

Castlemaine Naturalist

June 2005

Vol. 30.5 #322



Swift Parrot

Bumper Issue – thanks to members contributions!

Thank you for all those who contributed this month – as a result we have a bumper issue with twelve pages!

I am aware that more and more these days articles refer to websites which is all very well for those who have access to computers but not so for others. I would be very happy to access reference sites quoted in the newsletter to print off material for anyone with a special interest in a topic. Editor, Ph 5474 2244.

Echuca with BOCA

This year BOCA is celebrating 100 years and as part of the celebration Echuca BOC hosted three one-day outings at the beginning of May. Audrey (Maggie) Oliver and I decided to join them for two of the days

The first day was spent visiting the Golf Course to the west of Moama and finding Singing Honeyeaters and lots of Zebra Finches. Then at a wetland, still near the Course, we added a number of water birds including Hardheads, Swamp Hens, Black-tailed Native Hens and a couple of Swamp Harriers to the list.

Next we turned west along Pericoota Road. We stopped on the river for morning tea and went for a walk along some of the tracks. There were quite a number of birds seen including Superb Fairy Wrens, several Willie Wagtails brawling in a couple of Redgums near the cars, Red-capped Robins, Brown Tree-creepers and a Black-shouldered Kite. Quite a lot of houseboats pattered along the river while we were there, including one sprouting palms all over the top deck!

There were many hollows in the old Redgums and there were birds investigating them while we were there. Interestingly, Box Mistletoe was well in flower wherever we visited, but it had finished flowering several weeks before at home. The lunch spot was at the hall at Womboota, just past the school where two of Audrey's brothers attended when she was still a toddler, so she made sure she joined those who went down to visit it after lunch. It is now a winery and pottery. I joined the people watching Splendid and Superb Fairy Wrens, Southern Whitefaces, a Restless Flycatcher, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and a

female Red-capped Robin just near the hall and in the garden of the house next door! A pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles were soaring overhead.

On the way back to Echuca we stopped at a swamp near the Pericoota homestead and added Diamond Firetail, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes, Red-browed Finches and a Reed-warbler to the ever growing list for the day.

The next day was spent in the Redgum forest and sandhills on Gulpa Island near Mathoura. The cars soon became all the same colour with rivers of dust running down windscreens, even if we stayed well behind the next car. There was no wind, but there were still birds to be seen - Yellow and Eastern Rosellas again, Little and Noisy Friarbirds, Darters when we were on the river or creek, Peaceful Doves Pardalotes, Brown Quail, Emus, Dusky Woodswallows (which in two different places were using mistletoes to roost in) and more Wedge-tails. We stopped on the Edwards River to have our lunch and go for a walk and one group seemed very interested in something on the ground. They had found a Yellow-footed Antichinus. It was very active and obvious for about 10 minutes, quite ignoring them as they watched it, even when others of us joined the group. Like other Antichinus I have seen in those forests, the paws were more rufous than yellow.

We finished the day at a new bird hide off the road down to Picnic Point. There was still water in the swamp at this point and quite a number of water birds were seen including several Pacific Herons, Lapwings, Great Egrets and another Swamp Harrier.

Audrey and I had to return home next day so we farewelled the group of BOCA members known as the Bunkhouse Club the night before. This included Audrey's long-time friends Reg and Kath Johnson, who were staying at the same motel, because we knew they would be off bright and early next morning on the day's outing to the Barmah Forest.

Rita Mills

Seasonal Bird Report – Summer/Autumn 61 Hunter Street

The arrival of a pair of Scarlet Robins at the bird bath indicated that in early May we are close to winter. During April I was on the lookout for Tasmanian

Silvereyes migrating north and a small group arrived on May 5th. There were about ten – all trying to fit into the small bird bath at once, then dashing off to feast at the fig tree and repeating the process for about half a day, before continuing on to south-east Queensland. Possibly there were other groups went through in early April when I wasn't at home during Festival time.

