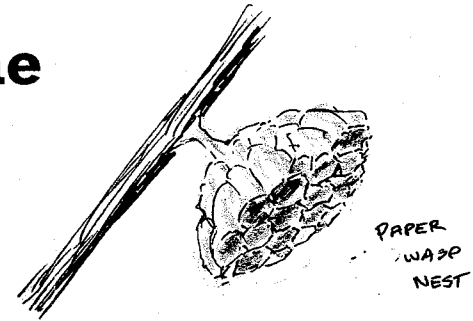


Castlemaine Naturalist

April 2001
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VFNCA Campout at Rawson, Mar. 9-12, 2001

About 120 People from all over the state, from Mildura to Sale, gathered at Rawson Village for the March Campout. Our accommodation was once workers huts and quite comfortable, though not luxurious. We ate in the hotel restaurant. All meals were included in the cost of the camp, even our picnic lunches, so we were free to go on the outings and attend the evening programs without having to worry about cooking or doing the dishes!

On the Saturday, I took the morning excursion to Rintoul Creek to look for plant fossils. The track down to the fossil site was very dry and dusty, with ruts to lose a 4WD in. Most of us walked the last 800 metres. The last three years have been very dry and the creek was only a few water holes and lots of rocks. We had been handed sheets with illustrations to show which of the Devonian period plants we were likely to find in the soft rock strata, and all were successful in finding bits and pieces and I brought home a few specimens to have a look at under the microscope.

Later we drove to the Moondara dam, and again we saw the result of the drought conditions. The dam is well down, but the drooping leaves of the rainforest plants and the crisp mosses really told the story. It was quite unlike the normally lush Gippsland forest.

I went on the all day excursion to Baw Baw Plateau, Mushroom Rocks and Mt. Erica to look at sub-alpine plant communities and interesting geology with Leon Costermans. He was very well organised and took us through an exercise in identifying eucalypt species with the help of two of his books and a bundle of extracts from one of them, and then got us to be aware of the changing communities with height, geology, fire and aspect, making a full and most enjoyable day. I found that what I thought must be a form of Manna Gum was actually Shining Gum. There had been showers the evening before and it was still misty when we finally drove up the mountain, and the tall eucalypts, granite boulders and tree ferns in the mist were a delight. My enjoyment was slightly spoilt when I discovered that the battery in my camera had died and I couldn't take a single slide! There were few flowers out, but some of the berries made up for this,

and one of the prettiest I have ever seen were the translucent, bluish berries of the Elderberry Panax. Each time, like a good teacher, Leon would get us to work it out for ourselves what each new find was, while making sure that we got the right answer! One plant that he made sure we saw was the Baw Baw Berry, which is endemic to the plateau. The other endemic, the Baw Baw Frog, we didn't see.

By the time we turned back down the mountain it was sunny, and the birds were even more in evidence, though the Lyrebirds which were quite vocal earlier, were quiet for most of the walk back down, but near Mushroom Rocks a group of us saw a Rufous Fantail, two or three Grey Fantails and a Pink Robin all in the same group of trees, which really capped our day.

My itinerary finished with a car tour of the Railtrail in Moe on Monday morning, followed by a rather damp picnic lunch in the gardens. Some very hard work has been done on the Railtrail by a group of locals. The tracks and large ballast have been removed and a finer crushed rock laid down, a safety rail has been added to the river bridge, and blackberries and other weeds removed. A lot has yet to be done, but it is being made into a very pleasant area to explore, and as we peered down between the thick ti-tree scrub on the cliffs at the edge of the lake we found Silver-eyes, White-browed Scrub-wrens and White-naped Honeyeaters, only a couple of metres away, certainly too close to use binoculars, feeding on insects out of the wind.

I felt very refreshed after it was all over, and decided after setting off that instead of staying somewhere overnight to dodge the traffic I would return home that afternoon, and very thankfully left the bedlam of the freeway with its P plate and boat-towing speedsters who were dodging in and out of lanes of traffic, to take the winding and scenic trip home through Neerim South, Yarra Junction, Healsville, Kinglake, Whittlesea, Kilmore and Lancefield, only joining the highway again at Kyneton. It was a bit further, but much more pleasant than the roaring traffic and miles of built up area of Melbourne's suburbs.

The next Campout will be at Acacia Camp in Hall's Gap from Oct. 26 - 30, and will be hosted by Ararat Field Nats. I can assure you that it will be well worth the effort if other Campouts are anything to go by.

