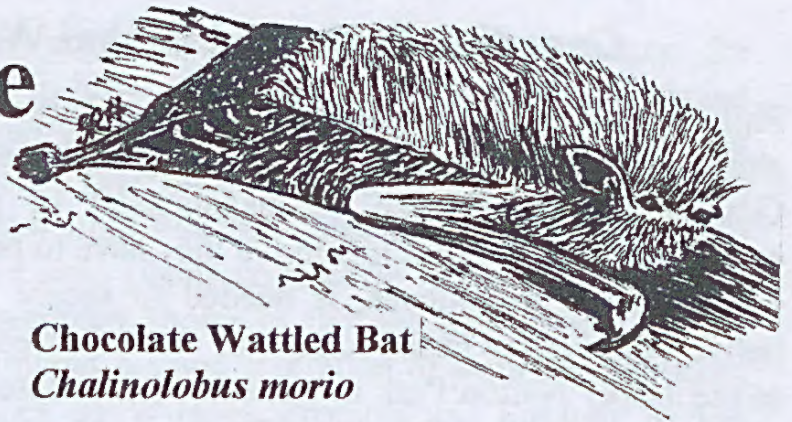


Castlemaine Naturalist

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Chocolate Wattled Bat
Chalinolobus morio

Seasons Greeting to all!

May the year ahead provide many opportunities for continued enjoyment and appreciation of our wonderful natural world. Many threats, both globally and locally, make it more important than ever that we all do what we can, individually and collectively, to protect our precious environment.

61 Hunter Street – Sept, Oct, Nov, 2006.

A few observations from our small bird baths (2) filled from our main water tanks. (We have covered the large one indefinitely.)

Large numbers of smaller birds have all visited regularly – despite the presence of aggressive red wattlebirds and the disgusting ravens.

Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, with several offspring reared in Parker St east bush behind us – New Hollands and Eastern Spinebills – wrens - small flocks of Yellow-rumped Thornbills – Goldfinches – a Rufous Whistler – Crimson and Eastern Rosellas – occasional lorikeets – a Common Bronzewing – Striated and Spotted Pardalotes (the striated have occupied the nestbox) – Grey Shrike-thrush and a juvenile Grey Currawong. Across the road in the huge old tree at “Buda” – kookaburras – smaller numbers of corellas, galahs and yellow-crested cockatoos, and during this week a small flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos made frustrated attempts to land there, buffeted by gale force winds, but had to settle for the ancient cypresses below.

Very best wishes to you all, Shirley Parnaby.

Editors Note: Sadly Shirley has decided this will be her final report from 61 Hunter Street. Shirley has been an active member of CFNC for many years and her observations and reports from 61 Hunter Street are always a treat and will be missed by our readers. Local observations such as these, recorded over a period of time, make a valuable contribution to the Natural History of our area. Thank you Shirley for your outstanding effort and we are glad that we will stay in touch through our newsletter.

Canadian Parks and Global Warming. 10/11/06

Phil Ingamells of the Victorian National Parks Association, believes the way ahead, given the present climate of global warming, lies in persuading the Government to increase its management of parks. We have isolated our ecosystems and in order to survive they have to be able move. Careful and clever management, he believes, is needed to secure the successful preservation of native biodiversity in the longterm. Phil showed slides, first from a recent visit to the Jasper Nation Park in Canada, to illustrate trends seen there as a result of global warming, and then local scenes, to show similar sorts of changes in Australia.

In Canada. We saw how the Columbia Ice Field in the Rocky Mountains and the Athabasca Glacier in the Jasper NP are receding and how river systems are falling apart; how slight temperature changes that affect one plant or lichen community can have wide ranging effects on food chains; and how weed infestations are occurring in areas where the seeds previously didn't survive the Canadian winters. Phil told how he was taken to hear the magical trill of Brewers Sparrows nesting in "willows". He didn't recognize the willows until he realized he was looking at a low growing invasion of willow seedlings. He then informed us there are 300 species of willow that have not yet found their way to Australia – but they are coming, along with other new weeds, to compete with our native species.

Some of the present park management strategies used in Canada are the extensive use of boardwalks and also boats to transport strictly limited numbers of tourists into fragile areas to avoid wear and tear on the natural environment. Limited infrastructure only is allowed in the Jasper NP and "bed without breakfast" in private homes has become a very popular way to accommodate visitors.

