO Box 324, Castlemaine. Inc #A0003010B