Rita Mills

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Bitter Cryptandra Mystery

I live on five acres of ex-sheep-grazing land in White Gum Road, Barkers Creek. I am amazed at the natural regeneration of native shrubs, wildflowers and trees that happened soon after grazing was stopped. One little shrub has

always fascinated me. Inconspicuous for most of the year, it is covered in masses of small white and pink flowers throughout early spring. I called it a "heath bush" for want of its true botanical name

This remained so until I applied for the "Land for Wildlife" scheme. Peter Morrison came over from Bendigo to evaluate the suitability of our block, noticed our unusual shrub, and took a piece back for identification. He called me later to say that it was *Cryptandra amara*, the Bitter Cryptandra, considered to be rare and endangered in this area. He also referred me to Frances Cincotta, a native plant specialist, of Newstead. She was pleased to confirm its identity, as the nearest occurrence she knew of was at Joyces' Creek (20 km west of here). Following a tip-off from Geraldine Harris I found another occurrence on a rocky hilltop only 3 km away in Barker's Creek.

Later this autumn we intend to set out some more plants to reinforce our small population of only three shrubs, in the process of solving this mystery I was led back to the Castlemaine Field Naturalists who care about such beautiful and endangered plants, as I do.

Michael Sweeny

Seven plants were in Kalimna south east of the Junior Secondary College Campus and I think still are. Three of the plants had a soft pink heart-shaped fruit, while the other four had greenish white ones.

It is also recorded in the CFNC plant list for the Monk, Goughs Range and Smiths Reef, and on a private property near Newstead, but nowhere is it common. Ed.

February at the Castlemaine Golf Course

Yellow-rumped Thornbills	Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo
Dusky Woodswallows and young	White-throated Needletail
Little Eagles (3)	Grey-crowned Babbler (1)
Olive-backed Oriole	Latham's Snipe (2)
Purple-crowned Lorikeets	Crested Shrike-tit
Musk Lorikeets	Silvereyes eating blackberries
European Goldfinch	50 - 100 Rainbow Bee-eaters
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes and young	Grey Fantail
Long-billed Corellas	Brown Treecreepers
	Black-chinned Honeyeaters

Les Prendergast saw six quail, but wasn't sure which species they were.

Debbie Worland

Roadside Clean-up

The next roadside clean-up will be held on **May 8** commencing at **8.30am**. Meet at Taits' Carriages. There will be no clean-up if it is wet or foggy, not because we are soft, but because it is not allowed for safety reasons by VicRoads. As usual, you will need sturdy footwear, hat and a drink. Gloves, red jacket and rubbish bags are

supplied, but grocery bags, if you have them, are much easier to handle, and can be placed inside the rubbish bags when they are full.

Birds, Gower School

Sunday 11/3/01, 8.20 - 9.50am. Cool to mild.

Australian Raven (2)	White-browed Babbler ,
Musk Lorikeet, common	-one group of 3
Red Wattlebird, common	-one group of 6 in different
Magpie, common	locations
Noisy Miner, locally common	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, fairly
Restless Flycatcher (1)	common
White-plumed Honeyeater (4)	Grey Shrike-thrush (1)
White-winged Chough, approx. 50	Purple-crowned Lorikeet, fairly
Galah, common	common
Yellow Robin, 2 birds together	Fuscous Honeyeater, common
Welcome Swallow (6)	Willie Wagtail, (1)
White-throated Needletail (1)	Eastern Rosella (1)
	Common Bronzewing (1)

Phillip West

Swift Parrots

The club has received the newsletter of the Swift Parrot Recovery team, giving some information about last years surveys. These surveys seem to be clearing up some misconceptions regarding the parrots' distribution, as it was "recently decided that the national Swift Parrot count should include areas of Southern Queensland", because, though Queensland hasn't been the place that birdwatchers associate with the Swift Parrot, it currently being regarded as a vagrant to that state, recent expeditions have been finding them in numbers that would suggest it would be well worthwhile carrying out regular surveys.

There is an interesting extract from the Toowoomba Bird Observatory in the newsletter, and also some interesting archival material from 1966.

In Maryborough, Vic., there were huge numbers of the birds feeding in the Box/Ironbark forests throughout the winter, and large numbers were recorded both in the May and the August surveys. The newsletter states that there were two major events that led to this concentration of birds. The first was an infestation of *Psillid* insects (lerps) on the leaves of the Grey Box, *Eucalyptus microcarpa*, which drew a large concentration of parrots in May, and in August it was the flowering of the Yellow Gum which kept them there. Significant numbers stayed in Maryborough district until late August.

The newsletter also includes the Swift Parrot Survey results from 1995 - 2000

In a conversation just recently, Simon Kennedy, the Swift Parrot Project Officer, told me that the first confirmed sighting of Swift Parrots occurred in the second week of March, so they are on their way across the strait already.

The *Swifts Across the Strait* newsletter is available from the Club if you would like to read it.

