

# Castlemaine Naturalist

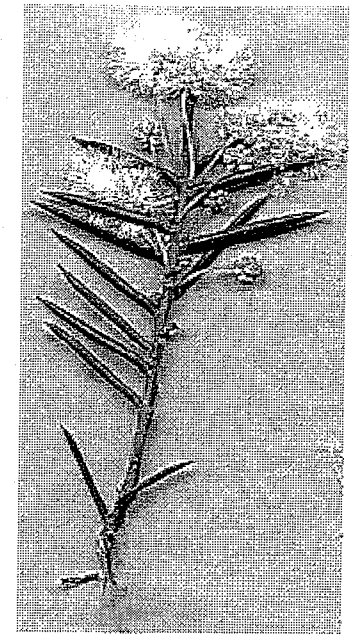
May 1998

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## BOCA Easter Camp at Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary, Linton

After a very successful and rewarding Easter campout at Wyperfeld National Park last year, Maureen and I decided this year to tackle the bush birds of the Great Dividing Range with approximately 70 other birdos lead by Nena and Rob Bryce.



Spreading Wattle in flower after rain

We arrived on the Friday morning to find the camp well established in a picturesque clearing, surrounded by perfect habitat for birding, despite the creek (like everything else) being very very dry.

Weather conditions were fine and cloudy for our Friday and Saturday excursions., and although birding was good, numbers generally appeared to be down. White-naped were the dominant honeyeaters, and Eastern Spinebills were present in large numbers, mainly in the mistletoe. Grey Box were in blossom, but there was very little nectar feeding. Winged ants and assorted flying insects appeared to be the main source of food, particularly for Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters.

Very few water birds were seen due to the low levels of the lake and dams. Raptors were scarce, and the Saturday outing to the Devil's Kitchen failed to find the Peregrine Falcons.

The calls of the Powerful Owls were a highlight of the evenings and nights, with contributions from the old favourite - Southern Boobooks.

Maureen had possibly the "find" of the camp with a sighting of the Bassian Thrush, which is not common to the area. Maureen, Ellen McCulloch and I observed it for about two minutes as it was feeding quietly. Upon sighting us it flew low and quickly to the cover of some bracken where it seemed to hide for about 5 minutes before flying off to dense cover about 40 metres away.

We woke on Sunday morning to steady rain and it stayed that way all day. Some of the crew (especially the tenters) went up to the "hut" for the day - there will be some interesting stories to come out of that, no doubt!

By mid-afternoon, after a short drive, we decided that the rain wasn't going to stop and as our Sunday bird call and charade evening had been cancelled, we packed up camp and headed home.

Maureen and Ken Dredge

## Babblings from Barkers Creek no 9

### Changing of the Guard

For some twelve years our house magpies, whom I introduced to you as Marjorie and Kennett, have maintained complete domination of their territory, an area of some eleven acres. Even the Choughs, Ravens and Currawongs have been barely tolerated. Prior to each new breeding season, the previous year's fledglings were cruelly driven from the home territory to join the other non-breeding magpies who gather in groups within the small areas allocated by the regional dominant breeding magpies.

A home territory must contain enough open pasture for the dominant pair to forage throughout the year, adequate water for their use and sufficient trees for the birds to roost and nest. In this case, the area was more than required but the breeding pair were able to defend the area against regular raids made by other magpies. This, in effect, is what actually defines territory. It is clearly marked by the advertising calls made each morning and throughout the day. If the boundary of the area is threatened, then the challenge is met aggressively with much snapping of bills and direct-flight attacks. Only rarely is there any physical contact made, but occasionally, the dominant male seizes the offender around the neck with its beak and both birds literally fall out of the tree fastened in this embrace.

In certain agreed areas, as if by full agreement, all of the local magpies of the common territories periodically meet, late in the day, for what can only be described as a social event and there is much non-threatening chattering.

Recently the back border of the home territory came under constant pressure and the challengers were met less aggressively. The offenders were a group of four siblings all of which had fledged in the last four years and each in turn driven out of the home realm before the following nesting season.

