

Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2007

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Red
Goshawk



Sixty years of bird Photography – David Hollands

David's career in bird photography began in the 1940's in England. David had been given an illustrated book about a natural history programme for children "Romany of the ABC" and, one day feeling a bit at a loss for something to do, his mother said to him, "Why don't you sit down and read that book". He liked the photographs in the book so much he thought he might like to become a bird photographer! When spring arrived young David set off on his bike with his Box Brownie camera to capture his first image. The bird looked enormous in his viewfinder but as David's first slide of the evening showed - bird photography is a little more complicated than one might imagine.

Eight months later David had acquired a folding camera and we saw his first blurred image of a wader. Further inspired after reading "The Art of Bird Photography" by Eric Hoskins, David captured his first real success - a lapwing sitting on an ant's nest taken from a hide in 1946. All the photos at this time were black and white.

We were shown pictures of the different cameras David used along the way and the techniques involved using the old folding cameras. He had to work under a black cloth no further than three feet away from the subject, with an upside down back to front image and a shutter controlled by how hard you pressed it. Even with two cameras he was limited to 14 glass plates (one camera had 6 the other 8) and photography at night involved the use of a reflector and flash bulb and the risky task of replacing the hot flash bulbs each time! We saw David's first picture of an owl peeking out of an old barn - farmers used to leave an odd brick out to encourage owls to nest in their barns to help control the rats and mice. The date was 1961 and this was the first picture he had published.

In 1961 David came to Australia with his wife and settled in Hamilton, Victoria. He bought a medical practice in Orbost in 1963 and for many

years his career as a doctor and role as a parent took over and there were no pictures for a long time. Sometime in the 1970's David decided to write a book on Australian birds of prey and this book "Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of Australia" was eventually published in 1984.

David recalled how he met Jack Cupper author of "Hawks in Focus" – a very practical man who David claimed, would lie in bed at night planning how to construct portable aluminium towers to enable them to get up 64ft into a tree to photograph Brown Goshawks. Once, in Orbost, Jack was 80 feet up a tower in a hide photographing Sea Eagles and David left to go to the hospital to do his rounds and came back several hours later. Thinking Jack might like some sandwiches, he climbed up to him, only to be told to climb back down straight away as he has no idea if the tower would support one person, let alone two! David showed pictures of a Grey Goshawk, Red Goshawk and a Grey Falcon – all rare birds that took years to find.

One photo showed Letter-winged Kites; the only bird of prey in the world that is completely nocturnal – like an owl, it does nothing during the day. It feeds almost entirely on long-haired rats and after rain when plagues of rats occur their numbers explode. Rarer than Grey Falcons, feral cats have been known to eat the chicks, then the adults and then raise their own kittens in the nest. An Australian army platoon was once employed for a week to shoot cats; they shot about 300, but it made no difference - others shifted in almost immediately to replace them. Other photos showed a Brown Goshawk with a long-haired rat, Peregrine Falcons using a Wedge-tailed Eagles nest (faced with a shortage of cliffs), a Black -shouldered Kite and a Swamp Harrier.

Next David talked about his greatest love – owls. There were Grass Owls; Lesser Sooty Owls and Sooty Owls (they are not the same); Barking, Powerful and the very aggressive Rufous Owls. Once while photographing a female Rufous Owl from a 70ft high platform, the male attacked the back of David's legs six times as he climbed down!

David also recalled working with John Young – a naturalist whose ability to think and prepare like a bird enabled him to find and photograph birds, like the Rufous Owl, 70 ft up in a tree. By throwing a line and sinker and then a series of ropes up into the tree, he positioned a caving ladder, climbed the tree, and then enlisted help to pass up the required lengths of timber to erect a hide!

We were treated to photos of Eclectus Parrots and Palm Cockatoos at Cape York. And David found it hard to stop laughing as he captured the antics of a pair of Scaly-Breasted Lorikeets posing in amazing positions.

