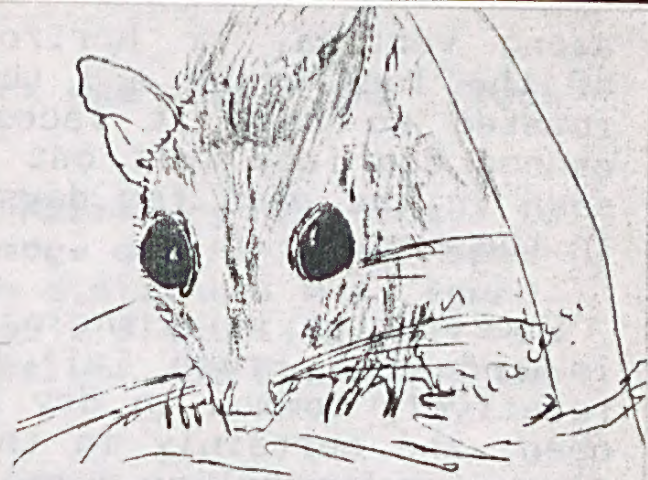


CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

MAY 1990

#156



THE BRUSH TAILED PHASCOGALE

This is an extract from a letter I received this month from Margaret Hunter who lives on "Leanganook", a property near the South Gap on Mt Alexander, just off the Faraday/Sutton Grange Road.

"I thought readers of your publication might be interested in a recent resident of our feed shed. This was a Brush Tailed Phascogale - Phascogale tapoatafa (identified from "The Complete Book of Australian Mammals" [Australian Museum], ed. Ronald Strahan.)

"Further enquiries among local and long time residents in this area led me to a local common name of 'Brush Tailed Bush Rat'. One local resident remarked he'd only seen one brought to school (Sutton Grange) when he was a child. Another Sutton Grange farmer had seen an 'occasional' dead on the road.

"Our feed/chook shed is only a few months old, about 25 metres from the house and 20 metres from scrub in the water channel enclosure.

"Although I don't believe I have lost any fowls (bantams), the Phascogale may have 'disappeared' newly hatched chickens and boiled eggs I had in nesting boxes in place of china eggs!

"The Phascogale was usually to be found behind drums or asleep in a heap of hessian on a feed bin. When disturbed, it would move to the shed beams and slowly 'investigate'. It was able to move in any direction (forwards or backwards)



VISITOR IN THE
FEED SHED.

along vertical or horizontal timbers." This is because of the long claws and the fact that the hind foot can be rotated so that it faces backward. Ed. "It did not take canned dog food left out for it. Although it has not been seen in the past few days it is quite possible it is still in the shed"

Some photos were enclosed, and confirmed that the animal is indeed a Brush Tailed Phascogale, or Tuan. They are relatively common in dry sclerophyl forests which are fairly open, and certainly in this area, but are seldom seen, as, like most Australian mammals, they are nocturnal tree dwellers. Their main diet is arthropods (spiders, insects, centipedes, etc) and small vertebrates - doubtless including newly hatched chickens! - and occasionally headless fowls with the brains and chest cavity eaten are a fairly sure sign of their presence.

They belong to the dasyurid family which includes Antechinuses and "Native Cats".

Palmer's, in Specimen Gully Road Barkers Creek, had a female take up residence in one of their nesting boxes, and raise a family there. She collected most of the nesting material that Wyn had put out in the container, and gradually threw it out as the family grew. The natural nesting material is leaves and shredded bark.

The female has eight nipples, and usually more young are born than can be accommodated - and more are lost during weaning and when they begin to make forays from the nest. She has no true pouch, but an area of soft membrane and hairs enlarges to accommodate the young, which are also protected by soft folds of skin surrounding the area. They are weaned at 5 months but share the nest with the mother until the next mating season. The females disperse after mating, but, like the antechinuses, the males seldom survive the first mating season, although the females often survive to breed a second time.

Many years ago, when we were kiln-drying timber, my husband and the others on night duty on the boiler often used to watch several Phascogales racing around the beams in the boiler room. Considering the number seen, there was probably a nest somewhere, and these were family groups.

Rita Mills
Margaret Hunter

MINERAL SPRING EXCURSION

Only a small number went on the Club's excursion to the mineral springs to the south. Despite the threatening weather, the day was fine and warm.

A small flock of Eastern Shrike-tits was seen at Glencoluce, just past the Loddon River bridge. A little further

on, a flock of about 40 Maned Duck was seen. The flock contained a number of young ducks.

