

# Castlemaine Naturalist March 2001 Vol. 25.2 #275



## Birding Bonanza at Gower School

In mid January Phillip West and I went to the Gower school area for some birding observations, and were thrilled with the variety and quality of the birds on display for mid summer. They included Spotted Quail-thrush sighted, and Crested Bell-bird and Peaceful Dove heard, but the highlight of our outing was the sightings of the Chestnut-rumped Hylacolas (Heathwrens) which were spotted in two locations.

As a result of this find I put in some serious leg work and have found approximately twelve birds, possibly more, over five separate locations in the area. Some have been their usual secretive selves and have gone straight to cover, but several have been foraging and on display for as long as one wanted. Some were calling and “chattering” but not singing.

It is wonderful to see this lovely little bird back in numbers (or have they always been there, and, for some reason, are out in the open this Summer?)

By my calculations, and considering the shy nature of this bird, I think the number of my observations would only be the “tip of the iceberg” with many more distributed through the suitable habitat.

Also, the Diamond Firetails, Peaceful Doves and Rainbow Bee-eaters are back in the Gower School area in good numbers after being very scarce over the last couple of seasons.

Another bonus during this search was the sighting of a Yellow-footed Antechinus, which was seen foraging and then scampering up into a tree, in view long enough for a good identification.

Ken Dredge

HIGHWAY CLEANUP - *A big thank-you to those who participated.*

A good number of people arrived for the cleanup on the morning of 10/2, and, despite the amount of rubbish along the roadsides, it was all finished by about 9.30. We didn't see the Latham's Snipe, but we did get a grand total of 17 golf balls! (plus a mangled one the ravens had mistaken for an egg).

## Gower School Bird List

Mid-January - Early February 2001

Whistling Kite	White-throated	Varied Sitella
Painted Button-quail	Treecreeper	Crested Shrike-tit
Common Bronzewing	Superb Fairy-wren	Crested Bellbird
Peaceful Dove (h)	Spotted Pardalote	Rufous Whistler
Galah	Chestnut-rumped	Grey Shrike-thrush
Musk Lorikeet	Heath-wren	Restless Flycatcher
Crimson Rosella	Weebill	Grey Fantail
Eastern Rosella	Red Wattlebird	Willie Wagtail
Red-Rumped Parrot	Yellow-tufted,	Black-faced Cuckoo-
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	Fuscous,	shrike
White-throated	Black-chinned and	Olive-backed Oriole
Needletail	Brown-headed	Dusky Woodswallow
Fork-tailed Swift	Honeyeaters	Magpie
Kookaburra	Eastern Yellow Robin	Australian Raven
Rainbow Bee-eater	White-browed Babbler	White-winged Chough
Brown Treecreeper	Spotted Quail-thrush	Diamond Firetail

Ken Dredge

### Birds at the Castlemaine Golf Course, January.

The nest of the White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes that I have been watching disappeared, and was found on the ground under the tree, with a cat. The birds have gone. However, the Grey-crowned Babbler is still in the area, and still calling. Other birds are - Olive-backed Oriole, lots of Dusky Woodswallows and young, juvenile Nankeen Night Heron, Rufous Whistler, Brown Treecreeper, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and Lathams Snipe.

At our own place the Grey-crowned Babbler was outside the back door. Also, there has been three Wedgetailed Eagles seen and five sightings of White-throated Needletails .

Debbie Worland

### Geckoes

During January we found a buff-coloured gecko in the house at Barkers Creek. Our limited reptile references suggested a Darwin House Gecko! However, there has been a second sighting in February . Of the three gecko species listed for the Heathcote area (Barking, Stone and Marbled) and a closer observation of the gecko found in our woodshed, we now assume the specimen is *Phyllodactylus marmoratus* or Marbled Gecko.

Our specimen had brown marble patterns on a buff background with the tail markings a lighter brown.

Nina Cole

## **If you should be visiting Ballarat .....**

Strolling around the Nature Walk which skirts the swamp on the edge of Lake Wendouree near the kiosk my daughter and I spotted a Blue-billed Duck surfacing. Startled, he disappeared into the reeds immediately. A few days later our son, who lives in Ballarat, visited the spot at my request and reported four male Blue-billed Ducks and one female.