Four years ago David changed to a Nikon digital camera with 400 and 600mm lens. Today he uses Canon digital cameras and is enjoying this amazing advancement and feels he is taking better pictures than ever before.

There were White-tailed Kingfishers, Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfishers in the north Queensland rainforest and Azure Kingfishers at Orbost with fish in their beaks facing forward, ready to feed to their chicks, so they slide easily down their throats.

David also showed some of his photos from overseas trips including an African hippo, Armadeus, hauling himself out of the river at sunset. David used a flash only to be told "Hippo don't like flashes – you shouldn't have done that". The hippo charged. David and his guide ran behind the only protection in sight, a slender sapling only 6-8 inches in diameter. With four-inch front teeth, hippos kill more people than all other animals. Miraculously after 10 minutes the hippo wandered away – saved by the hippos short attention span and poor eyesight!

We saw seabirds, endemic landbirds, and landcrabs on Christmas Island. There were Heron, a Great Egret, a Plumed Egret, a Night Heron, a Black Bittern in Nth Qld., Australian Bitterns, Brolgas on a nest in Vic., a Jabaru (Australia's only stork), Red-necked Avocet, Red-winged Dotterel, Painted Snipe, Pied Stilts, Black-winged Stilts, Spectacled Owls and many more. And the audience was spellbound as David generously shared just some of the things that have happened over sixty years of bird photography!

Geraldine Harris

Wanted! Articles for Newsletter!

Send your articles, reports, questions, observations etc to Geraldine Harris, P O Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph 54742244 or gedharris@castlemaine.net . If you found it interesting, others will too.

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

Emerald Butterflies Yum!

At the April meeting Tony Morton reported a bird inside his house at Vaughan....

Having just finished setting eight Emerald Butterfly specimens carefully on a board, Tony left the room briefly and was astonished on his return to see some "little brown job" (possibly a White-browed Scrub-wren) had made a feast of his precious specimens! While Tony had previously noted the same little bird eating insects each morning from the insect zapping device outside the study – he was unaware that this resourceful little fellow was keenly watching his movements as well!



...and a Red-necked Wallaby grazing on Swift Moths!

While in the Grampians last weekend our resident Red-necked Wallaby Daisy came regularly to feed around the house. Having been raised inside this house by the former owner we think she likes our company – we certainly enjoy hers! One evening, having finished feeding, she stood outside the window while we were playing cards...and to our surprise caught a large brown moth in her front paws and devoured it with gusto! Later on she moved away from the window and sat with her tail between her legs grooming herself thoroughly. When she had finished she came again and stood at the window and we noticed a clear wet line through her fur to her pouch! If only she could talk...

Geraldine Harris

Correction: The Dark/ Autumn Midge Orchids grow to a height of 15-30cm not 15-30mm as printed in April edition.

Subscriptions for 2007

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

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

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

Bird Observations from Maldon - Feb-March Gill Raynor

- Great activity around our birdbath, with groups of up to fifteen New Holland Honeyeaters, smaller groups of Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Silvereyes, and White-plumed Honeyeaters - also individual White-naped Honeyeaters, Yellow-plumed and Fuscous Honeyeaters, pairs of Yellow Thornbills, a Weebill, and the occasional Pardalote.
- Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, Red Wattlebirds, and several young Grey Currawongs.
- Heard but not seen were a Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo (very persistent over several weeks!) and a Brush Cuckoo.
- A pair of Yellow Billed Spoonbills in the dam.

Bird Observations from Muckleford South. Alison Rowe

- 7/4 We had a lovely pair of Golden Whistlers at the birdbath this afternoon. I would have had a hard time identifying the female, if she hadn't turned up around the same time as the male. I don't know how common they are generally, but they are special here because it's only about the third sighting in over four years. We see Rufous Whistlers slightly more often.
- 8/4 A first sighting here today was a flock of Varied Sittellas! I was scanning for swift parrots in a big grey box because I thought I may have heard some, but found Varied Sittellas instead.
- Two Grey Fantail sightings in one day and also White-plumed Honeyeater – both rare visitors.
- 24/4 Just saw a female Crested Bellbird in the garden! Haven't seen one for about three years.
- 26/4 A Rose Robin at the bird bath this morning! (our first sighting was almost exactly 4 years ago).
- Scarlet robins visiting here daily (2 males and a female) and we had a flame robin visit (the first since some time in February).

