

Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2006

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists - 2006 - Celebrating 30 years

President's Report for 2005

Numbers of members for 2005 was over 80, some just receiving the Castlemaine Naturalist, and never actually attending a meeting, some coming irregularly as speakers and subjects interested them particularly, and some attending almost every meeting. Sadly the club is aging, and the need to interest younger people really needs to be addressed, or, despite good numbers now, the club will die. We've reached 30 years, and 3 members have been on the Committee all those thirty years. I have enjoyed it, and it has become very much part of my life, but new members are needed.

Subjects at the General Meetings have ranged from a trip to Sri Lanka with photographer Jason Edwards and a pelagic birding trip with Nigel Harland off the South-east Coast of Tasmania, to Mistletoes – when an off-the-cuff discussion with club members proved to be a very interesting evening. Lindy MacRaild, the speaker for the night, couldn't get the equipment she needed, and had to defer to a later date. A trip to a very interesting mistletoe spot at Inglewood with Ern Perkins followed on the next day.

We had another dawn breakfast in February, and visited a number of interesting sites in the district including Herons Reef with David Bannear, and further afield, such as our trip to Macedon Regional Park with Richard Piesse.

Several of us have taken part in SEANA campouts, and Lesley and Ern were actively involved in the recent ANN camp in the mountains.

We had a campout at Robinvale, and were taken to all sorts of interesting spots on those few days by Lesley and Ern, some of us joining them on the way there and/or back to see some more of the interesting places they have discovered on their travels.

We have taken part in the Castlemaine Heritage and Garden Festivals, again hosting walks around the district, and again held the ever popular Wednesday Evening Spring walks.

We have continued with the Broom pulls in the butterfly area of the gardens, and done some planting there too. We've also continued with the Roadside Cleanup, which only needs doing every 2 or 3 months now, and rescued plants that were being disturbed by the widening of a culvert near the Steiner school. Later, after the work was finished, the plants were replanted and are doing well. We've taken part in several surveys, including Kalimna Park plants in the forested area, and the grassland to the east, quadrats where DSE is doing fuel reduction burns and along Eureka Reef walking track. We've also taken part in the Threatened Species Network Swift Parrot surveys, and Debbie Worland in particular has kept a good record of the Swifties at the Golf Club. We took part in the BOCA bird challenge for about the 5th year in a row, but missed Ken and Maureen Dredge's contribution, as they moved away to near Swan Hill earlier in the year.

Frank and Ethyl Blake, foundation members of the club also moved away. They have settled in Shepparton to be near their daughter. Frank turned 90 late last year.

This year the winner of the Field Naturalists Award was a very well deserving Ashley Perry. According to her teacher she was a very easy choice.

We have voiced our concerns re the block in Erin court, C24, and the trees on the roadside at Tunnel Hill. Some, including myself, have become concerned that we are losing our way as a club and becoming far too involved politically in some of these things, which we feel is for the individual or for groups which are politically oriented. It is something which needs to be discussed at a club level.

We have discovered a few new plants, including the Slender Mint-bush at Smiths Reef, rediscovered the Grey-crowned Babblers; unfortunately found a couple of new weeds, and through Debbie we, and the Threatened Species network, have discovered things that were previously unknown about the Swifties feeding habits.

The Castlemaine Naturalist continues to be a source of interest and information. Geraldine is doing a fine job, and I know what it can be like toward the end of the month and still very few items have been contributed! Please be sure to support your newsletter, and congratulations, and my thanks to Geraldine and those who have contributed. It has been a great pleasure for me to be able to just settle down and read what someone else has edited!

Finally my grateful thanks to the committee, especially to George Broadway, as secretary, Hans van Gemert as treasurer, Ern Perkins as mentor when called upon, and every one else for just being there and having their say. I feel that we have had a very interesting and informative year.

Rita Mills,
President, Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Plants of the Mt Alexander Shire Screensaver and New Logo Celebrating 30 years

What better way to celebrate our birthday than with a gift to all members of a Screensaver CD, to promote our local native plants? Ern Perkins has used photos, provided by members and other local photographers, to create "Plants of the Mt Alexander Shire" containing over 200 images of local indigenous plants that can be shown as a continuous slideshow on your computer screen.

