

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Fairy Wax-flower
Philotheca verrucosa

Castlemaine Field Naturalists - 2006 - Celebrating 30 years

The Aftermath – Brisbane Ranges, 12/9/06 – Dorothy Bessant

A perfect winter's morning – windless, blue sky, and look at all the cars lined up at the Octopus! Only two belonging to us? Oh, well, the fewer the cosier! And off we go, to the Brisbane Ranges, to view the post-fire scene. In the back seat, I catch snatches of a conversation between Rita and Geraldine about the true colours of this and that – clouds, hills, foliage, and how to represent them, paintwise. I'm concentrating so hard on trying to hear what's being said that I mistake Daylesford for Guildford, and that's a big mistake! Hope it isn't registered! On to the Brisbane Ranges and the first stop and the first sampling of other people's homemade goodies, then a leisurely survey of this fire affected area. We see blackened tree-trunks, fuzzily outlined in the tender green of new growth, and all around us, the black, spiky stems of hakea, with the burnt seedpods burst open by the force of the fire littering the ground around them. It is an eerily beautiful sight, the red, white and black of the split pods reminding me for some reason of the painting of Albert Tucker – maybe of 'Modern Evil'. But even here there is evidence of the resurgence of flowering native ground cover – I am told it will be an absolute paradise at the height of Spring. Right now my companions seem to be in paradise. As they fossick, examine and pronounce, I am profoundly impressed, but also reminded of the lines from my childhood, "Ducks are a dabbling, up tails all!" Perhaps reluctantly for some, we move on to be rewarded by the sight of a stand of truly magnificent grass-trees which obviously thrive on fire.

On to Steiglitz and a brief look at fascinating old buildings from the goldrush era. However, as this is Field Nats and not the Historical Association we can't afford to prolong this deviation from the main purpose of the trip – it's just an after dinner treat, really. Apologies by the way to Phee. I'm sure yours is the correct pronunciation of Steiglitz or would originally have been!

A look on the way back at some bush that escaped the blaze, where George pronounces upon a "miserable lot of messmates" I am deeply grateful to him for obviating the need for me to expose my ignorance by asking "What are they?"

On the other hand, I feel an obscure resentment on behalf of the mess-mates! After all, they have survived, in what must be testing terrain.

As we detour for an icecream treat, kindly provided by Geraldine, I am feeling more and more that I am in the bosom of some finely functioning family on a Sunday outing! It is quite a pleasant feeling. I'm even beginning to prepare in my mind for the inevitable Monday morning composition, which of course will conclude with the words, "We returned home tired but happy"!!!

In Search of the Elusive Gouldian Finch

Ken and Maureen Dredge, "On the Road", Duinitezy. 19/8/06.

When Maureen and I headed off on our trip around the "BIG BLOCK" in February, we drew up a bird list of target species. The birds most wanted! On top of the list was the Gouldian Finch and most elusive it proved to be too.

On our way up through the Centre we found some of our other target birds – Redthroats at the Arid Lands Botanic Gardens at Port Augusta, Crimson Chat, Chiming Wedgebill and White-winged Sittella in the MacDonnell Ranges and Bourkes Parrots on the Tanami track. Then we hit the top end and into the serious finch searching territory!

But alas, a very severe late wet burst, thanks to Cyclone Monica in late April resulted in so much water in all the streams and surrounding wetlands that most of the bird species were well dispersed and in no need to gather at selected waterholes.

Nevertheless we searched Katherine, Edith Falls, Pine Creek and Kakadu areas on our way up without success.

We weren't too concerned and were quietly confident that we would find them on our way back down after a couple of months in Darwin. The countryside and wetlands areas would have dried up considerably by then.

Birding was excellent in Kakadu, Fogg Dam and all the Darwin area with such wonderful species as Yellow Wagtail, Common Koel Channel-billed Cuckoo and the Banded Fruit Dove at Nourlangie Rock, presenting themselves to us for inspection. We also had a good variety of honeyeaters, gerygones and most of the available finches but not the Gouldian!

We left Darwin in mid July (what a perfect place to spend a southern winter, no rain or wind, and everyday a swimming day with a temperature range of approximately 18 degrees to 32 degrees) and with confidence spent two days searching Pine Creek and surrounding area. "You will definitely get them there," we were told. But it was not to be.

We were well compensated though when, on one of our early morning walks, we came across a feeding flock of about 50 Hooded Parrots and several Northern Rosellas. We observed them for about half an hour, thoroughly enjoying their morning activities.