Despite the drought conditions, the number of small birds breeding in the bush and under storey of Parker Street East at the back of our property has been surprising. As I sprayed the hose around during early morning or evening on watering days, five young Yellow-rumped Thornbills, a family of Grey Fantails and a juvenile Rufous Whistler would appear. A Goldfinch pair with two young bathed regularly and occasionally three juvenile White-naped Honeyeaters and a single Willy Wagtail.

One morning a tiny Spotted Pardalote (with a few red dots appearing) perched on the edge of the large bird bath on legs so thin and fragile that one feared for his chance of survival. The Striated Pardalotes were not successful in the boxes this year. Too much disturbance as we erected another rain water tank in the area, I suspect.

The Fine-leafed Peppermint produced an abundance of small fluffy blossoms and a delicious scent of honey and the Box Mistletoe on this eucalypt bloomed profusely and over a long period. Many birds were attracted – Musk Lorikeets, Mistletoebirds, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas, Brown-headed and Yellow faced Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebills, Silvereyes, Yellow-tufted and a complete family of New Holland Honeyeaters. Many Red Wattlebirds have been around also.

We had more than our share of Ravens and Pied Currawongs at the figs, and a solitary Grey Currawong for a while. Recently the local flock of Black Cockatoos flew our way and a group of Magpies have moved in to share with the Blackbirds and a few Sparrows. There are very few insects around, which is bad news for many birds and also the bat population.

Shirley Parnaby

Observations from Treloars Rd. Maldon

Over the past few weeks the Yellow Gums have started flowering and I have observed lots of birds following the nectar trail! There have been flocks of Musk Lorikeets, Red Wattlebirds, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and smaller groups of Fuscous, Brown-headed, White-naped and Yellow -faced Honeyeaters with the occasional Eastern Spinebill trailing along.

There are also movements of some woodland birds that are appearing around our house on the way to a more open grassy woodland habitat. Sightings include Flame Robins, Grey Fantails, Restless Flycatchers, Rufous Whistler - and totally unexpected, I encountered a pair of white-fronted chats who were sitting on a fence post where I was able to have a really close inspection !!!!

Rose Watson

Cactus at Robinvale

Members at the club Campout at Robinvale found a very nasty looking cactus near the river in the Tol Tol area. Hans and Anne contacted the DSE and provided photos and information. As a result of their efforts the cactus has been positively identified as *Cylindropuntia rosea*. It is thought to be a garden escape, originally from Mexico and Texas. It has pink flowers and white spikes and can easily be spread by a broken off piece taking root. DSE are planning to eradicate it.

Swift Parrot Survey – May 14 & 15, 2005

On the weekend of the 14 & 15th of May the CFNC again participated in the Threatened Bird Network Swift Parrot Survey to see how many of the little 'blighters' had come across from Tassie to see us for the winter.

The 'swifties' at the Golf Course had arrived early this year (25/3) and most recently had been sighted in the Yellow Gums having their morning wash in the moisture on the leaves. Debbie had received ten unconfirmed sightings before the survey so we were optimistic. One report came from a local pigeon racer who has noted that his pigeons often return from Tasmania with their beaks and the fronts of their wings covered in salt - is this also was the case for Swift Parrots?

On the Saturday morning 10 enthusiastic members met on a chilly, but perfect, autumn morning to begin our quest. We divided into two groups with Ern Lesley, Rita, Geraldine and Richard heading off into the southern section of the 'swifties' range. Despite some very nice bird sightings in the Chewton Fryerstown area, alas, there were no 'swifties' recorded.

Maureen and I with John Alexander, Chris Morris and Noela Caine checked out the north western part of the range including the Gower school and the Quince tree where we had a great sighting of a pair of Crested Bellbirds hopping along about 20m in front of us. Later on, members spotted an antechinus moving about on a tree trunk. We went on out to Maldon and checked the Butts Reserve and the North British Mine areas without success. We returned via Sandy Creek Track and Welshmans Reef to John's property, where 'swifties' had been regularly sighted. But not 'today'.

