

# Castlemaine Naturalist

February 2006  
Vol. 31.1 #329



Creamy ( 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday) Candles  
*Stackhousia monogyna*

## Castlemaine Field Naturalists - Celebrating 30 years

### Member's Night – 9/12/05

A couple of the highlights of our member's night were the items by Deb Worland and Robyn Garnett.

Debbie Worland showed her remarkable video of Swift Parrots feeding in the trees and on the ground at the Castlemaine Golf Course. This video, with very little explanation from Debbie, provided convincing evidence at the recent C24 (Planning Scheme Amendment) hearing. The video also included White-browed Babblers, Crested Shrike-tit, Musk Lorikeets and Purple-crowned Lorikeets.

Robin Garnett once worked in Canberra developing science exhibitions – one significant exhibition was 'BHP Wild Science – Characteristics that have evolved in nature and been paralleled in technology.' Robyn brought engineers, naturalists and physicists together and talked to them about the ways in which nature has inspired invention and was able to show that some of our most up-to-date technology was used by Nature first.

For example, when burrs stuck in George de Mestral's clothes while walking his dog, he studied the burrs and saw the little hooks. He talked with weavers and discovered that by using loosely woven pieces, one left uncut and one cut through, he was able to make Velcro (velour, crotchet = Velcro). The design was patented in 1955 and today is used world wide on shoes, jackets, tree guards, to hold astronauts against the edge of spacecrafts, and in the Middle East to hold riders in the saddle when riding camels.

Someone else, interested in the way pythons were able to catch prey even with their eyes masked, discovered a series of pits along the top of their jaw that are able to sense heat (infrared detectors). Infrared rays have since been used to help find people buried in rubble after earthquakes, to track enemy aircraft and in navy tracking research. Moths that like to lay eggs in conifers after they've been burnt have infrared sensors and some butterflies have them so they don't bask too long and therefore get too hot.

Geraldine Harris

## **Report on C24 Panel Recommendations - Hans van Gemert**

Late November the Panel handed down its report on the Mount Alexander Shire C24 Planning Scheme Amendment and at the December Council meeting the report was released for public exhibition. It is over 150 pages long, quite digestible and set out clearly.

As background information each municipality is required by State legislation to review its Planning Scheme and its Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) every 3 years. Because the review has already been taking place for several years it is actually six since the adoption of the previous scheme for Mount Alexander. A very large number of submissions were received to the Council's proposed amendment and, because a number of these submissions were not agreed to, the Minister has to appoint an Independent Panel to conduct public hearings under clearly defined guidelines. These hearings took place last September and closely followed on from C25 hearings (Happy Valley/Moonlight Flat) by the same Panel last August. The Council is not obliged to accept the Panel's recommendations but usually does and the Minister can intervene if required.

Our Club, along with FOBIF and other environmental groups, made submissions about the inadequacy of residential land forecasts and the need to prevent vegetated areas from being rezoned to residential while suitable cleared land is available. We were pleased to be able to call on Dr Jim Radford as an expert witness on the importance of protecting and conserving biodiversity in the Box-Ironbark Forest region. Several members of our Club also made private submissions including one from Debbie Worland on the need to preserve the habitat of the Swift Parrot. This was illustrated with a short video of the birds feeding in the trees and on the ground, near one of their known roosting sites, at Muckleford.

The Panel's recommendations can be summarized as follows: all of our requests have been agreed to. It is especially satisfying that the Panel concurs with our suggestion that it is premature to indicate on certain plans which areas are proposed for rezoning until the necessary studies have been completed.

The Report is available on CD for \$5.00 and the Club has a copy which can be borrowed. The newly elected Council has not yet discussed the report but is expected to do so by March 2006.