The CD has been further enhanced by the use of our new coloured club logo featuring Nodding Greenhoods, *Pterostylis nutans*, on the CD cover and on the CD. This elegant new logo was drawn and painted by Rita Mills. (see black and white version on front page)

Our new Screensaver CD comes as part of all 2006 memberships. Members can either, pay their fees and collect their free screensaver at a meeting or send an additional \$2 postage with your 2006 subscription for postal delivery. The club intends to supply some free copies to select community groups for use as an educational tool and additional copies can be purchased for \$6 (\$2 extra for postage). This Screensaver is an ideal gift for anyone wanting to learn to recognize and name our local indigenous plants. Thank you Rita, and Ern, and Nigel Harland for the suggestion to make it a gift for all members.

Gower School Bird Report 26/12/05 – Philip West

2.15pm – 3.30pm. Warm and slight breeze.

Magpie	Brown Tree-creeper	Fuscous Honeyeater
White-browed Babbler	Jacky Winter	Grey Shrike-thrush
Willy Wagtail	Common Bronzewing	House Sparrow (10-12)
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater		

Pool in dry creek bed at edge of farmland.

Eastern Rosella	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Fuscous Honeyeater
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Spotted Pardalote	Red Wattlebird
Sacred Kingfisher	Grey Shrike-thrush	Common Bronzewing
Peaceful Dove	Red-rumped Parrot	Little Cuckoo-shrike

Observations in the Otways: An Otway Black Snail and a 20cm earthworm; coming into the house of a friend at Wye River – koalas and King Parrots; and under the house – a Satin Bowerbird. Richard Piesse

Newsletter Articles Wanted

If it interested you, others will be interested also. Articles, reports and observations can be sent to Geraldine Harris, P O Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5472 2244 or emailed to gharris@castlemaine.net

The Imperial Hairstreak, *Jalmenus evagoras*. Larvae and pupae on Wirilda, *Acacia retinodes*

Jenny noticed several nests of all stages of the butterfly on small bushes of Wirilda (*A. retinodes*) when she was weeding with a Landcare group along Forest Creek, Chewton on 18th February. There were also smaller numbers on *Acacia dealbata* and *A. mearnsii*. The many adults flying round the bushes draw one's attention to the presence of the insect. This particular species has never been found on Wirilda before, I believe, although another species of the same genus do use it as a foodplant. The old pupal cases of dozens of previously emerged specimens on the small Wirilda bushes, clustered together and attended by hundreds of small black ants (*Iridomyrmex sp.*), are clearly visible, which suggests that there have been continuous emergences since late spring. The butterflies will continue to breed until stopped by cold weather. You can still see them there if you're interested.

There is a large colony of this butterfly near Malmesbury, on the Daylesford road, from about Zig-Zag Road to the Glenluce/Vaughan turnoff, mainly on the left. This time the foodplants are *Acacia melanoxylon* as well as *Acacia dealbata* and *A. mearnsii*. They seem always to prefer small bushes rather than large.

This year, I have also seen a specimen of the Imperial Hairstreak at Glenluce Springs, but couldn't find where it came from. However, as it was a fresh female, there must be a small colony there. I haven't seen it at Vaughan since 2001. This could be because its host bushes of *mearnsii* have grown too big. Perhaps the ants do not venture above a certain height. I've tried to introduce the butterfly into the garden here by tying twigs of larvae and pupae (with the ants) to what I think are suitable *Acacia* bushes, but they will have none of it, hang around for a few days and fly off in disgust. This probably just shows how silly humans are to imagine they can influence Nature!