We saw many Reed Warblers in the same area, and also a small, insignificant looking bird we could not identify which seemed to be strolling around on the matted rafts of weed, and was quite unconcerned by our presence. After searching our combined collection of bird books at home we finally discovered from an excellent photograph in the Readers' Digest bird book that it was a Baillons Crake.

Shirley Parnaby

## **“Stand up for your ~~rights~~ plants”**

I was distressed in January when I observed that the VicRoads contractors grading the roadsides between Castlemaine and Newstead had wiped out the only specimen of Tree Violet, *Hymenantha dentata*, that I had ever seen along that familiar 15 km or so of the Pyrenees Highway. Trees closer to the bitumen than the 1 m tall tree Violet had not been damaged. I suppose that understorey plants are harder for grader operators to see (and recognise as valuable).

Concerned that a population of ten or so (not so) Common Eutaxia, *Eutaxia microphylla*, and a Pink Bindweed, *Convolvulus erubescens*, further up the road might meet the same fate as the Tree violet I contacted VicRoads at Bendigo and they organized for me to meet up with two of the workers on the site, just north of Newstead.

I was a little discouraged when the workmen insisted on referring to my ground cover friends as “native weeds” or “grasses” but was very pleased and relieved when a short while after I had pointed out the plants (and shown them photos of their pretty flowers) this vulnerable patch was encircled with pink ribbon to denote a “no go” area until the completion of this round of roadwork.

So, the moral of this story is; don't be shy about protecting our disappearing remnants. Sadly, most people in our community are unfamiliar with the plants that belong here. We need to continue to share our enthusiasm for, and knowledge about, our local flora and fauna, not just with each other but with the wider community. It seems to me that a lot of environmental damage is done in ignorance, or haste, not with malice.

I should have invited the VicRoads workers to join the Field Nats!

Frances Cincotta.

## Some plants seen at Bullarto Reservoir 10 Feb., 2001

**Brooker's Gum** *Eucalyptus brookeriana*. This eucalypt is a rare and endangered species in Victoria. It is similar to Swamp Gum, but has smaller buds and fruit, and the juvenile leaves are slightly crenulate (toothed). At Bullarto it grows along creek valleys.

**Austral Brooklime** *Gratiola peruviana*. It was growing in swampy areas near the reservoir outlet. It grows to about 20 cm, and has green, oval, paired leaves and has pale pink flowers. It is native to Australia and South America.

**Musk Monkey-flower** *Mimulus moschatus*. This north American plant resembles Austral Brooklime but has yellow flowers. It was seen growing near the creek crossing. Despite the common name, it is almost odourless.

**Swamp Daisy-bush** *Olearia glandulosa*. It was growing on the north-east side of the reservoir. It is a slender shrub to about a metre, and has white daisy-flowers. The leaves are very narrow (about 1 mm wide) and about 40 mm long. The leaves have prominent glandular swellings.

**Self-heal** *Prunella vulgaris*. It was growing below the dam wall. It has terminal blue flower clusters. Culpepper tells us that "...whereby when you are hurt, you may heal yourself" and goes on "...it is an especial herb for inward or outward wounds" and "the juice used with oil of roses to anoint the temples or forehead is very effectual to remove the headache..." [from *A Modern Herbal*, M Grieves Ed C F Lyle. Tiger Books International]

**Matted Bossiaea** *Bossiaea buxifolia*. It is a shrub to 50 cm high, but is more often prostrate. It has small oval to heart-shaped leaves and egg and bacon flowers.

Ern Perkins

### Butterflies on Babbington's Road, Bullarto Reservoir

I was very sorry not to be able to go on the excursion to Bullarto Reservoir on the day of the Club outing, but on hearing about butterflies that had been seen, I packed my net, charged my killing-bottles and followed a week later (17th February). Things here are very different to the forest around Castlemaine. The forest around the reservoir is much moister, of course, and the trees are bigger. It is cooler, greener, and the understorey thicker, with many more species of grass and sedge, I noticed especially Wiregrass *Tetrarrhena jucea* and the big sword-grass *Gahnia sieberiana*. There were also more species of 'Browns', some of which come to the end of their westerly range here, and then re-appear, as different subspecies, in the Grampians. some notes on the species I saw there follow below:

1. A Skipper, probably the Bright Shield-skipper *Signeta flammeata*, whose larvae feed on Wiregrass. This species begins to appear in this sort of forest in later summer.

