

# Castlemaine Naturalist

July 2007

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Red-tip Greenhood

*Pterostylis sp affinis parviflora*

**Reminder: Club Development Workshop – taking us into the future. This Saturday, July 14th.** Facilitator: Maurie Crooke. Explore future directions that will ensure the continued effectiveness of our club. Chewton Community Centre, Main Street, Chewton. 10am til 4pm Parking at rear of building. George Broadway, Ph 5472 2513.

## **A Fabulous Holiday in East Gippsland - Richard Piesse**

Early in May I stayed with friends on a small organic farm "Jacarri" in the Brodribb River valley at Goongerah, approximately 70 kms north of Orbost. We lived in an ecologically sustainable living space, a two-bedroom cottage with solar power, a wood stove, dry composting loo etc. Water is supplied to the property from the river using an amazing water wheel placed on the riverbank.

The property is close to the Errinundra National Park and the surrounding forest and other wilderness areas. Unfortunately there is still far too much evidence of logging activities right up to the boundaries of the National Park.

Bird sightings from the property and up in the forest:

Australian Magpie

Bell Miner

Galah

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

Welcome Swallow

Pied Currawong

Blue Wren

Superb Lyrebird

Australian Raven

Eastern Rosella

King Parrot

Wood Duck

Mountain Duck

Kookaburra

White-eared Honeyeater

Wonga Pigeon

Plants in flower in the local bush and up in the higher forest:

Senecio sp., Goodenia ovata, Cassinia aculeata, Xerochrysum viscosum, Acacia terminalis, Pultenaea juniperina, Epacris impressa, Hibbertia aspera

Other plants of interest in the forests:

Black Olive-berry, Mountain Plum Pine, Gippsland Waratah, Sassafras, Holly Lomatia, Alpine Pepper, Victorian Christmas Bush, Native Currant

Eucalypts found in this part of the state:

Eucalyptus cypellocarpa, viminalis, nitens, delegatensis, dives, radiata, croagingolensis (Gippsland Peppermint), obliqua, globoidea (White Stringybark), fastigata (Brown Barrel), pauciflora, polyanthemos, angophoroides (Apple-topped Box), denticulata (Errinundra Shining Gum).

We returned home via the Deddick River, McKillops Bridge, Gelantipy, Buchan, etc and came across an area with the Suggan Buggan Mallee (*E. saxatilis*) near Little River Gorge.

### **Field Trip to Smiths Reef Dam, 9/6/07 – Rita Mills**

After the rain we were anticipating finding things to be very different from what we have been seeing in the bush over recent months and years. Certainly the shrubs are going to take a long time coming back, but there was a flush of green that was very heartening, especially finding that it was not *all* weeds!

We found thousands of orchid leaves, a few flowers, and lots of interesting fungi, some of which I don't remember ever seeing before. It was interesting to see the little orange Mycenae growing without being in moss, and I wondered if their patch of moss had died, because I don't remember ever seeing this species growing on its own.

The Greenhoods in flower were - Large Autumn, *Pterostylus revoluta* and Red-tip *P. sp. aff. parviflora*. One of the Tall Greenhoods, *P. melagramma* was well in bud, and there were leaves of several other species all over the place. We found leaves of Beard-orchids, and probably Spider Orchids, too. The area warrants another visit.

### **Some things change other don't – Gil Smith**

In 1980 when we bought in Colles Rd there was the Knoblock's old house (since burnt down), the P.O. Garage (since bulldozed) and our little cottage. The cottage now has the company of two very large houses on the same 5 acres and over a dozen houses on the Colles Road area. The good thing that stayed the same was the joy I had when I saw a family of 12 Choughs in the area. It's five years since I've seen them.