We thoroughly enjoyed our morning in the bush and our reports will be most beneficial as they show exactly where the SWIFT PARROTS WEREN'T FEEDING. However, on Saturday afternoon, as members arrived at Harris's for the Habitat Walk, Swift Parrots were feeding in Grey Box and Long-leafed Box in their garden - despite suggestions, no Araldite had been used!

On the Sunday morning we met at the Golf Club and our leader Debbie took Chris and Helen, Geoff and Geraldine and Maureen and I to view her private collection of 'swifties' near the junction of the Golf Club and Margaret Badminton's property. YES! - on cue they arrived. Many circling overhead and other settling noisily into the treetops for an early breakfast. We estimated about 40 birds.

From there we travelled out to Newstead and had morning tea at the Rotunda. We checked the "motel trees", watched a kite hovering in a paddock along the river flats and then went on to the Pound Lane area. There was no sign of any out that way but once again we had another very pleasant morning spent in the lovely Box-Ironbark countryside.

On Sunday afternoon Geoff and Geraldine were reading in their garden (binoculars at the ready) when, at about 3.30pm, about 100 'swifties' flew in. It looked like the weather was about to change when they suddenly started to gather in a couple of large trees. They flew in from various directions in manageable groups of 12 - 20 which made the counting relatively easy. This was a good end to the survey weekend but it was a shame that other spotters were not there!

(One of the great things about Field Naturalist activities is the way the enthusiasm of fellow members can lead others to discover things in their own back yards that they might never have been aware of otherwise!)

Ken Dredge and Geraldine Harris

Caterpillars in Bushy Needlewood Identified

Bushy Needlewood (*Hakea decurrens*) is the plant I found caterpillars munching on in late March. Tony Morton let me know that it was the larva of one of the *Oenochroma* species, probably *O. vinaria*. He confirmed this identification with John Landy.

They tell me there are 22,000 moth species identified in Australia so far, (compared to only 397 named butterfly species). My *O. vinaria*, which has no common name, belongs to one of the largest families - Lepidoptera (Butterflies and Moths): Geometridae - which contains around 1,300 described species in Australia and 20,000 species worldwide. Wow!

Frances Cincotta

Newstead Wildlife Shelter – Barry and Dawn Angus

EMERGENCY NUMBERS 5476 2580 or 0428 5771752

Bird List for City Boundary 9/5/05

While on a practice walk for the Heritage Festival "Beat the Bounds" walk George Broadway and Richard Piesse identified the following birds:

Brown Treecreeper	New Holland Honeyeater
Buff-rumped Thornbill	Noisy Miner
Cockatoo	Red Wattlebird
Crimson Rosella	Red-browed Firetail
Eastern Spinebill	Red-rumped Parrot
Galah	Spotted Pardalote
Grey Currawong	Superb Blue Wren
Kookaburra	White-browed Babbler (McManus Rd)
Magpie	White-plumed Honeyeater
Masked Plover	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater

Note: Those of you who missed this event during the Heritage Festival will have an opportunity to do the short walk in August (see programme p.12)

Journey to Macarthur and Portland – 7 & 8 May, 2005.

- Mistletoe – followed a corridor all the way to Ararat (through Maryborough and Avoca) and part of the way south to Marnoo. None evident further south and definitely none growing on wattles in the Macarthur district.
- Red Gums – huge numbers under severe stress along the Pyrenees Highway west of Avoca.
- Birds of Prey (sighted south of Ararat) - probably Little falcons and Brown Falcons.
- Wetlands – between Willaura and Glenthompson, huge areas containing small dams, some with low levels of water. Black -tailed Swamphens and other waterfowl noticed from the car.
- Dunmore State Forest – Control burn – no wonder DSE refuses to comment further!

Richard Piesse

Portland Field Naturalists 60th Birthday Party – 7/5/05

The PFN recently organised a celebration of 60 years of activity in the local bushland.