2. The ubiquitous and horrible Cabbage White *Pieris rapae* from Southern Europe. First seen in Australia (Melbourne) in 1937.
3. Silver Xenica *Oreixenica lathoniella*. The smallest Brown around. First appears in late summer and autumn, often in quite large numbers. Food plant: *Poa spp.*
4. Marbled Xenica *Geitoneura klugii*. A small Brown that spends most of its time flying close to the ground around trees. Mainly worn females left. Foodplant: Various grasses.
5. Shouldered Brown *Heteronympha penelope*. Males are just beginning to emerge, females in Autumn. They have a rich ginger colour when fresh. Foodplant: *Poa spp.*
6. Banks' Brown *Heteronympha banksii*. Males also just beginning to emerge. A rich dark brown butterfly with copious black markings and a purplish sheen on the underside of the hindwing. Foodplant: *Poa spp.*, *Carex*.
7. Common Brown *Heteronympha merope*. Very few males left, but females reasonably common though in poor condition. Foodplant, *Poa spp.*
8. Varied Sword-grass Brown *Tisiphone abeona*. The Victorian sub-species *albifascia*. Rather worn now as they first emerge in November and spend their time flying around and through clumps of their food plant: swordgrass *Gahnia spp.*
9. Common Grass-blue *Zizeeria labradus*. Very widespread. Attracted to damp patches on the roadside. Food plant: many species of *Fabaceae*.

Further searching would certainly have resulted in more species of butterfly being observed, but the nine species listed above are the most obvious at this time of year.

Tony Morton

### Office Bearers of Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club 1976-2001

Year	President	Secretary	Treasurer	Newsletter Ed
1976-7	Ray Bradfield	Rita Mills	Lloyd Bransgrove	Ern Perkins
1978	Rita Mills	Bev Singleton	Lloyd Bransgrove	Ern Perkins
1979	Rita Mills	Geoff Sitch	Lloyd Bransgrove	Ern Perkins
1980	Geoff Sitch	Stan Bruton	Lloyd Bransgrove	George Broadway
1981	Geoff Sitch	Mary Lindsay	Frank Meyer	George Broadway
1982	George Broadway	Mary Lindsay	Frank Meyer	Rita Mills
1983	George Broadway	Audrey Bruton	Frank Meyer	Rita Mills
1984	Jack Dare	Beris Perry	Frank Meyer	George Broadway
1985	Jack Dare	Beris Perry	Stan Bruton	George Broadway

1986-7	Ern Perkins	Barbara Maund	Geoff Sitch	Rita Mills
1988-9	George Broadway	Barbara Maund	Ern Perkins	Rita Mills
1990-1	Ern Perkins	Barbara Maund	Clodagh Norwood	Rita Mills
1992	Barbara Maund	Maggie Oliver	Chris Norwood	Rita Mills
1993	Barbara Maund	Maggie Oliver	George Broadway	Ern Perkins
1994	Barbara Maund	Margaret Willis	George Broadway	Rita Mills
1995-6	Chris Morris	Margaret Willis	Brenda Envall	Rita Mills
1997	George Broadway	Maggie Oliver	Brenda Envall	Rita Mills
1998	George Broadway	Barbara Maund	Margaret Badminton	Rita Mills
1999	Maurcen Dredge	Barbara Maund	Margaret Badminton	Rita Mills
2000	Maureen Dredge	George Broadway	John Turnbull	Rita Mills
2001	Ern Perkins	George Broadway	John Turnbull	Rita Mills

## **Members in both 1976 and 2000**

Frank and Ethel Blake	Rita Mills
George and Phee Broadway	Lesley and Ernie Perkins
Geoff and Geraldine Harris	Barry and Bev Singleton

## **Some Bird Atlas Facts**

It is twenty years since the last Atlas of Australian Birds was run. The new Atlas project started in August 1998 and is due to run until the end of 2001. So far over 130,000 surveys have been submitted by 10,000 contributors at 70,000 locations, and all the a one degree grids have been visited, making this the most comprehensive survey of Australian bird species ever carried out.