### **Road Safety and Trees – Hans van Gemert**

(Members will be required to vote on this at the February Meeting)

Last year our club, along with many other organizations and individuals, lodged an objection when VicRoads applied for a Planning Permit to remove 110 trees along the Pyrenees Highway between Elphinstone and Chewton. Subsequently, VicRoads amended their application to reduce the number of trees to be cut

down to 70. Last November, the Mount Alexander Shire Council rejected the application. VicRoads has now lodged an application for a review of that decision with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

At the January Committee Meeting it was decided that we should continue our objection and request to be heard at VCAT. That decision was not unanimous as several Committee members believe the Club should not oppose the application while others believe that, where the removal of native vegetation is concerned, we should express an opinion. As the deadline for notice of participation at VCAT expires on February 3, it was necessary to indicate our intention before there was an opportunity for the membership to make its wishes known. It is therefore proposed to place this matter on the Agenda for the Annual General Meeting in February. This discussion will result in either an endorsement of the current position or in a notification of withdrawal of our participation.

### **Political Involvement – Nigel Harland**

After 30 years of operation, it is perhaps a good time to reflect on where we are as a club. There are a number of subjects which need consideration and it would probably be better to deal with them in manageable chunks rather than trying to consider everything at the same time. As a first subject, we could perhaps deal with the involvement of the club in political matters.

Over the last 12 months the club has been involved in a number of political matters and we have taken them quite a long way. There are the C24 and C25 issues, where we have made submissions on behalf of the Club and they have been successful. We are currently involved in the matter of culling trees on the Pyrenees Highway. It is not my intention here to mount arguments in favour of or against such involvement by the Club, but to ask members to consider such involvement.

It is possible for the Club to continue an active approach or we can decide to become less active. There are many organizations involved in such matters and we should decide whether we want to adopt a similar style. It is possible for us to continue with our current policy, we can back off totally or we can become more selective.

The next meeting is the AGM and it would probably not be a good idea to get bogged down in this type of discussion. I suggest that members give the matter due consideration and we can include it on the agenda for the March meeting.

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

## **Field Naturalists Award at Secondary College 2005**

According to her teacher, Ashley Perry was an easy choice. Ashley was enrolled in the environmental unit of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and was outstanding in her attendance and excellent work ethic. She made an enthusiastic contribution in a number of areas including Clean up Australia day, bird watching, tree planting and the follow-up watering of the plants and was an energetic contributor in recycling and sustainability activities. Congratulations, Ashley.

## **The Birds Australia National Congress in 2005.**

The Birds Australia Annual Scientific Congress and Campout held in Bendigo the first week in October was judged to be a great success, by whatever way one measures these things. For a start over 180 people registered, whereas 150 was budgeted for which shows good promotion; then Birds Australia – Victoria Region who organized and hosted the event were financially in credit due to careful budgeting plus wide ranging sponsorship from Bendigo Business Houses, The City of Greater Bendigo, Government Authorities and Universities. Members of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club played a large part arranging these activities.

The Lieutenant Governor, Lady Southey, a generous friend of Birds Australia, was Guest of Honour at the Dinner and gave an inspirational speech.

Other highlights were the Civic Reception at the Bendigo Art Gallery, a perfect setting to showcase the coming week of scientific papers starting with the Keynote address by Professor Richard Kingsford of N.S.W. University. Themes for each session were based on topics relevant to Bendigo's location. There were 30 spoken presentations, 15 posters, and two book launches over two days followed by the traditional four days Campout trips in the district. The high quality of presentations from students was an encouraging feature. Concern for wetlands, river flows, waterbird communities featured strongly; not forgetting quantitative measures of decline of birds of woodlands and mallee over 20 years. All in all an enjoyable and informative occasion even if the subject matter is frightening when one realizes that recent work in northern Victoria suggests that birds communities crash when the wooded vegetation in the landscape falls below a threshold level. And this is before taking climate change into account.

Chris Morris

### **Vale Enid Hall**

Enid Hall was a valued and interested member of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club for a considerable time. A memorial service and interment were held in the Chewton Cemetery on Sunday January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006.