Climate change means vegetation communities have to move. In the Jasper NP plants seeking cooler conditions will eventually move up above the treeline where they will colonize the bare high peaks. Lower down the mountain fragile vegetation communities will be threatened. The establishment of the railway town of Jasper in the centre of rich wetlands is regretted now because the wetland is where the animals come for food during the thaw. This important wetland is also threatened by increased housing, fires and pests and diseases that are no longer controlled by the colder temperatures. For example uncontrolled pine forest beetle populations are having huge environmental and commercial consequences in the area.

This move to higher altitudes and towards the poles is a reasonably slow process and systems can cope. But in Australia there is no higher places for alpine plants to move to and many species such as the Alpine Forget-me-not and the Silver Snow Daisy, deprived of their natural habitat, will be lost.

In Australia although we now acknowledge an Aboriginal presence for thousands of years which resulted in little change, since white man arrived and records have been available it is evident that slow changes have been occurring for some time. Antarctic coldfronts that once came over southern Australia linking Australia to Antarctica now only lick the coast of Australia. A 1750 view of the Grampians looked out onto plains covered in trees. A recent view looking out from the northern Grampians shows us that the park is now almost entirely surrounded by cleared farmland making migration of plants and animals very difficult. Historical sketches of Wilsons Promontory, through to the present, show the sea rising steadily. Unique systems such as the Pink Lakes in the Mallee, the Sheoake Forests on Snake Island and Myrtle Beech Forests in Tasmania are examples of ecosystems under severe threat.

Much is in danger of being lost before it is fully understood. There are thousands of insects, fungi, and natural relationships (like the connection between the Long-footed Potaroo and truffles under eucalypts) that we know nothing about.

Recent fires in the high country (2003) and in the Grampians (last year) were the most monitored in Victorian history. There is, however, very little data on what was there before the fires. Victoria has cleared more than any other state. Only 37% of our natural vegetation remains - 16% in national parks.

The Government is presently working on a White Paper that, 4-5 years on, is aimed at increasing our chances of preserving long-term biodiversity. Such management will necessarily involve the cooperation of major conservation groups and draw all sorts of people into the process. Examples of rock solid evidence, such as provided by the records of Bogong Eyebrights preserved in an exclusion plot and monitored since 1940, are needed to support campaigns for change. Monitored plots and detailed records of what we are doing are essential. We have trapped our ecosystems. We have caged them but they have to have room to move. Government departments need to look at what is needed to build bridges to prevent communities from being isolated, and also how to maintain the integrity of systems so they are strong enough to survive.

Geraldine Harris

P.S. Shirley Parnaby, who spent six weeks touring the National "Monuments" of the West Coast of USA some 26 years ago, wrote to express her pleasure at being able to attend Phil Ingamells talk in November – and agreed that the changes, since her visit, are alarming.

THANK YOU to all members who contributed articles to the newsletter during 2006. Members' articles provide the interest and variety we aim to provide. I look forward to your contributions in 2007. Geraldine Harris

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

Club Records

Last week, I was invited to join the "Forest Working Group" tour of the local forests. The group has members from interstate and overseas, and some of the group are principally interested in computer modeling. I discussed our record keeping system with some of the participants.

The Castlemaine District plant records are held on a computer database. The project started when computer memory was much less. The database used is a flat file database. For each plant, the broad locality for which it has been recorded is given. There is generally no, or very sparse, information about a plant's abundance when the record was made, the date of the record, the name of the person making the record, and the precise location of the plant (when this is desirable).

Another problem is that the records are on one computer, and so not readily available to other members. Nor can other members assist in entering data.

Perhaps we should use a more modern database, so that much more detailed information could be stored. We could consider using the database for animals also. Perhaps the database could be stored on our web site, so that the information could be accessed or added to by any of our members. Many members have accumulated a store of information over the years. Perhaps members would be willing to add this into the database.

If we did this, we would need more web space than we now have. The club's web site, if the club wishes to have a web site, could be transferred to a larger site. This would have the advantage that higher resolution photographs, than are possible at present, could be added to the site.

I would be pleased to have comments or discussions with members who could assist in presenting a submission to the club.

Ern Perkins, 25 Nov 2006.

A Bat at the MCG – Jenny Heyme

I walk past the Moyston Cricket Ground most days on my way to the Post Office. It's a warm afternoon and I'm enjoying the walk when I notice something odd – a little brown scrap, not quite like a leaf – hanging in the sports ground fence, and I go over for a closer look. I'm surprised to find it's a little bat, out in the open in the middle of the afternoon. And wonder out loud what it's doing there. Its little head and tiny black eyes turn toward me.