About a week ago the dominant female (Marjorie) died and that day the territory was stormed by the Gang of Four and that evening the dominant male (Kennett) had disappeared. Next morning the domain was resounding with advertising calls which continued throughout the day. The higher level of bird calls has continued as the new group continues to maintain its dominion.

To date, this year's fledgling (Olivia), although orphaned, has remained in the territory and answered our calls to her. When under attack she will fly to us for apparent protection. When the new breeding season arrives she too will be driven from the territory. Or will she? Of all the magpies bred since we have lived here Olivia is more like her mother than any other. Her personality and her tameness, even at this early age, mimics Marjorie. She also has the in-built aggression as the Currawongs and Choughs have come to realise.

Those who live by the sword must apparently die by the sword.

But Marjorie is sadly missed.

John Turnbull

### From the Committee

**The Calder Freeway.** The Club is planning a submission to Vic Roads about possible routes for the Calder Freeway between Malmsbury and Ravenswood. If you can contribute or wish to participate in preparation of the submission, please let E Perkins know.

**City of Bendigo.** Bendigo Field Naturalists Club newsletter reports that the Keep Australia Beautiful Council Victoria has given the award for the Most Environmentally Conscious Local Government Group to the City of Greater Bendigo.

**Swift Parrot Survey.** The first survey for the year is on 8-9 May. Our excursion on Saturday is to Muckleford, so we will keep a lookout, as always, for Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters. Members who go birdwatching may wish to visit some likely Swift Parrot areas on the Sunday.

**Where have all the birds gone?** Or have they? Our records are often not sufficient to give an authoritative answer. Members who make bird lists are asked to record the numbers of each species. Comparisons with counts in later years will help give a picture of population fluctuations.

**Naturalists Get-together in September.** The draft program is printed on page 7 of this newsletter. Your help will be appreciated. We have catering, and excursions. If you can help with excursions please contact E Perkins.

### Cape Broom

Work has started on the broom eradication at the north end of the botanic gardens. The project is being undertaken by the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club with funding through the Parks Victoria Grants Program.

The purpose of the project is to help restore the natural environment and community values by removal of Cape Broom weed infestation allowing regeneration of native vegetation to support the survival of the Eltham Copper Butterfly colony in the area.

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club will manage the project with guidance and assistance from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the Shire of Mt Alexander.

There will be three stages in the operation to be completed by summer

1. Removal of Cape Broom by slashing and burning of broom thickets.
2. Selective weeding and pulling of regrowth.
3. Restoring and replanting of native vegetation to support the colony of Eltham Copper Butterflies.

Chris Morris.

### Observations

**Ravens and Choughs at Sinclair's Lane.** Twenty Ravens were feeding in a group. Twenty Choughs were nearby. Were they taking the same food? (M Dunne)

**Red-browed Firetails** have been seen at Yapeen. (M Badminton)

**Fox harassed by magpies.** A fox was seen streaking across a paddock at Carisbrook, being bombed by magpies, taking it in turns to harass it. (R. Mills)

**Snakes strangled in birdwire** were observed recently. Both were cleaned down to the skeleton and skin by European Wasps. (K Cross)

**Wedgetails at Mt Alexander.** The three wedgetails on Mt Alexander are still doing well, and were soaring over McKittricks Road on 10 April. (M Hunter)

**White Faced Heron on Lawn** was reported from Harcourt. (B Envall)

**Parsons Bands.** Five flowered at Castlemaine North, on private property (N de Maccus)

**6 Indian Mynahs** were seen in B Maund's Kennedy St garden. (B Maund)

**Wattlebirds and Yellow Gum.** The gum in Lyttleton St was crowded with Red Wattlebirds. (G Broadway)

**Little Falcon** has been seen at the corner of Hargraves and Berkeley St. (G Broadway)

## Birding with Woodend Branch of BOCA

On a perfect Saturday morning on 18 April, Stan Bruton, Maureen and I met with Ken and Marjorie Cross and crew from Woodend to have a "birder" in the box and ironbark forest around Muckleford.

We are pleased to report that even after the "big dry" numbers and variety appear to be very good in our own back yard.