The second last stop was at the Malmsbury Gardens, to view the railway bridge. At the edge of the lake, specimens of Swamp Couch (or *Paspalum distichum*) was found. This is a new record for the Club's plant list. It is shorter than the more common paspalum, and has only two flower spikes.

There was some difficulty in rating the mineral water as the Jim Paull spring at Vaughan was under water, and so the Lawson Spring had to be taken as the standard for comparison. One of the Kyneton Springs was out of action, as was the Tylden Spring.

The tasting tests produced these results:-

Vaughan (Lawson)	Standard at 5.0
Glenluce	8.5
Glenlyon 1	7.5
Glenlyon 2	6.7
Leitch's Creek	6.9
Lyonville	6.5
Kyneton	7.6
Taradale	1.5

The bird list for the excursion was

Chough, White-winged	Robin, Yellow
Coot	Rosella, Crimson
Duck, Wood	Shrike-tit, Eastern
Fantail, Grey	Silver Eye
Firetail, Red-browed	Sparrow
Honeyeater, Fuscous	Swallow, Welcome
Honeyeater, Yellow-faced	Thornbill, Brown
Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted	Thrush, Grey
Kookaburra	Treecreeper, White-throated
Magpie	Wagtail, Willy
Miner, Noisy	Wattlebird, Red
Pardalote, Striated	Wren, Superb Blue
Raven, Australian	

CASTLEMAINE PLANT LIST Ed 7

Edition 7.02 of the Castlemaine Plant List is now available at a cost of \$2. The Botanic Gardens reserve west of Barkers Creek has been included in the new list.

Unlike earlier lists, individual copies of the new list will be printed as need arises, so that a more up-to-date list will be on sale. Copies can be ordered from E. Perkins.

BIRDS LISTS

MARYBOROUGH VS CASTLEMAINE

In the recently published "Birds of the Maryborough area" by Garry and Brenda Cheers, the following are the birds listed that are not given in the C.F.N.C. bird list. Notes in brackets are from notes in the Maryborough List.

- EMU (Historical records, and possible pets). There are also historical records for Castlemaine, and some captives e.g. McKenzies Hill and at Sutton Grange.
- INTERMEDIATE EGRET (Very rare. 2 at Laanecoorie 15/12/87)
- WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE. (Very Rare. 2 reports, one of these from Cairn Curran)
- LITTLE BUTTON-QUAIL (Single report from Clunes)
- RED-CHESTED BUTTON-QUAIL (Single report from Clunes)
- PLAINS WANDERER (Very rare. A record from Newstead 1987)
- AUSTRALIAN CRAKE (Uncommon. Maryborough sewerage ponds)
- SPOTLESS CRAKE (Very rare. Maryborough sewerage ponds)
- BROLGA (Very rare. Sometimes seen at widespread localities). Bendigo F.N.C. also have a record for Harcourt, December 1989).
- AUSTRALIAN BUSTARD (Various records from last century)
- BANDED PLOVER (Not common but widespread)
- RED-CAPPED PLOVER (Very rare. Maryborough sewerage ponds)
- BANDED STILT. (Very rare. Maryborough sewerage ponds)
- GREENSHANK (Very rare. A record from Cairn Curran)
- RED NECKED STINT (Very Rare. Maryborough sewerage ponds)
- LONG-TOED STINT (Very rare. Record from Merrin Merrin)
- WHISKERED TERN (Very rare. Isolated records)
- PINK COCKATOO (Seen near Natte Yallock in 1972)
- RAINBOW LORIKEET (Rare seasonal visitor to Maryborough)
- KING PARROT. Pair in Maryborough gardens in 1982. Aviary escape?
- SUPERB PARROT (Historical records from Newstead)
- REGENT PARROT (Historical records from Bet bet & Amherst)
- WHITE-THROATED NIGHTJAR. (Recorded at Waanyarra)
- AZURE KINGFISHER (Old records from Deep Creek)
- SINGING BUSHLARK (Fairly common in grassland & cropland).
- PINK ROBIN (Rare visitor. Reports include brown-plumaged birds from Sandon Forest in 1989)
- GOLDEN-HEADED CISTICOLA (Rare. Several records). Has been seen by C.F.N.C. members, but just out of bird list areas.
- BROWN SONGLARK. (Common in grassland. Migrant, often seen sitting on fences)
- VARIEGATED FAIRYWREN (Very Rare). A bird of northern districts.
- CALAMANTHUS [Field Wren] (Very rare. One record)
- WHITE THROATED GERYGONE (Rare visitor e.g. at Havelock)
- LITTLE WATTLEBIRD (Very rare. Reports from Clunes & Talbot (Dec 1984) and Maryborough (1986)
- TAWNY-CROWNED HONEYEATER (Very rare. Maryborough airport, Paddy's Ranges & Havelock Forest)
- CRESCENT HONEYEATER (Maryborough cemetery in 1950s. Avoca in 1986)