Special Atlas expeditions into Australias' relatively unknown and remote inland areas have been organised and have located rarely seen species such as the Princess Parrot and Chestnut-breasted Whiteface. The critically endangered Night Parrot, which hasn't been seen for years, is also a target of these expeditions. Chris Morris has taken part in at least one of them.

General Atlas aims are to collect information on the distribution and abundance of Australia's bird species, compare present distribution and abundance to previous Atlas results, identify rare and endangered species and to encourage people to use bird watching for a conservation purpose.

**Andrew Silcocks will fill us in on finer details when he addresses the General meeting in March.**

Atlas information supplied by  
Chris Morris

## **Observations**

- On the afternoon of 8/2 Doris Boyer looked up from what she was doing at her table by the window of her flat in Lyttleton Avenue to see a White (Sacred) Ibis carefully picking over the fallen apples under the tree on the

opposite side of the road. It seemed to be looking for grubs in the fruit, and stayed at least ten minutes until someone came up the street. Rita Mills

- At Yapeen Margaret Badminton had two Sacred Kingfishers outside her kitchen window for about 10 minutes early in February.
- Debbie Worland reported 5 Gang Gang Cockatoos feeding in Hawthorn bushes at Glenlyon on 26/1.
- Shirley Parnaby reports that in February the mangled remains of a Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan), obviously a road kill, was found at the corner of McDonalds Lane and the Calder Highway in Ravenswood.
- Chris Morris reports a brown coloured White-winged Chough with the flock near his place at Little Bendigo. It has been there for some time and is well accepted by the rest of the flock. The Choughs on John Turnbull's property are breeding for the third time this season.
- Kangaroos are spreading throughout the district. George Broadway has seen several on the Wesley Hill Oval on two occasions, and Rita Mills has had them feeding in her own bush for several months since several large houses have been built in Odgers Road on the old haunt of the very large mob of over 80 animals.
- To Brenda Envall's delight a mixed flock of Blue Wrens and Red-browed Finches have been visiting her garden at Harcourt recently.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING:

**SUBS ARE NOW DUE.** If you have paid there will be (p) after your name on the envelope, if you have yet to pay there will be (-).

**Photopoint CD** On Monday 5/2 a number of the club members plus others who were also invited attended an *al fresco* meal given by the Historical Society during which the Field Nats Club handed over the Photopoint Project material to the Historical society for safe storage. Ern Perkins had set up his computer to automatically show though the images taken, and this aroused a good deal of interest. It was a very enjoyable and successful evening.

The outcome of all this is that the **Photopoint** project, which includes photos and written data, is **now available on CD for the cost of \$20**. It gives a wide variety of district habitats and historical information of interest to Landcare people, landowners and field naturalists. Give your orders for the CD to Ern Perkins.

**RAOU Big Birthday Birdwatch.** Birds Australia (RAOU) reaches its centenary this year, and on Sunday July 1 it has been decided to celebrate with a super day of Atlassing. We have decided to take part as a club and hope to send out teams, with Margaret Badminton, the supervisor for our area, directing us to blocks in our grid which have not been covered. It will be a great day, a terrific boost for the Atlas, and a great encouragement for our hard working supervisor! **Keep the day in mind - better still, marked on the calendar - and determine to join in!** More details later!

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST, MARCH 2001  
PROGRAM

**EXCURSIONS 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. Mar 9. "The new Bird Atlas, the good news and the bad news". Speaker is Andrew Silcocks of Birds Australia. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Mar 10 **Tipperary Springs, Daylesford** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm. Leader is C. Morris.

Sat. 31 Mar **A walk through Smith's Reef Goldfields.** This is part of the Castlemaine State Festival Program. Meet at Gower School ruins at 9.30 am. A 5 km walk. Wear sturdy footwear and take morning tea. Full instructions in the Festival program booklet.

Mon. Apr. 2 **Heritage Walks; A walk to the Gardens via Kalimna.** Ern Perkins will be leading the FNC walk of approx 7.5km, leaving the Visitor Information Centre (the Market) at 9.30 am. Wear suitable footwear and clothing. Take morning tea.

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 FNC** 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 club will provide tea and coffee), followed by the rest of the program at 8pm.

Fri. 11 May **Antarctica and Patagonian National Parks.** Speaker is Carol Hall. UCA hall, 8pm

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**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. 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'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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