Approximately 85 people enjoyed a four-course-meal, good company, a birthday cake and the launch of a 60-year history of the club. The celebrations also included the presentation of a life membership award, reminiscences of their experiences in the club by two more senior members, a power point presentation of the clubs activities since 1945 and proposed plans for the future.

It was a memorable evening held at the Portland Bowling Club RSL.

Richard Piesse

Habitat Talk and Walk - 13,14th May,2005

At our last meeting James Radford from the Biodiversity Team, Deakin University gave a powerpoint presentation of the three years of research he and his team have been undertaking investigating the effects of landscape change on wildlife in 'whole landscapes'.

For most species single patches of bush are not enough for viable populations to survive in the long term, they need networks of habitat through the landscape. Many species use the whole landscape moving from one landscape element to another on a daily, seasonal or irregular basis and land surrounding remnants of native vegetation influences the species capable of using that remnant. Whole landscapes therefore are the most appropriate approach for planning management and restoration of rural environments.

The team carefully chose and monitored 24 varied landscape sites of 10x10km in box dominated woodland with rainfall zones between 450-600ml and with varied tree coverage from 2-60% - some with large aggregated blocks of vegetation and some with varied types of dispersed vegetation (roadsides, scattered remnants etc.).

They looked at landscape thresholds - where small changes in the in landscape structure (eg vegetation cover) produced abrupt changes (species occurrence, species richness etc.). Landscape thresholds offer insights for land management. They inform us about ecological limits and the need to avoid excessive disturbance and degradation of the natural environment.

Not surprisingly different species showed different responses to landscape change:

- Birds that move easily across the landscape (Little Lorikeets, Crimson Rosellas, Swift Parrot and Olivebacked Oriole) showed a linear response ie. their population decline is constant as tree cover decreases.
- Birds that have difficulty crossing large patches of habitat (Grey Shrike-thrushes, Yellow Robins, Crested Shrike-tits, Black-chinned Honeyeaters and Rufous Whistlers) reach their threshold when tree cover declines past a certain level - these birds become isolated and population rates plummet.
- Other birds (Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Gilberts Whistlers, Red-capped Robins and White-browed Babblers) require a certain level of treecover or are 'large patch specialists' - they do not survive in fragmented areas .

Changes in native vegetation cover affect ecological processes that maintain healthy ecosystems. The research showed that the woodland birds community collapses below 10% cover - we must aim higher than this. To support most species present in woodland regions an average of 30-35% native vegetation is

necessary and areas of high vegetation cover need to be regularly interspersed among areas where native vegetation has been cleared.

On the Saturday excursion we looked at some ways to restore and enhance existing natural habitat. We saw examples of direct seeding, natural regeneration that occurs by prohibiting stock, the effect of protecting remnant vegetation with exclusion fencing and the beauty of native vegetation being restored along the streamsides and wildlife corridors. We saw the variety of water flow that results and that is so necessary to a healthy riparian ecosystem. Much of the restoration and revegetation work was experimental and there is still much to do. In just five years the changes have been very rewarding and perhaps the presence of Swift Parrots in the garden to greet the Field Nats as they arrived was one of those small rewards that make it well worthwhile.

James concluded his talk with an apt quote -

The future is not somewhere we are going,
It is something we are making. (Hobbs).

(Ref. How Much Habitat is Enough? DSE Publication)

Geraldine Harris

Starbushes, Cave Crickets, and an interesting Orchid but no Pincushion Lily (*Borya mirabilis*).....

In April Geoff and I joined eight other people including DSE and Parks Vic. Representatives to search a particular area for the endangered Grampians Pincushion Lily (*Borya mirabilis*). April is a good time to look because the leaves are a distinctive colour making the plants more visible. Unfortunately we didn't find any *Borya mirabilis* but searches such as this are still worthwhile because they help identify habitat that may be able to sustain a translocated population sometime in the future.

