

# Castlemaine Naturalist February 2002 Vol. 26.1 #285



## Notes on the Varied Sedge-skipper *Hesperilla donnysa* Hewitson 1868

Four subspecies of this little brown Skipper, which stretch over Southern Australia from South Queensland to Kalbarri in W. A., including Flinders Island and Tasmania, are to be found. Their caterpillars all feed on various species of *Gahnia*, and the butterfly's range is limited by the existence of this plant.

Here round Castlemaine their foodplant is *Gahnia radula*, and in November their larval and pupa shelters, made from two or three leaves joined together with silk, can be found scattered among the aggregations of *Gahnia* along creeks and watercourses which are relatively undisturbed. I imagine that the plant, aptly known as Swordgrass, is very unpopular with gardeners and farmers (the leaves can give you a very nasty cut if you are careless), but without it on your land, you will not see this autochthonous Skipper indulging in aerial dog-fights with rival males, or the female hovering over a leaf of *Gahnia*, settling and extending its abdomen under the leaf to lay an egg there. The butterfly does not seem to stray far from its food plant, and so related species, whose particular *Gahnia* is more restricted, are under great stress through 'clearing' of land. One related species can rarely be found on the introduced Pampas Grass, but *H. donnysa*, as is the case with most butterflies, cannot adapt to another food plant

In Victoria, the adult butterfly can be seen in swordgrass swamps in late November and December. A second generation appears in March in South Queensland and Northern N.S.W. where the weather is more suited to butterflies. Here in Castlemaine, like the Altona Copper, it is a harbinger of Christmas.

### ... and a geometrid moth *Gastrophora henricaria* Guen.

The Panters discovered a moth in a bucket, and kindly handed it on to me. It is a striking moth, a Geometrid (the family that has those 'looper' caterpillars which seem to 'measure' the twig they are on, hence their name!)

called *Gastrophora henricaria*. A master of disguise, its larva, which feeds on the foliage of *Eucalyptus*, makes a convincing dead twig if disturbed, sticking straight out from the bough, while the adult moth, which is about seven centimetres from wingtip to wingtip, looks exactly like a dead *eucalyptus* leaf when resting. If disturbed, however, it stands with body almost vertical, head downwards, displaying the large purplish eye spots on the underside of its forewings, presumably to frighten you off if you're a predator. The upperside of its hindwings is also most attractively patterned orange and black in surprising contrast to the dead leaf-like appearance of the upperside of the forewings. This moth is to be found from South Queensland to South Australia. It has gone to a good home.

Tony Morton.

### **Eltham Copper Butterflies**

A seemingly small new colony of Eltham Copper Butterflies has been found at North Castlemaine. After a visit to the butterfly area of the gardens it was felt that the chewed *Bursaria spinosa* on the Mills' property might be worth investigating, so Rita and grandson Tris Kennedy decided to check it out just after Christmas. At first they were unsure, and thought that the butterfly seen may have been the Bright Copper, but after consultation with Tony Morton and Gary Soby and consulting a couple of comprehensive butterfly books, followed by another very good sighting by Rita, it has been decided that the butterflies can only be the Eltham Copper Butterfly.

Since then Gary has made a couple more visits and has seen some of the butterflies, but at this stage (25/1) hasn't seen them close up. Tony hasn't been back to the Mills property but decided he'd check Kalimna Park, which he's considered doing for some time, as the habitat in several places looked "right", and he *was* right. He has found another colony, several fresh specimens, and has watched a female laying eggs.

There hasn't been a great number of the butterflies seen, but it is confirmed that there are some more colonies, which gives more hope for their ultimate survival.

Rita Mills

### **BOCA Challenge Bird Count**

Dec. 1 2001

Many thanks to the 14 members of CFNC who joined in the 2001 BOCA Challenge. The good numbers enabled us to split into three teams, giving us a much better coverage of the 40 km radius from Castlemaine than we have been able to achieve previously with only one team.

The day started with an early morning trio of Debbie Worland, Maureen and myself "sprinting" the Castlemaine Golf Course at 6.30am for the early

birds. We then all met at the "Octopus" at 8.30 am to form into teams - poor Debbie even missed out on breakfast!

Special thanks to the recorders of each team. It is a major achievement to record not only the species sighted but the actual numbers of each over the nine hour period. (Bird species are counted if seen by 2 persons or heard by 3 persons.)