We started off in the Gower School area and were pleasantly surprised by all we found, including honeyeaters, rosellas, White-browed Babblers, Crested Shrike-tit, Diamond Firetail, Dusky Woodswallows, Brown Treecreeper and many more of the regulars.

From Gower School we crossed over to the quince tree for Black Chinned Honeyeaters and a Flame Robin. From there it was up the Red White and Blue Track to the mine for lunch, where we had to leave the group. After lunch Stan was to lead the crew in search of Painted Button Quail, Crested Bellbird and Spotted Quail-thrush.

Ken Dredge

## CFNC publications

Castlemaine plant list	\$3.00c	Acacias 1 and Acacias 2	(each)	.25c
Mt Alexander tour	.20c	Muckleford Forest plant list		.25c
Fryerstown tour	.30c	Ferns of Mt Alexander Shire		.50c
Mineral springs tour	.20c	A walk in Norwood Hill bushland		.50c
Common native grasses	.25c	Geological features of Castlemaine District		.25c
Moonlight Flat plant list	.25c	Kalimna walking track		.25c
Bird list	.25c	Castlemaine plants for Castlemaine gardens		.30c
Lawn and garden weeds	.30c	Native plants for Castlemaine gardens		.30c
Castlemaine F.N.C.	free	Street trees of Castlemaine		\$1.00c
Broom: pest plant	free	Walk to Kalimna via Pennyweight Flat		.25c
Roadside summaries	poa	Rare plants of Mt Alexander Shire		poa

## The hot dry summer

By Easter, the Castlemaine bush was as dry as I can remember. Not only had there been little effective rain for months, but there has been a succession of dry winters. To make the dryness more acute, the rain we have had has tended to be in heavy showers, rather than long-lasting soaking rains.

**Kaweka before the rain.** On 5 April I walked around the Kaweka Wildflower Reserve with

other members of the Kaweka Committee. The reserve at Castlemaine has indigenous and non-local plants,

Some of the plants that have been affected by the dryness are:-

Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*). Many have died. Others have few leaves.

Rough Wattle (*A. aspera*). Many have died. One of the most affected acacias.

Early Black Wattle (*\*A. decurrens*). The leaves have closed up. A large tree near the top end of Turner St has died. It has been under stress for some time.

Sallow Wattle (*\*A. floribunda*). Some deaths.

Spreading Wattle (*A. genistifolia*). Only a few are in flower. Some have died.

Hedge Wattle (*A. paradoxa*). Many have died. Others have dead branches.

Gorse Bitter-pea (*Daviesia ulicifolia*). Large numbers of plants have died. It is hard to find a living specimen.

Common Raspwort (*Gonocarpus tetragynus*). Many have died. Others are almost leafless.

Rosemary Grevillea (*Grevillea rosmarinifolia*). Smaller plants appear to be healthy. Some deaths.

Bushy Needlewood (*Hakea decurrens*). There are numerous plants in Kaweka, and as usual in dry weather, many have died. The seed cases of the dead plants have opened up to shed seed.

Willow Hakea (*\*H. salicifolia*). Smaller plants look healthy, but some larger plants have died.

Sarsaparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*). Many have died. Shrubby forms appear to be healthy.

Daisy (*Olearia ramulosa*). Some deaths.

Grey Everlasting (*Ozothamnus obcordatum*). Many have died.

Rough Mint Bush (*Prostanthera denticulata*). Some deaths.

Ivy-leaf Violet (*Viola hederacea*). Some were growing near the bird bath. All appear to be dead.

Dusty Miller (*Spyridium parvifolium*). All have died.

Slender Riceflower (*Pimelea linifolia*). Some have died. Others have only a few leaves.

**Kaweka after the rain.** Since then, there has been some good rains at about weekly intervals, and so another inspection seemed to be worthwhile. The most obvious (on 28 April) change was that of colour - there was a greater contrast between the greens and browns.

Lichens were now green, and more conspicuous.

Large branches on the large Ovens Wattle (*Acacia pravissima*) in Turner St have died. The rain perhaps came just in time to prevent the complete death of this wattle.