WHITE-FRONTED HONEYEATER (Occasional visitor)
BLACK HONEYEATER (Irregular visitor e.g. Maryborough
cemetery, Dalenong and Redbank)
CRIMSON CHAT (Very rare visitor. Last known visit in 1968
but some earlier records)

WHITE-BREASTED WOODSWALLOW (Rare migrant. Most likely seen
at Eddington, Bells Swamp, or Cairn Curran)

Birds on the Castlemaine Bird List, and not included in
the Maryborough List are

MALLARD. Found from time to time in several locations
including Lake Joanna in the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens.

GREY GOSHAWK. Recorded for Cairn Curran, Nuggetty and
Castlemaine.

GANG GANG COCKATOO. Recorded for Mt Alexander.

OLIVE WHISTLER. Seen by several members on C.F.N.C.
excursion to Spring Gully.

On April 1st we went over to our daughter's place at Moyston.
Simon, our grandson, took me for a walk in the late afternoon
to see the White-browed Woodswallows that have been roosting
in the trees about a kilometre from their house for the
past week or so. While we waited for six o'clock, which
was when they came in to roost, he assured me, we checked
out the Blue-wrens, various honeyeaters, White-browed Babblers,
and the rest. Sure enough, just before six the Woodswallows
began coming into view from high up. By about 5 past 6
there must have been close to 100 (Simon counted 90, and
as he often counts numbers of birds, I guess I'd better
believe him!) The interesting thing to me was the timing.
They waited until the sun was just off the three trees that
they roost in before coming in.

RITA MILLS

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PUBLICATIONS

- Birds of the Castlemaine District 30c
- Botanic Gardens Tree List 20c
- Castlemaine Bird List \$1
- Castlemaine Plants for Castlemaine Gardens 30c
- Castlemaine Plant List Edn 6 \$1
- Castlemaine Plant List Edn 7 \$2
- Common Orchids of the Castlemaine District 30c
- Eucalypts of the Castlemaine Area 30c
- Fryerstown Tour 20c
- Geological Features of the Castlemaine Area 30c
- Lawn and Garden Weeds 30c
- Mineral Springs Tour 20c
- Mt Alexander Tour 20c
- Native Plants for Castlemaine Gardens 30c
- Orchids of the Castlemaine District \$1
- Street Trees of Castlemaine 30c
- Wattles of the Castlemaine Area 30c
- Wildflowers of the Castlemaine Goldfields 30c

NOTES FOR APRIL

CAPE BARREN GEESE. A flock of 9 was seen in Odgers Road towards the end of March. It is likely that the geese were on route between the coast and the Riverina.

HAWK GETS STARLING. A hawk was seen to take a Starling in Doveton Street (west of Barker Street). The starling was drinking when captured.

ALBINO NOISY MINER has again been observed on the Castlemaine Golf Course. Location was between the 6th and 7th fairways.

KOALA AT LAURISTON. A koala was seen in the Lauriston forest on April 18th. It was feeding in a Messmate.

FLOCKS OF WOOD DUCK. In addition to the flock seen at Glenluce on the Mineral Springs excursion, Wood Duck (sometimes called Maned Geese) have been seen

- a flock of approximately 250 at the edge of Lauriston Reservoir on April 18th. The reservoir was at a low level, and the duck were on one of the exposed parts of the reservoir floor.
- a flock of about 40 on a dam at Fryerstown.
- a large flock near Odgers Road, Castlemaine North.

NESTING BEHAVIOUR OF MANY BIRDS. Nesting behaviour has been noted in a number of cases. Pardalotes have been seen digging into banks, and Robins etc. have been seen forming pairs. Is this usual behaviour for autumn?

INDIAN MYNAHS ARE GETTING CLOSER. A flock of between 30 and 40 was seen recently between Taradale and Elphinstone (near the old Highway turnoff at Elphinstone). A flock of at least 50 Indian Mynahs was seen between Lauriston and Malmsbury, on April 18th. They were on electricity wires, a nearby shrub, and flying over the cleared paddocks.