Puzzled I keep walking and I'm thinking it *really* shouldn't be there and what I should do. If it's still there when I come back, I'll try to move it – maybe to the tree nearby.

And it is still there when I'm coming back, so I go over and try to lift it off the fence. Then it's obvious that it is hanging there in broad daylight because it *can't* get off the fence. One back foot hangs on, and its tail membrane is caught on the on a barb of the wire. I have to gently unwind it. It's quite calm as I do this – no attempt to bite me with little needle teeth, so I decide to take it home to show the boys. I carry it tucked in my hand against my chest, sheltering it from the light.

At home, there are cats –I don't want to take the bat inside, so as I'm walking , I'm deciding what to do next, how to keep it safe. There's an empty bird cage on the verandah – I put it in there and cover it with a cloth, then call the boys to see it. It's been hanging in the sun all day so maybe it's thirsty. Holding it in one hand, I offer it water on a spoon and it drinks eagerly, its little pink tongue dipping into the water, lapping like a cat. We have a good look at it and put it back in the cage. Tristan thinks he knows what it is, and the books come out to check. Yes, it's a Chocolate Wattled Bat – quite different from the last little bat we found which was a Lesser Long-eared Bat.

At dusk having shut the cats safely away – the bat is brought inside for closer inspection and a photo session. It's barely bigger than my thumb. Alex remarks on its squeaking, but I can't hear it. Its teeth would be terrifying if it wasn't so small and its eyes seem alert. While I'm holding it parasites crawl out of its fur and we try to remove them. There were two or three we saw – mites, I think – and they look way too big for such a small host. I wonder if any have moved onto me, but maybe they only like bats – I hope! The bat seems unconcerned, so I stretch out a wing to admire it and inspect the way the tail membrane works. It doesn't seem damaged by the barbed wire. These bats catch insects by scooping them up in the membrane, so I guess that it has caught on the fence while hunting – flying between the strands, the tail membrane has snagged on the barb, flipping the bat round the wire, and tangling it so it can't get free.

Chocolate Wattled Bats live in colonies – we hope it's going to find its way home, and leave it on the verandah in a safe spot from predators but where it can leave if it wants. It's still there the next day and I show my friend, who falls in love. It really is a sweet looking little thing (Chocolate, remember).

That evening, when I check again, it's gone, hopefully safely back home, but we'll never know!

Black Hill Reserve, Kyneton –11/11/06.

The five members who journeyed to Black Hill Reserve despite the hot dry weather were well rewarded with a very pleasant stroll through part of the reserve. The real treat however was being able to climb up a ladder, carefully placed prior to our arrival, to view a nesting box packed with Sugar Gliders, or from what I saw, sugar glider heads, bodies and legs! Albert Golden, our leader,

explained that boxes often contain young of varied sizes that are left together for safety or convenience – who knows? Unfortunately there are no photos as we were too preoccupied hanging on to the tree to operate our cameras. G. Harris

Observations

Powerful Owls: At Trentham Falls – pellets found underneath the roosting site contained beak and claws. Penny Garnett

Tawny Frogmouths: in the Oak Forest at Winters Flat - with a messy magpie-type nest, seen lining up on fence with young. Debbie Worland

Tawny Frogmouth chick (like two pompoms joined together, very cute) found on road in Limestone Tk - placed back in nest but then noticed adult roosting with another chick nearby – first chick found dead the next day after very strong winds. Natasha Harris (*It might have been the weakest chick and therefore abandoned by it's mother.* Rita Mills)

White-browed Woodswallows: Hundreds of White-browed Woodswallows and some Masked Woodswallows, still at the Golf Course. Debbie Worland

White-browed Woodswallows at Walmer School Nature Reserve. Rita Mills

Magpies: Pet magpie has fallen out of favour since it was seen feeding on fledgling Welcome Swallows at Barkers Creek; also Collared Sparrow-hawk in Casaurina near house, probably with same intention. Geoff Harris

Another pet Magpie known to whistle and imitate wattlebirds has now mastered the art of cat calling and was heard to utter, “Hello Smudgee”. Rita Mills

Mallee Fowls: Wonderful views of birds trained to come on demand at Whimpeys in the Little Dessert. Anne and Hans van Gemert.