Observations at Barkers Creek Geraldine and Geoff Harris

- 5/7 Parsons Bands Orchids *Eriochilis cucullatus* flowering in bush.
- 8/7 Wedge-tailed eagles soaring overhead and small Red-bellied Black Snake at door – disappeared into brickwork on house!
- 15/4 Richards Pipit on ground in paddock off White Gum Road.
- 26/4 Something fell onto Geoff as he walked out the door – putting his hand up he discovered a Marbled Ghecko on his shoulder.
- 28/4 A flock of 20+ Yellow-rumped Thornbills over Hagues Road.
- 30/4 Silvereyes in old Cherryplum along creek– and also various fungi starting to appear after the rain.

Other April Observations

- Report from residents overlooking the freeway works at Harcourt that they had seen a flock of Swift Parrots. And in his garden a Grey Fantail and White-plumed Honeyeater – their first appearance for quite some time. George Broadway
- Male and Female Scarlet Robin at Chewton. Sue McCallum
- Juvenile Blue-tongue Lizards at Virginia Bartlams - also reported in another member's bathroom.
- Tawny Frogmouth in garden at Gisborne. Joy Wetherill
- At Castlemaine Golf Course Debbie Worland has noted an absence of frogs and birds in the vicinity of the dams filled with recycled water – while there are both at the dam filled with fresh water.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists May Meeting

Gariwerd: Reflecting on the Grampians

In April 2003, photographer and ecologist, Alison Pouliot was commissioned to provide images for the book, "Gariwerd: Reflecting on the Grampians".

Three years and 33 trips to the Grampians later, the book has been published and was recently launched by former Victorian Governor, John Landy.

A week after the photography was complete, fires ravaged the Grampians, destroying much of what was photographed.

Join us for an illustrated talk about Alison's photographic journeys, experiences and challenges.

Where: Castlemaine Field Nats Club Meeting, Uniting Church Hall, (enter carpark from Lyttleton Street), Castlemaine.

When: Friday 11th May at 8pm

Visitors very welcome

Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey, May 19/20

No prior experience necessary –

We need as many pairs of eyes as we can muster.