Tony Morton

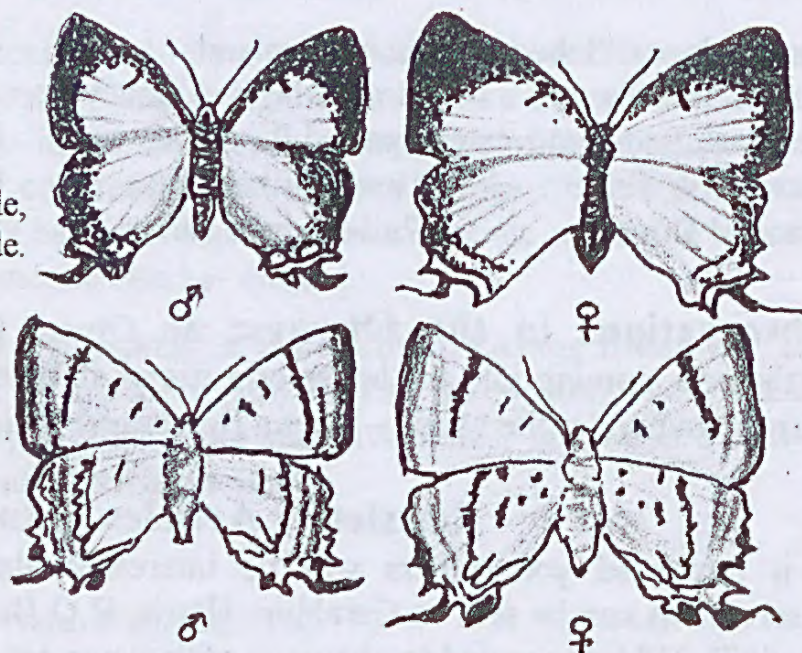
Imperial Hairstreak

Jalmenus evagoras

Male upperside, Female upperside,

Male underside, Female underside.

(Drawings: G Harris)



Habitat and large trees are the key to survival.

Dr. Todd Soderquist addressed a large audience at the February meeting of the Newstead Landcare Group and the message that he brought to the gathering was that “habitat is the big point of survival” – and for some of our large endangered birds and rarer mammals, “large trees populations, in particular, are the key to their survival”.

There are only 20-30 pairs of **Powerful Owls** in the Box-Ironbark country and large treed areas are so important to their survival that these owls are now used as indicators of large tree site hot spots.

Why are large-sized tree populations so important to Powerful Owls?

Powerful Owls roost in trees for long periods but they actually use lots of different size trees as roosting sites. They are specific in their nesting site requirements but they only need one nesting sight (July-November). What numbers of large trees provide, that is so important to Powerful Owls, is suitable prey. Powerful Owls do not like to eat things from the ground and pellet analysis (regurgitation from the crop) provides clear evidence that their prey preference, Flying Foxes, Possums, Cockatoos and Sugar Gliders, all prefer large trees to nest in. Prey numbers are down because large tree numbers are down.

Powerful Owls need large areas as a home range. They were once thought to require 800-1000 hectares but research has shown their range to be closer to 5000 hectares of habitat. They do move into open paddocks to get cockatoos and possums – but along corridors.

Survival: They are very rare and difficult to work with from a research point of view. Leg bands have proved difficult to detect because of their low leg feathers. DNA from feathers is presently being used successfully to study dispersal, longevity etc. If we could guarantee 89% survival then we would need ten pairs in this region to maintain the population, a lower rate of 85% survival would require 35 pairs. 100 pairs would ensure their survival. The same figures apply to Barking Owls.

Powerful owls are extremely easily disturbed. Sightings should be reported to DSE to enable them to manage and protect sites.

Barking Owls

Distinquished by their bright yellow eyes, vertical bars and large talons, and unusual barking or screaming woman calls, Barking Owls are extremely uncommon in Victoria at present. They sound very much like a fox/dog but never make one or three calls, only two.

They too suffer as we remove large trees from landscape because they prefer arboreal mammals such as Ringtails, Tuans, and Sugar Gliders as prey.

Todd is presently working in the Pilliga State Forest (between Dubbo and Narrabri) with the largest known population of Barking Owls. His research shows that where they occur is closely determined by soil fertility and radio

tracking has shown a single female can require 6000 hectares (60 sq. kilometres) of territory.

Masked owls and **Barn Owls** are difficult to tell apart. Masked Owls are extremely rare in Victoria at present. Barn Owls are the most successful and widespread owls. They use edge habitat – forests but open country too – and prey on smaller prey (rat size and smaller).

Phascogales (sometimes known as Tuans in Victoria)

Same problem – Their woodland habitat is threatened by agriculture and fragmentation. Phascogales like large trees and don't like small trees, particularly. Although only rat sized mammals, they require a large area of approximately 40 hectares. Females in a healthy habitat will avoid capture in cage traps at base of tree (or by predators) by staying in tree or moving along in the upper storey.

Their boom/bust type of reproduction means that in a bad year (fires, cold weather or predators) enough may not survive to maintain the species.