We checked Katherine again, without luck, and then we headed west to Victoria River Crossing where we found the beautiful Purple-crowned Fairy Wren, Banded Honeyeater and the White-quilled Rock Pigeon, but again no Gouldians. The target bird remains elusive.

Next up was Timber Creek and area “ the *home* of Gouldians” we were assured. Yes, you guessed it, they weren’t at home. By the time we had completed our Northern Territory experience at the Keep River National Park we were almost convinced that the species had become rather more endangered. We feared that they had become extinct.

Never mind, we were now in Western Australia and had the very likely habitat of Lake Argyle and Kununurra ahead of us.

A fortnight later we had Buff-sided Robin, Sandstone Shrike-thrush and White-browed Crake on our list, but still no sign of the elusive ones.

We were starting to get a little despondent as we were rapidly running out of available Gouldian habitat. Conditions had been in our favour. It was well into August and at the peak of the Dry, with some nice pools and puddles in some of the riverbeds. Some parks and Gardens had sprinklers on, but it was all to no avail. Other people (usually non-birdo’s) had come across a flock of about 60 magnificent Gouldian Finches drinking, feeding and frolicking along a 50 metre green lawn area in town. The flock was made up of mostly plain coloured juveniles, but there were about 10-12 full coloured males, mostly black-faced, but 3-4 of the less common red-faced birds.

Our excitement level was extreme!!

We observed them for about 30 minutes from a range of only about 10 metres at the closest point. They were not concerned by our presence at all, and apart from their usual non-stop activities, ignored us and our little dance of celebration. At last we had them!

On the following two days we had further sightings of these magnificent little birds, but in smaller numbers.

Now that mission is complete, after seven months on the road, we need a new target bird. Maybe Spinifex Bird on our way south to Perth, and then maybe the Red-eared Firetail, and then the Western Bristlebird and then...

But maybe we will check out the waders here at Broome first.

Regards and Best Wishes to all, Ken and Maureen Dredge

Editors Note: *Maureen and Ken have arrived in Broome after nearly 8 months on the road. They are enjoying travelling with no time limitations and find the freedom of being able to stop for however long they please "exhilarating". With continued perfect weather they are both well and are not confining their activities to bird watching alone but have been "in wonderment at the variety of and quality of wildflowers and other flora in the central and northern part of the country.*

Ken also reported that Maureen has been very brave on the trip. So far she has been chased by a snake at Mataranka, confronted by a buffalo at Mary River (on the way to the loo), come face to face with brumbies and dingoes, and had to share the track with "wild" cattle. She has made very sure though that she has not had a crocodile experience!

Wildflower Reports – Richard Piesse

23/8/06 Kalimna Park (Tourist Road)

Acacia (aspera, genistifolia, paradoxa, pycnantha and bailyana), Davesia ulicifolia, Diuris chryseopsis, Grevillea alpina, Hakea decurrens ssp., Hardenbergia violacea, Hovea heterophylla, Philotheca verrucosa

1/9/06 In addition to the above: Acacia acinacea, Caladenia carnea, Caladenia sp. (Musky or Hooded), Craspedia variabilis, Grevillea rosmarinifolia, Pimelea humilis, Tetratheca ciliata

4/9/06 In addition to the above: Diuris pardina, Drosera macranthra, Rhytidosporum procumbens, Prostanthera denticulata, Pterostylis melagramma, and Wurmbea dioica

5/9/06 Castlemaine Diggings NHP- Glenluce Area

Acacias (acinacea, aspera, dealbata, gunnii, lanigera, oxycedrus, paradoxa, pycnantha), Daviesia ulicifolia, Dillwynia ramosissima, Caladenia carnea, Epacris impressa, Euromyrtus ramosissima, Grevillea alpina, Hardenbergia violacea, Hovea heterophylla, Leucopogon (ericoides, virgatus), Philotheca verrucosa, Rhytidosporum procumbens, Tetratheca ciliata, Eucalyptus dives

10/9/06 Maldon Railway Line

Acacias (acinacea, aspera, dealbata, genistifolia, gunnii, paradoxa and pycnantha), Caladenia carnea, Craspedia variabilis, Cyanicula ulicifolia, Davesia ulicifolia, Diuris (chryseopsis, pardina), Eucalyptus leucoxydon, Grevillea alpina, Hakea decurrens ssp, Hardenbergia violacea, Hibbertia exutiacies, Leucopogon virgatus, Microseris sp 3, Philotheca verrucosa, Pimelea humilis, Platylodium formosum, Pterostylis melagramma, Rhytidosporum procumbens, Stackhousia monogyna, Tetratheca ciliata, Wurmbea dioica, Cassytha glabella

Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks

(To save space botanical names have been omitted if plant was listed on a previous evening walk.)