*Editor's Note: Gil sold his block of land on Colles Road five years ago and made this observation on a recent visit to Castlemaine*

## **Thala Beach Lodge overlooking the Coral Sea – Tony Morton**

Thala Beach Lodge consists of some 500 acres of land running up to a point overlooking the Coral Sea. The resort and lodges are built on this point and go down towards the beach. Formerly a cane growing area, a strip of the original coastal rainforest was preserved to protect the cane from the sea. Thirty years ago, the present owners cleared the cane and allowed the land to regenerate naturally. The Lodge was built eight years ago. Three gardeners, all naturalists (plants, birds and mammals), have been assisting by revegetating the land with indigenous species of trees, grasses and other plants specifically to attract and support native fauna. Some lantana and other weeds are allowed to flourish as they are a great attraction for butterflies and birds. We spent five days here in early June 2007.

*List of birds seen by me in these grounds, 30km N of Cairns on 3rd June 2007 (with the help of a couple of Twitchers):*

Orange-footed Scrubfowl	Striated Heron
White-bellied Sea-eagle	Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove
Spotted Turtle-Dove	Peaceful Dove
Rainbow Lorikeet	White-rumped Swiftlet
Sacred Kingfisher	Rainbow Bee-eater
Lovely Fairy-wren	Helmeted Friarbird
White-throated Honeyeater	Yellow Honeyeater
Northern Fantail	Spangled Drongo
Yellow Oriole	Figbird
Varied Triller	Black Butcherbird
Mistletoebird	Metallic Starling

Bush Stone-curlew (a motionless pair, knees not noticeably thick!)  
Osprey (female on *disgracefully* untidy nest on telegraph pole with two young, male bringing them fish.)  
Yellow-bellied Sunbird (also saw the delicate nest lined with spiders' web)  
(Common Mynahs seen in Port Douglas – yuk!)

At least 48 species of Butterfly were seen during this time, including Birdwings and Ulysses.

Several Cane Toads seen around. Hundreds come out in wet weather, we are told – double yuk!

Wife stroked a Paper Wasps' nest in spite of warning. Big mistake! I can still run faster so only had a few stings. I'm told wasp stings can help with one's rheumatism, but have not noticed any difference. I prefer Voltaren.

## Glen Innes and Bingara Birds – Rita Mills

We had decided to stay a couple of days to have a look around Glen Innes and were advised that if we wanted to see birds the best place was out at Beardy Creek Reservoir, only about 10 minutes drive from where we were staying at the Poplars Caravan Park. There were the usual Black Swans, Coots and Pacific Black Ducks, but there were also Little Pied and Great Black Cormorants and Darters, Hoary Headed and Little Australasian Grebes, Intermediate Egrets and Royal Spoonbills, and a few Hardheads and Shovellers, plus a White-bellied Sea-eagle perched on a post in the water over towards the far bank - and this isn't the whole list.

Our next stopping place, Bingara, southwest of Inverell, was also recommended by son-in-law Bryan. Birdos from the Tamworth area have set up numbers of bird trails, some over 70 kms in length, along the valley that runs through the Nandewar Ranges from the Gwyder Highway down past Manila. There are leaflets available to pinpoint the best spots for birds, and historical and geological notes as well (the area is well known for gold and gemstones).

About 6 kilometres before Bingara we turned off the main road into Whitlow Road and followed Bingara Bird Route 4 for about 10 kms. I walked along the short walking track on the creek, but it was dry, there were very few birds, and I didn't find the Spotted Bower Bird or its bower that was reported to be there. We could have followed that route for 54 kms, through Myall Creek, an infamous place where a tribe of aborigines were massacred, but where some justice was at last carried out, as the white men responsible were tried and hanged.

When we got into Bingara we booked into the Riverside Caravan Park, between the Gwyder River and Halls Creek, which had lots of trees I would love to have had in my garden - Weeping Boobiolla (I tried to grow one once - unsuccessfully).

On my walk along the creek next morning I made quite an impressive list of birds on a thirty-minute walk, while the clothes were washing. My list included Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Blue-faced, Yellow-faced, Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, King Parrots, and two parrots I thought were King Parrots at first, but which proved to be Red-winged Parrots, but I didn't see the Turquoise Parrots that Bryan had told me should be there.