The results were excellent! - a total of 125 species (last year's was 103 species) with a total of 3483 birds (give or take one or two!!!)

Two groups were out for a full day, and one group did two half day trips from Castlemaine, all three groups coming together at the Octopus again at 5.30pm.

The southern team, consisting of Ern and Lesley Perkins and Nigel and Ann Harland, headed off to cover the general area and bird spots of Chewton, Fryerstown, Vaughan, Malmsbury Reservoir and return to Castlemaine. Unfortunately the pair of white swans at the Chewton Cemetery could not be recorded!

The north western team consisting of Rita Mills, Debbie Worland, Chris Morris and John Sinnot covered Gower School and part of the Muckleford Forest, Maldon, Mt. Tarrengower, Barringhup, Joyces Creek and Newstead.

The morning group consisted of Maureen and myself, Maggie Oliver, George Broadway and budding young birdo, Sam Panter, who added several new birds to his list. We covered the local area of Happy Valley, Moonlight Flat, Kalimna Park, Lake Johanna and the Botanical Gardens.

The afternoon trip consisted of the above members except Maggie, who had an afternoon commitment, but we were joined by another experienced birdo in Margaret Badminton. We covered Exhibition Pass, Faraday, Mt. Alexander, Harcourt Res., Harcourt, McManus Road (yes, the Bell Miners are still there) and Eureka Mine.

All three groups met back at the Octopus ON TIME (Shock! Horror! A Birdo outing actually achieving this feat!!)

I think everybody enjoyed the outing, tiring as it was (probably the reason we got back on time! Ed.) The weather was perfect, the company and the birding excellent, and the information recorded will be greatly appreciated by BOCA.

Ken and Maureen Dredge

I for one thoroughly enjoyed the outing, and I was very pleased, although we didn't see a couple of special birds we'd hoped to see, to have

seen four Peregrine Falcons and the Rufous Songlarks, which I don't think I had seen before. I was very impressed by Ken's and Maureen's preparations which were not only thorough and gave us both the route to follow and some other options if we had time to follow them up. It was easy to pace ourselves because of their hard work. Thank you, Ken and Maureen. RM

## Flora McDonald Grassy Woodland

(continued from CN 284, Dec. 2001)

This property is on Burrels Road (off Warburtons Road), Patyah, 22kms north of Edenhope (VicRoads 38 F8)

"This is West Wimmera's best kept secret. A buloke and gum woodland habitat, it is home for Australia's most threatened red-tailed black cockatoo. The brolga and the wedgetailed eagle form part of the large bird population. Its lovely natural vegetation and pristine wetland area is a haven for regional wildlife." Thus the introductory brochure.

Our guide for this walk was Neil Marriot, Trust for Nature Co-ordinator for the area. On our walk to see the Brolgas and their nest we sighted the following plants :-

Scaly Buttons (*Leptorhynchus squamatus*); Yam Daisy/Myrnong (*Microseris scapigera*); Common Eutaxia (*Eutaxia microphylla*); Loose-flower Bush-pea (*Pultenaea laxiflora*); Drooping She-oak (*Allocasuarina monilifera*) and Bull-oak (*A. huehmannii*) standing together, which is unusual; Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*); Sheath Star (*Hypoxis vaginata*); Running Marsh Flower (*Villarsia reniformis*); Chocolate Lily (*Arthropodium strictum*); Small Vanilla Lily (*A. minus*); Blue Grass Lily (*Caesia calliantha*); Bulbine Lily (*Bulbine bulbosa*); Blue Stars (*Chamaescilla corymbosa*); Common Woodruff (*Asperula conferta*); Black's Goodenia, or Native Primrose (*Goodenia blackiana*); Cutleaf Goodenia (*G. pinnatifida*); Creeping Mistletoe (*Muelleriana eucalyptoides*) in Red Gum; Harlequin Mistletoe (*Lyssiana exocarpi*); Broughton Pea (*Swainsonia procumbens*); Blue Devil (*Eryngium ovinum*); Prickfoot (*E. vesiculosum*); Fairy Aprons (*Utricularia dichotoma*); Water Ribbons (*Triglochin procerum*); Sprawling Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia gracilis*); Australian Stonecrop (*Crassula sieberiana*); Pink or Blushing Bindweed (*Convolvulus erubescens*); Common Onion Orchid (*Microtis unifolia*); Salmon Sunorchid (*Thelymitra rubra*); Crimson Sunorchid (*T. x macmillanii*); Great Sunorchid (*T. aristata*); Pink Fingers (*Caledonia carnia*); Austral Bears Ears (*Cymbonotus preissianus*); Mulga grass (*Neirachne allopecuroides*); Common Riceflower (*Pimilea humilus*) and Desert Hakea (*Hakea mitchellii*).