Wed Sep 13. Youngmans Track. Rita Mills

Gold-dust Wattle *Acacia acinacaea*, Rough Wattle *Acacia aspera*, Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*, Dusky Fingers *Caladenia fuscata* (with tiny Flower Spider attached), Billy-buttons *Craspedia sp*, Downy Grevillea *Grevillea alpina*, Goldfields Grevillea *Grevillea dryophylla*, Bushy Needlewood *Hakea decurrens ssp. physocarpa*, Grey Everlasting *Ozothamnus obcordatus*, Fairy Wax-flower *Philotheca verrucosa*, Slender Rice-flower *Pimelea linifolia*, White Marianth *Rhytidosporum procumbens*, Pink Bells *Tetratheca ciliata*

Wed Sep 20. Carpenter Lane, Muckleford Flora Reserve. George Broadway
Gold-dust Wattle, Rough Wattle, Honey-pots *Acrotriche serrulata*, Cut-leaf Daisy *Brachyscome multifida*, Slender Dodder-laurel *Cassytha glabella*, Dusky Fingers, Bitter Cryptandra *Cryptandra amara*, Gorse Bitter-pea *Davesia ulicifolia*, Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella admixta*, Wax-lip Orchid *Glossodia major*, Downy Grevillea, Purple Coral-pea *Hardenbergia violacea*, Spiky Guinea-flower *Hibberia exutiacies*, Common Beard-heath *Leucopogon virgatus*, Grey Everlasting, Fairy Wax-flower, Slender Rice-flower, Dwarf Greenhood *Pterostylis nana*, Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans*, White Marianth, Pink Bells, Sticky Everlasting *Xerochrysum viscosum*.

Vale Kaye Turner

Kaye was an enthusiastic and valued member of our club for a good number of years and is remembered fondly by many of our members. Kaye's main interest was in birds and such were her skills that she could hear a bird before any others in a car "even when the windows were up". For many years Kaye made her home available for committee meetings and was an invaluable contact when it came to arranging speakers for the monthly meetings.

Vale Tom Garnett

Tom Garnett had a lifelong passion for birds and their importance as indicators of environmental health. He was secretary of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (now Birds Australia) at the time when they were organising the first Australian Atlas of Birds. He also had a great interest in native plants and will be remembered by many for his column in *The Age, From the Country*. Our sympathy to Penny and her family.

A visit to the Newstead Area by BOCA (Ballarat Branch)

On the 27th August, 2006 seventeen branch members of Bird Observers Club of Australia (BOCA) and nine visitors went on an outing in the Newstead area led by Joan Butler and John Alexander. It was a fine, cool day and six sights were visited. Starting at Mia Mia Rd, 27 birds were seen here. Morning tea was at the Red, White and Blue Mine, very quiet. The quince tree site was next. Gully Track, Welshmans Reef, 4 male Flame Robins and several females. Lunch at the Loddon River, Newstead. On the way to Tullaroop Reservoir we stopped on Rodborough Rd to look at a Nankeen Kestrel and Brown Falcon and found Banded Lapwing in the paddock opposite. Several waterbirds were seen at Tullaroop Reservoir. On the way home the three of us from Newstead were lucky to find a pair of Brolga in the paddock along Saligari's Rd. A total of 67 birds were recorded for the day.

Musk Duck (T)	Black Swan (T)	Australian Shelduck
Australian Wood Duck	Pacific Black Duck (T)	Australasian Shoveler (T)
Grey Teal (T)	Australasian Grebe (T)	Little Pied Cormorant
Great Cormorant (T)	Australian Pelican (T)	White-faced Heron (T)
Brown Goshawk	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Brown Falcon
Nankeen Kestrel	Purple Swamphen	Dusky Moorhen
Eurasian Coot	Banded Lapwing	Masked Lapwing
Silver Gull	Crested Pigeon	Galah
Long-billed Corella	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Musk Lorikeet
Crimson Rosella	Eastern Rosella	Red-rumped Parrot
Laughing Kookaburra	Brown Treecreeper	Superb Fairy-wren
Striated Pardalote	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Red Wattlebird
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Fuscous Honeyeater
White-plumed Honeyeater	Black-chinned Honeyeater	(h) White-naped HE
New Holland Honeyeater	White-fronted Chat	Jacky Winter
Flame Robin	Eastern Yellow Robin	White-browed Babbler
Crested Bellbird (h)	Grey Shrike-thrush	Restless Flycatcher
Grey Fantail	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Willie Wagtail
Australian Magpie	Pied Currawong	Grey Currawong
Australian Raven	Little Raven	White-winged Chough
Richard's Pipit	Red-browed Finch	Welcome Swallow
Fairy Martin	Common Blackbird	Common Myna
Brolga		