I would love to stay in the Barraba/Bingara area for a while during a good year. There are about 15 bird routes in the valley, lots of interesting

geological sites, and the people we met were friendly and welcoming. And there was an Antique shop for Doug in Bingara!

Our last two-day stay was at Coonabarabran - a last minute decision as usual - and spent the full day out on the road and in Barradine. On the road we had stopped at two or three places, and I was surprised to find a 4x4 suddenly pull over behind us where I had been watching some Double-barred Finches and a Satin Flycatcher. It proved to be a couple from Wollongong who had been on a bird camp near Wellington and were continuing on for another couple of weeks on their own. They'd spotted the binoculars at the ready, of course!

### **The joys of birds wherever you live – Gil Smith**

We live in Melbourne's western suburbs – luckily, opposite a local oval. I've always kept a list of different birds I've seen in the areas I've lived but after reading Bill Oddie's *Little Black Birdbook* and Sean Dooley's *The Big Twitch*, at Christmas, I've done my best to keep daily records with numbers etc.

The major surprise is we've had two Australian Hobbies visit the eucalypts (cream-white and red flowers) opposite our house since New Year's Day. My enthusiasm has spilled over to my non-birding next-door neighbour who is now frequently out the front with his bino's looking for the Hobbies.

The rest of my family are finally becoming interested in birds but are not aware of the two major bird debates:

1. Which bird has the best song, Australian Magpie, or Butcher Bird? and
2. Should you feed or not feed birds in your backyard?

My wife bought me a native seed block for Christmas. For three months it has sat in the front yard largely ignored by all except the occasional Sparrow. Now, with the above-mentioned list I became aware that the "gums" in the front have been attracting large numbers of Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets. It also became apparent that they were aware of the neighbour's fruit trees and were using a dead tree in my back yard (result of the drought) as a surveillance post for the best fruit. I moved the seed block to the back yard and now regularly have up to a dozen Rainbow Lorikeets in the tree at times.

My children have a large collection of pets and therefore a large array of water dishes in the backyard. We all spend lots of time admiring the beautiful Rainbow Lorikeets and occasionally one of us realises we also have one or two of Musk Lorikeets in the tree. Well today, I also added two

Small Lorikeets who actually landed on the ground to drink from one of the water bowls.

Other notable visitors to our garden are Magpies, Mudlarks and Willy Wagtails that come for drinks and baths: New Holland and White-plumed Honeyeaters, and Brush and Red Wattlebirds feed on our introduced "Chinese Lantern" plants, and occasionally a Crested Pigeon drinks from a dish. And last week we had a special visit – 20-30 Fork-tailed Swifts flew over the backyard.

### **Swift Parrot Survey Update**

"...there are a lot of records for the NSW central coast and Swift Parrots have been sighted as far up as Toowoomba.....

... there is a trend which shows how important coastal habitat is to swifties in times of drought. We have certainly learnt a lot more since the first national surveys about 10 years ago.

We now have 985 volunteers on our database. The number of volunteers and the amount of communication between volunteers has also increased over the years. The Recovery Team for the species has been discussing the idea of forming a 'friends of the swift parrot' group. Forming a group is recognition of the long-term involvement of volunteers and the importance of communication between people involved in surveying for this species. The benefit of being recognized as a group is also that funding applications and projects can be planned on behalf of the group. This should broaden the number of activities we can undertake."

Belinda Cooke  
Swift Parrot Recovery Coordinator

### **Seen recently in the *Weekly Telegraph***

'Birds are picking up cigarette butts and using the smoke to fumigate their wings of parasites, experts said. Rooks have been spotted swooping on to the tracks at Exeter's St David's railway station in Devon and placing their wings over the smoke to collect the fumes underneath.'