Spreading Wattles have been transformed. They have masses of buds, and many are flowering profusely.

Silver Wattles (*A. dealbata*) are also healthy, and have put on new growth. Hedge Wattle is now bright green, and Whirrakee Wattle has masses of buds. There is little noticeable change in Rough Wattle and Gold-dust Wattle. Leaves of Early Black Wattle have partly opened.

Some Sallow Wattles (*A. longifolia*) have also died; others have only a few branchlets with leaves.

Many of the Red Box are under stress. Some trunks appear dead. Other trees have lost all of their adult leaves, and are growing new sucker leaves along the trunk. One or two smaller trees appear to be dead. In the 1982 drought, Red Stringybark appeared to be the most affected eucalypt. They seem to have coped better this time.

Native grasses seem little affected by the rain. Some of the introduced annual weeds have already begun to sprout. Shell Grass has not get germinated.

Twenty plants were planted in late spring. They were watered several times, and mulched with straw. No further water was given over summer. 8 of the 20 are still alive.

**Shicer Gully, Guildford.** On a visit on 29 April, it was noticed that large stretches of forest are without understory plants. Closer inspection shows that all of the understory plants have died; only bare skeletons remain. In the moister gullies, the understory vegetation appears to be healthy. Will the shrub layer recover? Only time will tell.

E Perkins

## Weed Colonisation in Lyttleton St

Last year units for elderly people were built along Lyttleton Street, and a small gap was left between the retaining wall and the footpath. It is interesting to note the plants that have colonised this strip. There was probably moisture from watering of plants along the top of the wall which would have made conditions for growth favourable.

**Grasses** are represented by four species.

Prairie Grass. (*\*Bromus catharticus*). Several small plants are present.

Summer Grass (*\*Digitaria sanguinalis*). One of the more abundant grasses. The leaves have turned a red colour, so for these specimens *sanguinalis* is appropriate.

Couch (*\*Cynodon dactylon*) is at the eastern end.

Yorkshire Fog (*\*Holcus lanatus*). Several plants.

**Dock Family** has two representatives.

Sorrell (*\*Acetosella vulgaris*) has germinated abundantly after the rains.

Wireweed (*\*Polygonum aviculare*) is abundant.

**Daisy family is well represented.**

Fleabane (*\*Conyza bonariensis*). Several plants have grown. Most are under 30 cm. In better conditions it can grow to about a metre high.

Spear Thistle (*\*Cirsium vulgare*). One plant.

Cat's Ear (*\*Hypochoeris radicata*). Several plants.

Sow Thistle (*\*Sonchus oleraceus*). Several plants. Most show signs of stress.

Dandelion (*\*Taraxicum officinale*). Several plants, and in flower.

Coffee Bush (*Cassinia arcuata*). One of the two natives observed.

Aster Weed (*\*Aster subulatus*). Usually found in wetland areas.

**Rushes.**

Rush (*Juncus subsecundus*?). Several rushes have colonised the strip. Final identification will need to await flowering.

**Other families include**

Mallow family. Two representatives. Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*) and Red-flowered mallow (*\*Modiola caroliniana*) are present. The latter species is perhaps the most abundant plant in the strip.

Euphorbia family is represented by Petty Spurge (*\*Euphorbia peplus*).

The only member of the Plantain family is Buckshorn Plantain (*\*Plantago coronopus*). Flat weed is abundant on the other side of the footpath, but was not noticed along the strip.

Some other plants are too small to identify.

E Perkins

**Fri 11 - Sun. 13 Sept. Field Naturalists Get-together at Castlemaine.** Put this weekend on your calendar now. Program for the weekend is

Friday 11 Sept CFNC monthly meeting. John Landy *Insect protection mechanisms*.