Reward offered: Possible sighting of beautiful Swift Parrots

More information at May Meeting. Contact: Geraldine at 54742244

Photo Gallery



Photo provided by Bruce Donaldson

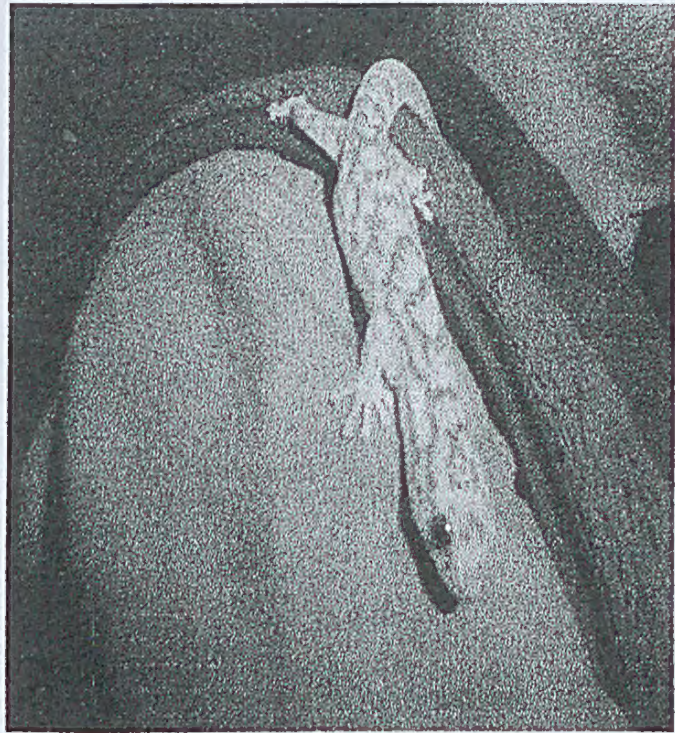


Photo: Geraldine Harris

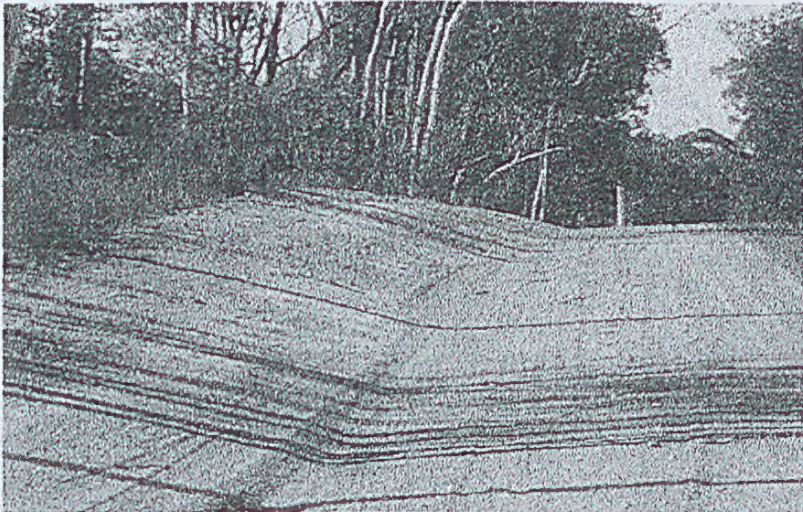


Photo: Debbie Worland

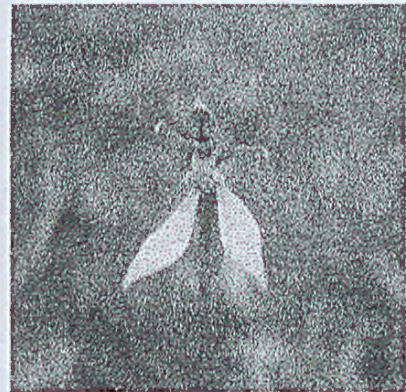


Photo: Geraldine Harris

Clockwise from top left:

Leucistic affected plumage in Scarlet Robin at Macedon (see April Newsletter).

Marbled Velvet Ghecko lands on Geoff Harris's shoulder.

Parsons Band Orchid *Eriochilus cucullatus* at Barkers Creek.

Damaged understorey after careless grading of roadway along Pyrenees Highway.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

May 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 carpark 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

Sun May 6. CFNC Heritage Festival Walk – In the Footsteps of the Major. A guided walk from Castlemaine to Expedition Pass along Forest Creek (15km) Return along Great Dividing Trail. Depart from car park opp. motel in Duke Street, at 9.30am. BYO lunch and drinks. Cost: free.

Contacts: Ern Perkins Ph. 5472 3124, George Broadway Ph. 5472 2513.

Fri May 11. Gariwerd – Reflections on the Grampians. Alison Pouliot, Research Scientist and Environmental Photographer. (More information on p.6.) UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat May 12. Field Trip: Mopoke Reef Waterwheel. Details above. Leader: G. Harris Ph. 5474 2244.

Sat and Sun May 19 & 20. National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey. Spotters wanted. Depart from carpark opp. the motel in Duke St at 8am sharp. (More information at May meeting) Contact: Geraldine Harris Ph. 54742244.

Sat May 26. Roadside Cleanup. Meet near Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 9am. Gloves, garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact: Hans Van Gemert Ph. 5472 1082. NOTE CHANGE OF DATE FROM MAY 19

Fri Jun 8. A Moth Beginner – Tony Morton. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Jun 9. Field Trip: To be decided

2007 Committee

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