We did however find a healthy population of the vulnerable Downy Starbush (*Asterolasia phebaliodes*) and Andrew Pritchard, Threatened Species Officer, Warrnambool, found a red form of *Pterostylis parviflora*, recognised in Backhouse and Jeanes book "Wild Orchids" as a species affinity, called *Pterostylis* sp. aff. *parviflora* or Red-tip Orchid.

We also found: some old Rock Wallaby scats in a remote cave (the last Rock Wallaby was captured in the Grampians in 1999); and some Cave Crickets that belong to the Order of ORTHOPTERA: super family; Grylloidea, family; Gryllidea, genus; Endacusta. The "Field Guide to Insects of Australia" (Zborowski and Storey) says "in rocky country the genus *Endacusta* is common though often cryptic". It was a very interesting and rewarding day.

Geraldine Harris

New Books

"Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country" by Chris Tzaros

For those of you, who missed the article on p. 9 of the Midland Express of the 24th of May, this is a book you must check out if you live in the Box-Ironbark area. "Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country" by Chris Tzaros of Birds Australia is published by the CSIRO. It retails for \$39.95. Students get 10% discount from Melbourne Uni Bookroom. You can get some idea of it by consulting the following site - www.publish.csiro.au/pid/4856.htm

I have since seen it in the flesh and it is quite a glossy publication. The distribution maps for the various creatures are terrific as they cover only the box-ironbark, stretching from Stawell to Chiltern. It also includes a CD. It does not strike me as being overpriced for the quality of the product and definitely deserves consideration.

Editors Note: Keep a watch out for a review of this book in the Australian Plant Society publication "Growing Australian" by our own Ern Perkins.

"Fieldguide to Australian Birds" by Michael Morcombe

While on the topic of new books on fauna, don't forget to take a good look at the revised, newly formatted (i.e. pocket-sized, more or less) version of Michael Morcombe's "Fieldguide to Australian Birds". It contains a few ideas you won't find in other guides, in particular some new approaches to quick reference, distribution maps, sub-species and distinguishing features. RRP \$34.95.

Bruce Donaldson

Binoculars with a Boarder!

Ken Dredge testing out his new binoculars, saw what at first looked like a web in his vision. On further investigation he was sure he could see a white-tailed spider as well! The binoculars were duly returned to the shop and exchanged for new pair - that did not contain any free lodgers! One wonders how the spider found its way in between the lens and whether it was indeed made in China also!

Bridal Creeper Beetle Release

This autumn a small foliage-eating beetle will become the third agent in the biological control of bridal creeper campaign. The beetle (*Crioceris* sp) will compliment the work of two other agents, a leafhopper (*Zygina* sp) and a rust fungus (*Puccinia myrsiphylli*), that are currently being used to control bridal creeper across Victoria.

Crioceris sp feeds and lays eggs on the young shoots and leaves. The feeding grubs damage the parts of the plant that enable it to climb. Stopping the early shoots from climbing can stop bridal creeper from spreading.

(Ref: Under Control. No 29, March 2005)

Observations

April Observations.

- Glider, burnt in fires, found dead on track in Control Burn area. R. Piesse
- 50-60 Red Wattlebirds making a terrific noise and attacking each other in Sawmill Rd area. Rita Mills
- Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos observed at Moonlight Flat Plantation, Blackwood, and flying over Wheeler St. in several waves heading towards pine plantation
- Croweas and Spreading Wattle flowering in Kaweka and Urn Heath flowering on The Monk. Ern.
- 30/4 Members who attended the Roadside Cleanup were rewarded with a sighting of a Noisy Friar-bird at the meeting site near Taits Iron Works. Richard Piesse