## **Breakfast with the Birds – 5/1/06**

It was quite a cool start to the day for the Dawn Breakfast out at South German Mine – quite a few of us had to get our heads around the fact that it was “South German Mine” which is to the north of “North British Mine” – not a good thing to try and sort out on an empty stomach! But we arrived. At first we could see very little in the way of birds, other than Crested Pigeons sitting on the power lines, but we were impressed with the way the planted trees have grown in the year or so since our last visit.

When we settled down to breakfast in a sunny spot at a picnic table we began to see quite a number of birds, including a family of Little Grebes, Welcome Swallows and down near the bank of the dam among the Peppercorns some wrens and pardalotes were bathing or getting their breakfast.

Rita Mills

(Editors Note: 32 different species were recorded.)

## **Summer Observations from Alison.**

At the height of the heat on New Year's Eve when it was 44C in the shade here, I was surprised to find at least 15 Spotted Pardalotes standing around in the shade of my verandah overhang. Most of them were more or less motionless and could be approached to within a metre or so. Obviously with their small body mass, it was just too hot out in the forest.

19/1. Two juvenile Diamond Firetails were just bathing in my birdbath. I've only ever seen adult ones here before (and even these not that often).

25/01 9:20am. Two Sacred Kingfishers right outside my window now, intermittently jumping into and splashing in the birdbath. One male, one female. (Diamond Firetail, Red-browed Finches, Fuscous Honeyeaters, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Common Bronzewing, Yellow-footed Antechinus also in view.) No wonder I never get enough work done!

27/1. I also saw a pair of Wood Ducks by the side of the Castlemaine-Maldon Rd., not far from the turn off, complete with a number of little ducklings.

Then on the same trip, after turning into Pullans Rd, not far along, two little quails crossed the road in front of me. I've never seen these before. Do you have any idea what species they might be?

31/1. We actually saw at least 9 Red-browed Finches here in the garden round the birdbath the other day, the most we've ever seen together. I have seen the Diamond Firetails doing the seed-stripping activity you describe (See Red-browed Finches in Observations).

Alison Rowe

## **“Fires are a natural occurrence and we are always going to have them.”**

“Fires are a natural occurrence and we are always going to have them” was how David Hanscombe began his talk to members at the Australian Plants Society Quarterly Gathering in the Grampians in June 2005 – ‘Fires in the Grampians’. “We must look on fires as just resetting the clock”, he said, “and high intensity fires, when they occur, take longer to recover.” In view of the recent devastating fires in the Grampians and other parts of Victoria and Australia, it is important to keep this fact in mind. While we would prefer these fires not to have occurred, and regret the enormous losses suffered to people, plants and animals, there is much to be learnt from the recent fires and still more as the recovery process begins.

David went on to explain that it was his job to minimize damage and put fires out. This usually takes the form of a mineral earth break made with bulldozers.

Some other methods used to fight fires include:

Using fire to fight fire in the form of back burns, control burns to reduce fuel (varied results) and handcrews to create small breaks.

Helicopters used are able to take up 9000 litres in 40 seconds and drop that water in a number of different spots. Prior to such dumps the areas must be cleared because the water is dropped with tremendous force and could cause injury.

Chemical control, in the form of fertilizer (Phoscheck) with a thickening and a colouring agent, is also used. It retards burning and induces smouldering but can result in natives being replaced by weeds, it can cause algal blooms in creeks and it is expensive. For example a fire in Black Range State Park used 62 loads of fertilizer (2500 litres per load) in addition to the cost of the aircraft.

In rugged areas, such as occur in parts of the Grampians, every 10 degrees of slope doubles the intensity of the fire.

Burning for ecological reasons can be very complex. Here David talked about targeting blocks according to the age of fuel and the needs of small mammals such as heath mice. Heath mice feed on grasslands of a certain age and therefore grass that is too old or too young does not provide suitable habitat.

(Compiled from notes taken at the Gathering in 2005.)