RED BROWED FIRETAILS AT GLENLUCE. These made another of the large flocks seen on April 18th. At least 40 were feeding on a cleared paddock at the edge of the Loddon River, about a kilometre downstream from Glenluce Springs.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE has been seen several times at Chewton

EASTERN SWAMP HEN can be found on the Castlemaine Golf Club dam, near the new club-house.

HAWK AND MAGPIES. A hawk (perhaps a Little Eagle), being chased by Magpies, took shelter in a house verandah at Chewton for a short time.

BLACK-CHINNED AND WHITE-NAPED HONEYEATERS were seen bathing together in a puddle at Castlemaine North. near the railway line.

SULPHUR CRESTED COCKATOOS AT FRYERSTOWN. A flock of about 40 has been seen recently.

SWIFT PARROTS AT MUCKLEFORD. A number of Swift Parrots were seen in the Muckleford Forest during Easter. Swift Parrots were also seen in this area during the combined Bendigo, Maryborough and Castlemaine F.N.C. excursion about a fortnight earlier.

YELLOW TUFTED HONEYEATERS have been particularly numerous recently in Muckleford forest. Flocks are present over much of the forest.

RED GUMS ALONG CALDER HIGHWAY. Members have commented on the poor appearance of the Red Gums this side of Big Hill e.g. near Bullock Creek. Many appear to be dying. Can any member comment on the cause, or seriousness of the affliction?

FROM WHIRRAKEE (April 1990). These observations were made by the Bendigo F.N.C.

-Brolgas. 3 were seen at Harcourt, in the early morning, flying south-west on 5/1/90.

-Satin Fly-catchers were seen on Mt Alexander. Two were nest building, as was another (3/12/90), and two were observed feeding young on 12/12/90.

-White's Thrush was seen on Mt Alexander on 3/12/89.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450

Committee: Ern Perkins (Pres), Chris Norwood (V. Pres), Maggie Oliver (V. Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec), Clodagh Norwood (Treas), Kaye Turner, George Broadway, Rita Mills (Newsletter), Ian Higgins, Robyn Holden.

Subscriptions

Student/Pensioner	\$5	Single	\$8
Family	\$12	Supporting	\$15
Newsletter posted: Subscription plus \$5.			

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

- Fri 11 May. LINEAR RESERVES with Keith Watson, Chris Knight and Vivienne Fraser. High School at 8.00 p.m.
- Sat 12 May. KOALA PARK. Leader R. Mills. Leave SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp.
- Fri 8 June. A WALK THROUGH BLACK HILL. Speaker is Lois Proctor. 8.00 pm at High School.
- Sat 9 June. FUNGI. An excursion along the Fryerstown-Taradala Road. Leader: C. Norwood. 1.30 pm. from SEC.
- Fri 13 July. Mt KOSCIUSKO. Wildflowers of the Snowy Mountains, with Rita Mills and Peter Starr.
- Sat 14 July. MUCKLEFORD FOREST. Birding in the Muckleford Forest. Leave SEC at 1.30 sharp. Take your binoculars and bird book. Leader: E. Perkins.
- Fri 10 Aug. GROWING AUSTRALIAN NATIVES FOR CUT FLOWERS. Talk by Marilyn Sprague. 8 pm at High School.
- Sat 11 Aug. One-tree Hill (Bendigo-Mandurang area). Leave S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30 p.m.
- Sun 19 Aug. TARNAGULLA. Excursion with Maryborough FNC.
- Fri 31 Aug-Sun 2 Sept. WYPERFIELD CAMPOUT. W.V.F.N.C.A. campout at Wyperfield, organised by Maryborough F.N.C.
- Fri 14 Sept. WALKING IN THE WILDERNESS - SW TASMANIA with Pat Bingham.
- Sun 16 Sept. FLAX-LEAF BROOM PULL from the Botanic Gardens, Froomes Road. 10.00 a.m.
- Mon 17 Sept. DARGILE FOREST. Excursion with Bird Observers Club - weekday excursion.
- Oct 26-28 GRAMPIANS. WVFNCA campout at Churches of Christ Centre, Halls Gap
- Fri 9 Nov. THE PREHISTORY OF DISCOVERY BAY (S.W. Vic). Speaker is Michael Godfrey. * p.m. at High School.

Meetings on the second Friday of each month at Castlemaine High School at 8.00 p.m. Business meetings on the fourth Thursday at 38 Campbell St at 7.30 p.m. All members invited. Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.

SUPPER ROSTER

May: M Oliver, M Downes June: B Envall, B Maund