Sat 12 Sept. Full and half day excursions from Rose Garden car park, Froomes Road, at 9.30 am and 1.30 pm, including

All day: walk to Cobblers Gully via Poverty Gully (L & E Perkins); all day at Smiths Reef and Muckleford (M & K Dredge)

Half day: Fryers Ridge, (G Broadway); Castlemaine Geology (L & E Perkins); Kaweka, Barkers Creek and Botanic Gardens (J Turnbull); Tarrengower and North British Mine (M Oliver & K Turner); Mt Alexander west ridge (M Hunter); Location to be arranged (C Norris), Fryerstown (S Bruton). Final arrangements will be made when the number of registrations are known.

Sat 12 Sept. 6.00 for 6.30 pm Dinner at UCA hall. Catered by UCA. \$15.00 per person.

7.30 pm. Excursion reports and observations.

8.15 pm. Dr Tim Entwisle *New names for old plants: why botanists change names*.

Sun 13 Sept. 6.00 am. Dawn breakfast at Kalimna Point and breakfast in the band rotunda. BYO breakfast. M Oliver is leader.

9.30 am Half-day excursions. See above.

12.30 pm BBQ at Highland Band Hall. Catered by CFNC (M & K Dredge, with CFNC helpers). \$5.00.

Booking sheets will be circulated before the weekend.

**Fri. 16 to Sun 18 Oct. V.F.N.C.A. Spring Campout at Warrnambool.**

Fri 16 Oct: 7.00 pm. Registration; slide show and supper or trip to Griffith Island (Port Fairy) to view Mutton Birds.

Sat 17 Oct: Bus trip (\$10). 8.45 am Childers Cove; 1.00 pm Illidge Sanctuary; 3.30 pm Hopkins Falls; 5.00- 6.00 pm VFNCA meeting; 6.45 pm 40th birthday dinner (\$12.00); guest speaker, supper.

Sun 18 Oct. 9.00 am Tower Hill or Killarney Beach; 1.00 pm BBQ (\$3.00) in private garden.

RSVP with payment: 1 October. J Shanahan, PO Box 705 Warrnambool 3280.

All activities from or at Archie Graham Centre, Timor St, Warrnambool.

Copy of program available from E Perkins.

## CFNC Program

**Fri. 8 May. *Non-flowering plants.*** Speaker is Garry Cheers of Maryborough FNC. 8pm, UCA hall.

**Sat 9 May. *Muckleford Forest plant communities.*** In the club's submission to the Environment Conservation Council, we identified some of the vegetation associations in Muckleford Forest. On this excursion we will visit some of those associations. Leader is E. Perkins. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30 pm sharp. We will also keep a lookout for Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters.

**Sun 10 May. *Swift Parrot survey.*** Spend Mothers Day looking for Swift Parrots, as part of the National Swift Parrot survey. This will *not* be an organised excursion. Report forms are available from E Perkins.

**Sat 24 May. *BOCA outing to Newstead/Maldon area.*** Meeting place is Market Car Park, Forest Street at 10.30 am. Leader is M Oliver.

**Fri June 12. *Terrick-Terrick; flora, grasslands and the Plains Wanderer.*** Speaker is Shirley Diez, Flora Planner for DNRE. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat June 13. ***Firth Park.*** Trentham East. Leave 27 Doveton St. 11.00am. Take lunch and afternoon tea. Leader is G Broadway.

**Fri 10 July. *Volcanoes.*** Volcanoes, with contributions from club members. Can you contribute?

**Sat 8-Sun 9 August. *Swift Parrot survey.*** Details to be announced.

**Fri 11-Sun 13 Sept. *Field naturalists get-together at Castlemaine.*** See page 7.

**Fri 16-Sun 18 Oct. *VFNCA campout at Warrnambool.*** See page 7.

## About the Club's program

**General Meetings** are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.

**Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are no excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business Meetings** are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

Visitors are welcomed at the Club's meetings and excursions.

## About the CFNC

**Committee:** G. Broadway (Pres.), M Dredge (V.P.), B Maund (Sec.), M Badminton (Treas), R Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), J Turnbull, M Oliver C Morris, K Turner. E Perkins.

**Subscriptions.** Ordinary membership: Single \$16, Family \$24. Pensioner/student: Single \$12, Family \$18. Supporting \$25. Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6.

The address is Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc., P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.

This newsletter was prepared by E. Perkins.