Geraldine Harris

## Observations

- **20 lapwings** in Elizabeth street near little dam. Anne van Gemert
- Sunday 11/12/05 am. Call from Bob Wilmer to come and have a look at the large bird at his place – the large bird turned out to be a **Powerful Owl!** Rita
- Peregrine Falcon sighted at the sewerage works. Ern Perkins.
- 12/1 – 7am. **Powerful Owl** in the Botanical Gardens – holding a possum, looking down at us from a high branch in an Elm Tree. Richard Piesse
- 21/1 Approximately **60 Fairy Martins** flying about over the house and then coming to rest in Blue Mallee and on the roof of the house for a rest before flying off en masse again. Geraldine Harris
- 7/1 and 26/1. Peter Skilbeck twice sighted an **immature Sea Eagle** from the Fire Tower. And on the very hot New Years Eve he noted a **family of Nankeen Kestrels** flaked out on the wooden landing of the tower.
- Large number of **pardalotes** around the house – drinking from and picking at moss growing along a crack in the water tank. The two species are not usually there at the same time – the Spotted Pardalotes were seen driving off the Striated Pardalotes. Also White-naped and Fuscous Honeyeaters and Grey Shrike-thrush. Hans van Gemert
- **Black Wallaby** hopped out from along railway line and headed off up the middle of Parker Street late one night in January. Natasha Harris
- 30/1 **Five Red-browed Finches** jumping up and dragging down the seed heads of Couch Grass to feed on. Geraldine Harris
- 1/2 Two **Swift Parrots** at my place this morning – probably early arrivals, perhaps because the Grampians site may have been destroyed. And at Golf Course I have seen **Rainbow Bee-eaters** and **Latham Snipe**. Deb Worland

### **ANN Get-together -High Country in the Alpine Spring – Jan.**

Lesley and Ern attended the ANN Get-together in the High Country along with a number of interstate members. Ern described the bus trip to Falls Creek as a highlight – they encountered thousands of mountain bike riders on the Alpine Bike Ride! Another highlight was the delight of Queensland members on sighting their first Blackbird in the grounds of the Buffalo Chalet!

## Extra Events

**Thur Feb 9. "Phascogales, Owls and other things that go bump in the night"**  
Presentation by **Dr Todd Soderquist** to Newstead Landcare. Group. 8-9pm then supper at Newstead Community Centre. All welcome. Gold coin donation.

**Welcome to new members:** Christine Kilmartin, Gill Rayner and Tony Bates.

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme – February 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 Feb 10. AGM and Clubs 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations.** Election of Office Bearers and Committee, followed by Thirty Years of Change. Rita Mills (2<sup>nd</sup> President of CFNC – 1978/9). Bring a plate of supper to share. UCA Hall, 8pm.

**Sat Feb 11. Ray Bradfield Memorial Excursion – Chewton, Fryerstown and Vaughan.** BYO drinks, afternoon tea, evening meal and chairs. Depart from carpark opposite the motel in Duke St. at 1.30pm sharp. Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph. 5472 3124.

**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 1.30pm/ 3.30 pm depending on weather. Bring afternoon tea/tea and binoculars. Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph. 5472 3124.

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

**Sat Apr 8. Revegetation Sites at Guildford.**

## 2005 Committee

Rita Mills (Pres).....Ph. 5472 4553      George Broadway (Sec)....Ph. 5472 2513

Hans van Gemert (Treas).Ph. 5472 1082      Richard Piesse.....Ph.5472 3191

Ern Perkins (Web).....Ph. 5472 3124      Athol Dorman.....Ph. 5472 4429

Nigel Harland.....Ph. 5474 8246      Chris Morris .....Ph. 9885 4221

Geraldine Harris (Editor).Ph. 5474 2244, PO Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450.

[gedharris@castlemaine.net](mailto:gedharris@castlemaine.net)

## Recommended Subscriptions for 2006

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>

*CastlemaineField Naturalists Club Inc., PO Box 324, Castlemaine. Inc #A0003010B*