Geraldine Harris

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 24/1/02

**Excursion to Kong Meng.** Note that the date in December Newsletter was incorrect.

**Membership fees for 2002.** The recommendation of the committee is that the fees remain the same as for 2001

**Welcome** to new member, Margaret Lees of Highett.

Richard Piesse was able to report that the **commuter track** between Chewton and Castlemaine is now complete except for the bridge. The team took 16 weeks to complete the task thus far, and hundreds of new plants have been put in along the sides of the track.

**Environment and Conservation Account** Following the receipt of a donation of \$100 from Dr and Mrs C. Culvenor, the Committee has decided, to establish an Environment and Conservation Account, and to augment this amount with a further \$300 from the operation surplus generated in 2001. This account will be used on those occasions when the club wishes to initiate, or participate in, an appropriate environment or conservation project - such as the Birds Australia Newhaven project which we supported, or a local project.

This account will enable the club to donate without any undue financial pressure on the club's operating funds nor will it have any adverse effect on the annual fees.

The new account will be structured and operated in an identical way to the existing publishing account.

Anyone may specifically contribute to this account if they so wish.

### **From the President.**

**Year of the Volunteer.** 2001 was the year of the volunteer. DNRE has presented to each member of the Club a certificate, signed by the Premier, and a mug. The certificate and mug can be collected at meetings.

**Threatened Species network.** The Catchment Management Authority and Natural Resources and Environment, made a funding application on a behalf of interested local groups, to the Threatened Species Network Community Grants Scheme. Groups involved include this Club and other groups (Kaweka Committee, Kalimna Committee, Land Care Groups and the Golf Club). The application was successful, and over \$70,000 is available. Projects include fencing, propagation of plants from seed and cuttings for revegetation projects, propagation and planting of threatened plant species, fauna and flora surveys, biological control, construction and monitoring of nesting boxes, corridor planting, site management, signage, and community awareness and education programs. These may take place on both public and privately owned land.

Generally, grant money is to be matched by an equivalent amount. This may be in labour or other activities. Members of this Club have already collected quantities of seed as part of the program.

If you are interested or able to be involved, please let me know. Involvement might include taking part in surveys of birds or other animals, plant surveys, monitoring, plant propagation, or having land suitable for revegetation, planting of rare species, placement of nesting boxes, or fencing.

A summary, or full copy of the project application are available.

**Central Goldfields Flora and Fauna on CD.** Several meetings have been held to consider the production of a computer CD, with plants and vertebrates of the central goldfields. The area covered would be a rectangle with Rushworth in the north-east, and Lexton in the south-west. The CD would contain lists of plants and animals recorded in each 2 minute grid (about 3 km x 3 km), and images of each animal and images of most plants. The CD would be produced by Viridans, and draw on DNRE fauna and flora lists. Approximately \$25,000 will need to be raised to finance production. Groups involved in discussion have been DNRE, Viridans, City of Greater Bendigo, and representatives from Bendigo, Maryborough and Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club.

**Kaweka Committee of Management.** The triennial meeting to elect the Committee of Management for the Kaweka Wildflower Reserve will be held at the Town Hall on Thursday 7 February at 7.30 pm. Please consider joining this group.

Ern Perkins

### **Sunday Serenade**

While visiting Willmers' (gardeners will probably know the Willmer Garden) for supper on Sunday 20/1 a peculiar loud, creaking call could be heard somewhere out in the garden, and we were told that it had been heard for several nights, and that they thought it was a frog, but hadn't been able to track it down. Although it was a familiar call I hadn't heard it for several years, but we felt that it had to be a tree frog as it seemed to be coming from up in the branches of some Lucerne trees behind the house. Bob and I went off with torches and scrambled up the steep path and then up the steeper bank, and were finally rewarded with the sight of a medium sized, putty coloured frog sitting on the sloping branch of one of the Lucernes. We watched as it expanded its throat pouch and emitted the most peculiar, and loud grating call. Somewhere further over there seemed to be a slightly different (it may have been distance) answering call.