May Observations

- Travelling from Castlemaine to Ballarat, Sparrowhawk sighted plucking an Indian Myna which protested at first but eventually succumbed. J Gregurke Ballarat FNC.
- Flock of Red-browed Firetails in Sawmill Road. Rita Mills
- Red-rumped Parrots in Richards Road. Large areas of Bridle Creeper in Moonlight Flat area. Near collision with White-faced Heron about to land on bridge on the Garfield Track. Hyacinth Orchids in full bloom at Blackwood. Richard Piesse
- The Southern Boobook in the Botanic Gardens is still waiting patiently for his/her mate to return. No whitewash or pellets which would indicate permanent residence. Shirley Parnaby
- The possum problem in Norman Marshall's area has eased considerably. When they showed signs of taking up residence under the roof of his elderly neighbour's house, he arranged wire netting and a possum trap to deter them. Caught one possum, which he released in Kalimna bush away from the house, and at present they are not a problem. Shirley Parnaby
- A Flock of 60-70 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flew over Happy valley on Sunday morning 25/5/05. Ken Dredge

What is a "Bioblitz"?

A Bioblitz occurs when a group decide on a venue such as a park or urban block to carry out a 24 hour identification blitz using experts, students and interested community members to identify birds, plants, mammals, insects etc.. For more information do a google search on "Bioblitz" or watch this space for further information and perhaps a date and venue.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Extra Events

Wed. Jun 8 Fungimap Project – Tom May. Bendigo FNC meeting at their clubrooms in Old High St GoldenSquare. Meeting starts 7.30, presentation at 8pm.

Wed. June 29. Miller Property at Sandon (formerly owned by Susannah Starr). Invitation to CFNC members to join U3A Walkers to help identify birds and plants. Meet 9.30am at Newstead Community Centre. Bring a picnic lunch. 1.30pm finish.

Friends of Kalimna park Working Bees – Everyone welcome!

May till October - 4th Sunday of each month. Meet at the top of Lyttleton St.

May 22, June 26, July 24, Aug 28, Sept 25, Oct 23. Bring own tools.

Morning tea will be provided each month. Ph. 5472 5343.

Thu. Aug 11. Local Wattles – Frances Cicotta. Presentation to Newstead Landcare Group (and anyone else who's interested!) on the local wattles. There are 19 Acacia species indigenous to the Shire of Mount Alexander and if you want to learn how to distinguish between them, and how to grow them, come along to the Newstead Community Centre, 8pm.

Jan 16-Feb 2, 2006. Australian Naturalists Network Get Together at Feathertop Chalet (10 days) and Jindabyne (7 days). Cost \$1650. Booking Forms available from Ern.

From the Business Meeting 26/5/05

- **Welcome to new member:** John Alexander
- Richard, Lesley and Ern have now completed 22 (11x2) quadrats, taken photos and David Avery is to supply the fire history of the last 15 years.
- Ringwood FNC to visit in October, Ern to choose an appropriate topic for meeting presentation.
- Ern sent a list of birds and suitable birding spots to Robinvale Caravan Park and Tourist Information Centre drawing attention to the value of such an asset
- Letter to John Thwaites supporting the grazing ban in the Alpine National Park.
- Dawn Angus, Newstead Wildlife Shelter has prepared instructions "First Aid for Wildlife". Subject to Dawn's approval, CFNC will print them in leaflet form as a free publication - also as a pdf.
- Suggested by Ern that a Bird Count Site be set up as an Urban Landcare Project between Happy Valley Rd. and Colles Rd.

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

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Rem 14/7
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George
Young Hall
Classic Care Brighton

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme - May 2005

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.

JUNE

Fri 10. Birding off the SE Coast of Tasmania. Nigel Harland. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat 11. Herons Reef. Leader: David Bannear. Depart from carpark Opp. Castle Motel, Duke St. at 1.30pm sharp. Contact, Richard Piesse, Ph 54772 3191

JULY

Fri 8. Mistletoes. Lindy MacRaid, Biodiversity Team, Deakin Uni.,UCA 8pm.

Sat 9. Mistletoes. Inglewood / Kooyoora State Park. Depart 10am sharp.

AUGUST

Sat 6, Sun 7. National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey

Fri 12. Speaker to be confirmed.

Sat 13. Boundaries of Castlemaine. Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph 5472 3124.

Thu 25. Broom Pull. Meet at the Mary St./Froomes Rd. Corner at 9am.

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
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Subscriptions for 2005

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

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

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

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