A simple, efficient and cheap method of monitoring phascogales can be made with food dye patch on white paper strip placed in open ended tunnel-style box – the animal runs through and leaves nice footprints. If you leave them too long, many tracks can be difficult to decipher. This method enables identification of hot spot populations and the most suitable habitat areas for establishment of core populations.

The Solution: Nesting boxes will encourage populations but they are not the solution; trees are the preferred solution. Phascogales and such animals require connectivity. They require corridors between fragmented woodland. They require midstorey acacias and plants that enable small mammals and birds to move about and feed without going to the ground, especially if predators are about. And most important of all, we need to grow large trees that, in 150 years, will be the nectar producers that supply this food.

Geraldine Harris (from notes taken at the meeting).

Culprit Identified.

Do you remember the fluffy tails Albert Golden found on the ground? According to Todd Soderquist, the culprit was most likely a Barking Owl. Usually they take a bite and eat, sometimes they eat the tail too, but more often the adult will clip the tail off and drop it to the ground below.

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

Observations

- 4/2 House garden, Barkers Creek. Watched a female Mistletoebird wind as much spider's web (from a tree branch) as she could manage around her beak before flying off to add it to her nest. Geraldine Harris
- 10/2 7pm – A Crested Shrike-tit at the birdbath. We've never seen one before! Alison Rowe
- Grey Box and Yellow Gum beginning to flower well here and reports of snow and bitterly cold weather in Hobart may be reason why Swift Parrots have arrived a month earlier this year. Deb Worland/ Nina Cole
- What do people know about cicadas of this district? Ian Higgins' list of yodelling Red Eyes, Black Squeakers, and Tickers, prompted Enid Chapman to recall her childhood in Sydney and a number of cicadas named "Green Grocers, Yellow Mondays, Black Princes and Floury Bakers".
- A stick insect resting across two pavers, one stone coloured and the other red, was coloured stone and red also. Ern Perkins
- Judith McNay was curious to find out if a Blue Tongue Lizard and a newly arrived Central or Bearded Dragon would be compatible? Answer: yes.
- 23/2 In the Castlemaine Gardens –
 - a pair of Nankeen Night Herons around the lake for the past four weeks; &
 - a tortoise under the bridge – last sighted two years ago. George Broadway
 - White Ibis. Fay Noble
 - Darters and Cormorants on the island. Richard Piesse
- White-necked Heron on dam in Blakeley Road -also Weebills and Brown-headed Honeyeaters. Rita Mills

Web News

- Ray Bradfield Memorial Excursion Photos
- Reports from the ANN Get-together in the High Country, Jan. 2006.
(LINKS/ SEANA)

From The Business Meeting 23/2/06

Welcome to new members: Dorothy Bessant, Beverley Mary Hill, Helen Laycock, and Robyn Lewis.

- A 6ft X 6 ft screen has been purchased for use at meetings (Jan. Meeting)
- 200 Trees ordered for National Tree Day Planting – July 30 (Jan. Meeting)
- Pyrenees Tree Removal – CFNC to remain on mailing list.
- Request by member for excursions to be held on different weekend than the general meeting to avoid back-to-back trips by distant members wanting to attend both events. Held over for consideration at general meeting.
- Possibility of club members working with schools to promote conservation, to be discussed at general meeting.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme – March 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 Mar 10. Continents Apart: Landscapes and Plants of Alpine Europe and Australasia. Phil Collier. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Mar 11. Bird Survey on Zhale property at Baringhup - to commence monitoring effect of large scale tree planting. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 3pm sharp. BYO tea, seat, and binoculars. Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph. 5472 3124.

Sat Mar 18. Roadside Cleanup. Meet near Tait Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 8.30am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact: Hans van Gemert, Ph 5472 1082.

Fri Apr 7. Revegetation Techniques - John Anthony (Environmental Officer, MASC). UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Apr 8. Revegetation Sites on the Guildford Plateau. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 1.30pm sharp. BYO afternoon tea. Leader: George Broadway, Ph 5472 2513.

Fri May 11. Dingo Farming. Tehree Gordon. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat May 12. Cobblers Gully. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St at 1.30pm sharp. BYO afternoon tea. Leader: Richard Piesse. Ph 5472 3191.

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

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

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

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

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

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