(T) = Seen at Tullaroop Reservoir (h)= heard

John Alexander

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

Observations

Cuckoos: George Broadway heard his first Shining Bronze Cuckoo for the season on the last day of August. A Horsefield Cuckoo was seen at the top of Doveton St (John Alexander), while Horsefield Cuckoos appeared mid August in the Macedon area. (Bruce Donaldson).

Olive-backed Oriole in the Botanic Gardens (7/9). Visiting Geelong Members.

Robins: Six Flame Robins (two male) seen on the Mia Mia Track, and Red-capped Robins, usually dry country birds and rare in this district, have appeared around the same time in April for the past 3 years at our home in the Muckleford Forest (Alison Rowe). Rita Mills recalls them first appearing during the 1982 drought.

A pair of **Crescent Honeyeaters** were seen recently in Blakeley Road by Rita Mills. While these are new to this area in the past 3-4 years, Crescent Honeyeaters are permanent residents in Bruce Donaldson's garden at Macedon.

Wattles and Boronia Good year for wattles this year, particularly the Gold-dust Wattle (Hans Van Gemert). Gold Dust, Hedge, Rough and Ovens Wattles all doing well this year (Chris Morris). Boronia Gully, Irishtown has a splendid display this year (Richard Piesse).

There have been large numbers of **kangaroos** in paddocks to the left of Ross Drive. George Broadway

Chris Morris has noticed competition between nesting **Ravens and Magpies**.

Ann van Gemert has been "dive bombed", not by a magpie, but by a **White-winged Chough!**

Painted Quail and their scatchings in the grass at Newstead. John Alexander

Web News – request for photos.

Ern Perkins is working on a new webpage "Native Trees and Shrubs of the Mt Alexander Shire" and would be pleased to receive any relevant photos members might have - in as high as resolution as you can manage please. Ern 5472 3124.

Workshop -Native Vegetation Law and the Planning Scheme

Hosted by FOBIF, this workshop will be presented by lawyers from the Environmental Defenders Office, Vic. and held on Tuesday 17th October 2006, 10am-4pm. Learn about net gain, offsets, overlays, conservation significance, Native Vegetation Frameworks in the Mt Alexander Shire, and more. Nominal charge to cover costs. Booking is required. Contact: Frank Panter on 5470 5072.

From the Business Meeting 28/9/06

Welcome to new members: Bruce Sutherland, Lorraine Le Plastrier and Cathy Wheel.

- Cape Broom in butterfly area of Botanic Gardens is in flower and easily identified at present. Members willing to spend a small amount of their time pulling out some of the broom would be very much appreciated, particularly in the well-weeded areas.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

October 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.

Wed Oct 11. Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walk (5). All these walks depart from the carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 4pm sharp and return at 5.30pm. Contact: Geraldine Harris Ph 5474 2244.

Fri Oct 13. Wattles of the Box Ironbark Forest. Ern Perkins. UCA hall 8pm.

Sat Oct 14, Sun Oct 15. SEANA Campout at Maryborough. No club excursion but Castlemaine members are invited to attend the SEANA Campout activities. Registration fee \$20. **Those wishing to car pool on either day** should contact Ern Perkins 5472 3124 or Rita Mills 5472 4553 prior to or at the October meeting.

Thu Oct 26. Roadside Cleanup. Meet near Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, C'maine at 8.30am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact: Hans van Gemert. Ph 5472 1082.

Fri Nov 10. To be arranged.

Sat Nov 11. Black Hill. Leader: Albert Golden.

Fri Dec 8. Members Night.

Sat Dec 9. Christmas Outing – Crocodile Reserve Track.

Sat Jan 13 Dawn Breakfast – Chinaman's Point, Chewton.

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(Excursions).Ph.5472 3191
Geraldine Harris (Editor).....Ph. 5474 2244, PO Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450,
gedharris@castlemaine.net

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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