Pallid Cuckoos: Very close-up view near Poverty Gully Track – these birds are known to feed their young even when they are occupying some other birds nest. Chris Morris

Reptiles: Jacky lizard in the middle of White Gum Rd; two large gheckos hanging from the window ledge – one struggling for its freedom while it dangled from the other's mouth. Territorial feud perhaps? And a 30cm juvenile brown snake (two dark head stripes) found inside house at Muckleford. G Harris

Ravens: More common than usual, immediately around the house. A Dorman “Confused” young raven making wattlebird sounds in garden. Rita Mills

Major Mitchell Cockatoos (2) reported flying over Vaughan Springs – a most unusual sighting but a possible result of the prolonged dry conditions.

Dry Conditions: On a 42.5 km Great Dividing Trail walk between between Mt Bunningyong and the Creswick Forest, the country was very dry all the way. Also no flowing water at Sailor's Creek or at Slaty Creek picnic area. R Piesse
But some green reported by members visiting Lyonville and Musk. G Broadway

Concern: Debbie Worland is concerned about the electrolyte concentration of recycled water at the Castlemaine Golf Course and the effect this may have on the surrounding vegetation (Swift Parrot habitat). Requests to have a programme of tree monitoring to record any decline have so far been ignored.

Treecreepers and White-browed Woodswallows – Gill Raynar

Presently we are at our 20-acre block of mixed Mallee/Box Ironbark outside of Wedderburn. We've always had a community of Brown Treecreepers here, about ten in all, very easy to spot, as they would come up around the house, feeding on the ground. However, they haven't been around for quite some time. I saw a single bird in mid October, just as White-browed and Masked Woodswallows were moving in. I'm now wondering whether the woodswallows have driven the treecreepers out. Do you have any knowledge of this? We seem to have more woodswallows this year than at any previous time. I really miss our cheery little treecreepers!

Possible explanation: In drought conditions, the migratory and mobile habits of woodswallows would ensure better access to food and make them better adapted than treecreepers that are more vulnerable because they are more sedentary and occupy a much smaller territory. Rita Mills

VicRoads and Trees

VicRoads have rejected a request by a group of Chewton residents and the MAS Council to reduce the speed limit to 80kph along the road between Elphinstone and Chewton. The reason they gave was "motorists don't observe speed limits". The chopping down of the trees along this road has been deferred as negotiations for offset planting are still being negotiated.

Thirty-four trees are being threatened at Pullens Road on the way to Maldon – mediation meeting on Dec 13th. Alison Rowe is co-ordinating a campaign to save these trees. amrowe@impulse.net.au. Submissions still being accepted.

Up to 200 trees along the Pyrenees Highway towards Newstead are targeted for removal as well.

From the Business Meeting 23/11/06

- Committee members wanted – please consider nominating prior to the AGM
- Richard Piesse is moving to Melbourne but fortunately for us he intends to be a regular visitor to Castlemaine. Richard is a valuable member of our club and we wish him well at his new location.
- Weed CD still in demand – new edition being considered for 2007.
- Club representative to seek clarification from Mt Alexander Shire on Threatened Species Roadside Reports (carried out by CFNC members) that cannot be located by funding body.
- Next meeting of the Constitution Sub-committee at 9am, after Dawn Breakfast, at home of C Morris Ph 0418 996 289 or E Perkins 5472 3124.
- Still time for responses to a discussion paper on Murray River Red Gum Forests". Comments accepted until Dec 7 2006. www.redgum.org.au or www.melbourne.foe.org.au/barmah

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

December 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 Dec 8. Members Night. Traditional "Show and Tell" night. Bring along a short slideshow (10 slides), an interesting nature experience, a list of questions etc. Be as creative as you like. Digital and Slide projector available for use on the night (Digital images need to be in either JPEG or PowerPoint format on CD or USB key). Bring a plate of supper to share. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Dec 9. Christmas Outing – Harcourt Reservoir. Depart from opposite motel in Duke St at 3pm sharp or make own way to Harcourt Reservoir by 3.15pm. BYO evening meal and drinks. Contact: Rita Mills Ph 5472 4553.

Sat Jan 13 Dawn Breakfast – Chinaman's Point, Chewton. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 6.30am. BYO breakfast, chair and binoculars. Contact: Geraldine Harris Ph 5474 2244.

2007

Fri Feb 8. AGM Election of Office Bearers and Committee. Followed by **Mount Alexander Sustainability Group.** Speaker: Dean Bridgefoot. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Feb 9. To be decided.

2006 Committee

Rita Mills (Pres).....	Ph 5472 4553	George Broadway (Sec)....	Ph 5472 2513
Hans van Gemert (Treas/ Public Off)..	Ph.5472 1082	Ern 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 \$2 postage)

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