There does seem to be more frogs calling lately around our area, and I have had a couple of Banjo Frogs at our house. The following Saturday night there were at least 3 other species of frogs calling from the dam on the same property.

Rita Mills

## Observations

- Margaret Badminton spotted a part albino Superb Blue Fairy-wren on the Lancefield/Kilmore road at the end of December. The head was white except for two blue feathers, but the other colouring appeared to be normal. Also, she and young friend, Kate Deed, were out birdwatching in Yapeen when they spotted a bird which Kate (in charge of the binoculars) said "wasn't really like a Wattlebird"; it proved to be a Noisy Friar-bird.
- Ken and Maureen Dredge report sighting 6 Greenfinches in and around Cypress and Liquidamber trees at 6 Montgomery Street in January.
- Gilbert Smith, one of our out-of-town members who has a small property in Colles Road, made the "first major visit in 10 years" during the holidays. Although the area has been built up during the 20 years since he bought the property there is still some wildlife, and, over the five days and two nights he was there, he managed a bird list of 28 species including a Sacred Kingfisher flying down Colles Road, two White-necked Herons and a Bronzewing at the dam. Owlet-nightjars, Olive-backed Orioles and Rufous Whistlers all were heard. There were also four kangaroos on the property.
- Just after Christmas George Broadway's granddaughter insisted that she had found a turtle in Forest Creek. It proved to be not a turtle of course, but a large tortoise. The difference? Tortoises have legs and are usually found in fresh water, turtles have flippers and are marine animals.
- Richard Piesse has had regular visits of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos at his place south of Vaughan. They have been in the pine trees taking the seeds from the cones.
- Brenda Enval investigated a rustling near the back door to find a young Blue-tongue trying to find its way through a clear panel in the fence.
- Late year Chris Morris reported seeing a brown White-winged Chough among the normal flock. He has seen it again recently and it appears to be quite accepted by the flock and as yet has not come to any harm.
- Debbie Worland and son Chris have seen 3 Latham's Snipe and one Australian (Spotted) Crake on the Castlemaine Golf Course dam. They have also been watching a pair of Australasian Grebes which have nested on the dam. One day when they were there they spotted the chick riding on the back of the parent. Debbie also reported that about 20 White-throated Needletails were flying round their place for 3 evenings in a row from 25 - 27 Jan.

*Again, thank you to all contributors to the Castlemaine Naturalist over the past year. Your help is invaluable and helps make the newsletter what it is. Rita Mills, Ed.*

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST, FEBRUARY, 2002  
PROGRAM

**General Meetings** are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

**Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. Also note that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

**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. Feb. 8 **Annual Meeting. Landscape Planning** speakers are Shirley Diez and Peter Morrison of DNRE. UCA hall at 8pm.

Sat Feb. 9 **Kong Meng Historic Reserve.** Leave 13 Mostyn St at **3.00 pm**, for Kong Meng via Newstead and Carisbrook. There will be an approx. 2 km walk through the reserve. Take stout footwear, sun protection, sun glasses and drinking water. Then on to Tullaroop Reservoir for a BYO picnic tea on the "island" (near the Church). Leader is Ern Perkins.

Fri. Mar 8 **Nicaragua**, Neil Norris, *or Freeway Focus*, Frank Panter - it all depends whether Neil is called away at short notice again! UCA HALL, 8pm

Sat Mar 9 **Mount Alexander.** Birdwatching with Maggie Oliver. Leave 13 Mostyn Street at 1.30 sharp.

Fri. 8 - Mon. 11 Mar. 02. **VFNCA Campout** based at Campaspe Downs Country Resort at Tylden near Kyneton. Theme of the Camp is **Volcanoes and Mineral Springs of Central Victoria.** Copies of the Information and Registration forms still available although accommodation is no longer available at the site. Registration, which includes insurance, is \$10 per day. If meals are required there is an extra charge - but the hosts, VFNC, need to know *soon* whatever you intend doing, so arrangements can be finalized.

Fri. Apr. 12 Frank or Neill! see Mar 8. UCA hall, 8pm

Sat. Apr. 13. **Sutton Grange.** A visit to Jock McRae's property. This is the 10th anniversary of the original LandCare plantings on the property. The celebration will include an inspection of the plantings, and some more planting done. Further details nearer the time.

Fri. May 10. **Bats** Speaker is Lindy Lumsden of DNRE.. UCA hall at 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. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

**Subscriptions for 2001 - And 2002?** 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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