The club will be taking part in the surveys again this year. The one coming up will be on the weekend of 19th and 20th of May. Details will be published in the May Newsletter. It is usually held on the Saturday Ed.

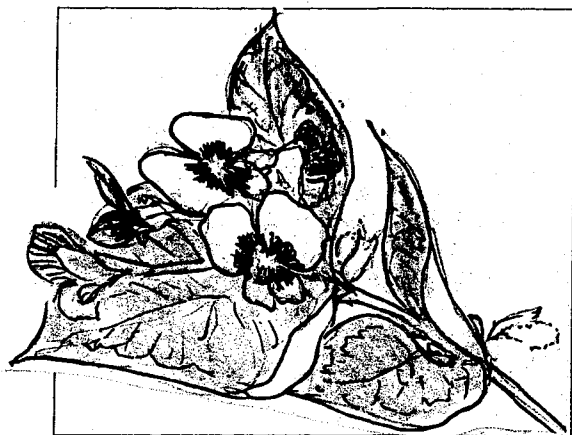
Observations

- The Crimson Rosellas in Maggie Olivers's garden are getting just a little over-familiar with their hostess. Maggie was in the garden recently when they zoomed past her, nearly hitting her with their wings as they passed - this after having polished off the fruit on her tree!
- Brenda Envall was woken at 1am by someone knocking at her bedroom door. It was her son who wanted to show her the Barn Owl in one of the trees in the yard!
- Maureen Dredge reported that she had seen a Little Eagle flying very low over Moonlight Flat and being harassed by several Magpies.
- There are more and more Eastern Grey Kangaroos appearing in Blakeley Road, one even heading for the bush via Mills' driveway. Another time one was feeding in the rain in the paddock opposite the house during daylight hours.
- Doug Ralph has sent, per Margaret Panter, a specimen from Glenluce which appears to be *Acacia obliquanerva*, which is not recorded for this area. It will be a very interesting addition to the plant list if it is confirmed.
- Peggy Munroe has native Paper Wasps making a neat "umbrella" shaped nest on one of the rafters of the verandah in Burnett Road.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 22/3/01:-

- Ern Perkins reported to the meeting that there are hundreds of Broom seedlings appearing where we have weeded before in the Butterfly area of the Gardens. The next Broom-pull will be in August.
- Also for that area, Ern Perkins has swags of *Bursaria* seed which needs to be propagated, and the Club is looking for volunteers to set the seed. **Please contact Ern if you are willing to take some.** The young *Bursaria* will be eventually planted in the Butterfly area.
- From the VFNCA Campout at Rawson comes the information that the next camp will be at Ararat in October, and the next Australian Naturalist Network camp will be in Tasmania, hosted by Launceston FNC. See also the note re Chambers Gorge Field Trip on pp 6 & 7.
- The Photopoint CD is available for \$20. If you want one see Ern Perkins.

Handsome Flat-pea
Platylobium formosum



This appropriately named pea has 2cm wide rich yellow flowers with red bases to the petals, and rich red-brown on the backs of the petals with darker "stripes". The flowers are on 1cm stalks, the calyx is brown and hairy and there are pointed brown bracts at the base of the flower stalks. The leaves are in pairs, and, in this district,

are heart-shaped and 7 - 10 cm long. Dark green above and dull green below, they are leathery, and the net veins are quite obvious. It is often described as "erect", but in this area it is prostrate, or semi-prostrate.

It flowers in mid-Spring covering areas up to 2 or 3 hectares in some areas of Glenluce. It is mostly found in the higher rainfall areas south of the town, but there are patches at Smith's Reef and the Maldon Railway Reserve.

Rita Mills

References - Wildflowers of South-east Australia, Galbraith, and Field Guide to the Flowers and Plants of Victoria, Willis, Fuhrer and Rotherham.

Field Trip to Chambers Gorge, SA

Out of the Rawson Campout came the news of an invitation from the **Field Naturalists Society of South Australia** for members of the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association, of which the CFNC is a member club, to a Field Trip ("Campout" in our language!) in Chambers Gorge in the Flinders Ranges from **June 8 - 13**. The itinerary is included on p. 7. of the CN.

If you are interested, please contact **Dick Southcombe** of Geelong, ph. 52433916, before **Mon. April 16** or contact **Graham Medlin** in Adelaide on 08 82764499 after that. **If you would like a copy of Graham's book Field Guide to Chambers Gorge** to take with you, please let **Dick know**, as he is putting in a bulk order, and they will be available for \$25 posted, through him, but he needs to know before Easter.

Itinerary for Field Trip to Chambers Gorge

June 8-13, 2001

Day 1: Friday, June 8.