**Welcome to new members:** Helen Robertson, Elaine Bayes, Damien Cook, Talia Madigan, and Rosemary and Peter Turner

## October 19,20,21. Club Campout in the Grampians

Members are invited to spend a relaxed weekend at Kiah exploring the northern Grampians with Geraldine and Geoff Harris. Accommodation choices include: in the house, bush camping on an adjoining block away from the house or at Old Dadswell Town cabins on another adjoining block of land. Situated close to Goulton Gorge Mt Zero, Mt Stapleton, Hollow Mountain and Roses Gap, there are plenty of interesting sites to explore as well as the 700 acres of easy-walking in heathland surrounding the house. Evenings at the house, with a shared dinner on Saturday night. Expressions of interest and enquiries to Geraldine at 5474 2244.

### Observations

- ✓ Wire-leaf Mistletoe growing on Mt Morgan Wattle. George Broadway
- ✓ A Sugar Glider was seen harassing Fairy Wrens in a callistemon - then it lunged and we presume (but didn't actually see) caught and ate one. Bruce Donaldson. (Brush tails will eat meat – Virginia Bartlam; Ringtails will eat a chop bone - Mandy; Ringtails eat spiders – Rita)
- ✓ Cranberry Heath in flower and evidence of lilies and orchids to come in Poverty Gully. Richard Piesse
- ✓ 30 -60 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos along Forest Creek. White-browed Babbler family at Sandon. Natasha Harris
- ✓ Red-browed Firetail Finches feeding in garden. Virginia
- ✓ Worm Farm – Yellow Robins eyeing off the worms. Bruce Donaldson
- ✓ Six Flame Robins on Gully Track, Hooded Robin on Sth German Track, White-plumed Honeyeaters returning. Still no Fuscous Honeyeaters. John Alexander
- ✓ Flocks of Red-browed Firetail Finches and a first sighting of a female Mistletoebird at Johnstone Street. Natalie de Maccus
- ✓ Tasmanian Silvereyes in Blakeley Road. Rita Mills
- ✓ Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos at Campbells Creek. Peter Bassett
- ✓ A large kangaroo under continuous attack from two stray dogs took shelter in the dam. The attack continued until the dogs were frightened off. The kangaroo eventually climbed out of the water and remained vigilant for some time afterwards. Several people have suggested that the kangaroo was probably luring the dogs into the water to drown them. Geoff Harris
- ✓ 1/7 Owlet Nightjar at dusk in tree in Sparks Road, Chewton. N Harris

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

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## July 2007

**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.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or 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 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

**VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES**

**Fri Jul 13. Global Warming and What We Can Do About It.** Terry White, founder of Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance. UCA Hall, 8pm.

**Sat Jul 14. Club Development Workshop.** Facilitator: Maurie Crooke. Explore future directions that will ensure the continued effectiveness of our club. Chewton Community Centre, Main Street, Chewton. 10am til 4pm, followed by Happy Hour. Lunch and refreshments provided. Parking at rear of building. Past, present and potential members all welcome. George Broadway, Ph 5472 2513

**Sat Aug 4 & Sun Aug 5. National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey.** Contact Geraldine Harris, Ph 5474 2244

**Fri Aug 10. Seagrass Beds of Western Port Bay.** Graham Watson (see Midland Express article 12/6/07) UCA Hall, 8pm.

**Sat Aug 11. Field Trip: Conglomerate Gully on the outskirts of Riddells Creek.** Joy Wetherill 0417 554 954. NOTE EARLY START: 11am sharp car pool from car park opposite motel in Duke St or meet at Riddells Creek bakery at 12noon. Picnic or pie lunch at start of walk followed by a 3 km circuit: interesting plants and geological features. Joy will provide afternoon tea afterwards at her home.

**Thu Aug 16. Annual Broom Pull.** Working bee pulling out Cape Broom seedlings from the northern end of the Botanic Gardens - 9am til 12noon. Parking at corner of Mary St & Froomes Rd Castlemaine. BYO morning tea and gloves. This particular bushland is home of a population of Eltham Copper Butterflies and this is an ongoing activity for the club to maintain their habitat. Some extra hands would be appreciated. Contact : Rita Mills 5472 4553

**Sat Aug 25. Roadside Cleanup.** Meet near Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, C'maine. at 9am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact: Hans van Gemert. Ph 5472 1082.

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