Spend all day travelling to Chambers Gorge. Arrive late afternoon and set up camp. Proposed campsites are in the vicinity of Crossings 4 and 5 (see map). Come prepared for bush camping. There are no toilets or any other facilities. Bring gas for cooking as the supply of wood for campfires is limited. Participants may arrive on either Friday or Saturday.

Day 2: Saturday, June 9.

Familiarisation with the area. Examine the open cut barite mine and the main Aboriginal engravings site. Discuss Aboriginal myths and legends including the story of the Blue Wren (*Yuduyudulya*) and the formation of the Big Split and Mount Chambers. Walk part-way into the gorge to the vicinity of the Three Sisters Waterhole. The creek cuts deeply through the uplifted strata at this point and exposes a cross-section of the Precambrian geology from the Elatina Formation to the Tapley Hill Formation. Watch for signs of yellow-footed rock-wallabies in the rocky scree on the eastern side of the creek near dusk. If time is available climb into Lookout Cave to examine bones of prey species from old owl roosts and to admire the view across to Mount Chambers.

Day 3: Sunday, June 10.

A leisurely climb to the top of Mount Chambers. The major geological formations and plant associations can be clearly seen from here. Views extend east to Lake Frome and west towards Wirrealpa and Blinman. Red-barred dragon lizards can often be seen sunning themselves on the exposed rocks. The rocky top is full of interest for herpetologists. Examine an old stick-nest rat site behind Mount Chambers and then walk eastwards along the Mount Chambers Range to view the Big Split from above. Watch for yellow-footed rock-wallabies in this vicinity. Climb down to the southern side of the range to examine the Blue Wren Fissure. The fit and adventurous may wish to climb into the Big Split from near here. Magnificent views can be seen down into Chambers Gorge and The Amphitheatre at this point. Finally descend into the main gorge via a narrow euro track near the scree slope and return to camp.

Day 4: Monday, June 11.

Full day walk to Waterfall Gorge via Frome Valley and return via Chambers Gorge. Climb to the top of Goat Hill to admire the view directly down into the deeply incised Waterfall Gorge, before descending into Waterfall Creek below. Bypass the dry waterfall via a rocky ledge to enter the cool depths of Waterfall Gorge where the walls are barely 4 m apart. This is a good point to stop for lunch. Examine several owl roost sites in caves in this vicinity where the bones of small mammals indicate a much richer mammal fauna prior to European occupation. At this point participants may make a leisurely return to the campsite along Chambers Gorge or walk further towards the eastern entrance. If you select the second option you will need to be prepared to return in the dark at this time of the year.

Day 5: Tuesday, June 12.

This will be an unstructured day to allow participants to recover from the previous two days and/or to pursue their own interests.

Day 6: Wednesday, June 13.

Leave Chambers Gorge to return home.

Additional activities which may be pursued on all of the walks include bird-watching, plant identification, reptile identification etc. Water samples will be collected at selected sites along the gorge. Bat calls will be automatically recorded overnight, onto a laptop computer hard disk, using AnaBat II, and analysed at a later date.

Note: If you intend entering any of the caves you will need to bring:

1. a rock-climbing helmet, or a hard hat (as used on building construction sites), or a cycle helmet, for added safety.
2. a head lamp or torch.

PROGRAM

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm 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 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND
EXCURSIONS

Fri. 13 April Good Friday. There will be no general meeting for April.

Sat. 14 April Local Geology Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm Leader is E. Perkins.

- **Fri. April 20. Bendigo Native Plant Group** has issued an invitation for us to attend their meeting in the **Golden Square Elderly Citizens Hall**, when Michael Marmach will give a talk, illustrated with slides, on the **Canning Stock Route**. It has been decided, considering the number of slides, to start at 6pm. The first part of the program will be followed by a b.y.o. meal (Bendigo NPG will provide tea and coffee), followed by the rest of the program at 8pm. If preferred, Meet outside 27 Doveton St. at 5.30pm.

Fri. 11 May **Antarctica and Patagonian National Parks**. Speaker is Carol Hall, winner of the Ballarat Courier Slide of the Year competition for 2001. UCA hall, 8pm

Sat. 12 May **Highway Cleanup**. Meet at Tait Carriages at 8.30am. There will be no cleanup if it is raining or foggy. More info. p.3

Sat 12 May **Golden Point Reservoir** (not Expedition Pass Res.) Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm sharp.

Sat.-Sun., May 19 & 20 **Swift Parrot Survey**. Arrangements for our participation will be published in the next CN.

Sun. 1 July **Birds Australia Big Birthday Birdwatch!** Put it in your diary.

Fri. 13 July **Toad Studies in NT** Speaker is Graeme Watson. UCA hall, 8pm

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

2001 Committee E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.) ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

Subscriptions for 2001 -

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

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

Supporting: \$31

The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

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