

# Castlemaine Naturalist

JULY 1990

#158



## A WEEK'S BIRDING

Last week I had a bird observer friend staying with me, and we packed lunch and went exploring nearly every day. We saw roughly 40 birds most days, and twice were lucky enough to be in an area where a mixed flock of birds was feeding - once at the back of the Gowar school and once behind Mt Tarrengower. Both flocks included robins, whistlers, thornbills, pardalotes, grey fantails, a scissors grinder, silver eyes, shrike tit, lorikeets, and of course, wattle birds.

Later at the Red White and Blue area, we were lucky to have good views of a group of five or six black-chinned honeyeaters, and also a pair of hooded robins. A very special sight was a pair of fully coloured little grebe on the lower dam. They were floating together with perfect reflections in the still water - a very pleasing sight.

Another visit to the Red White and Blue produced the strange sight of a male hooded robin, sitting at the edge of the lower dam. He occasionally splashed in the dam, but otherwise just sat for several minutes. The female watched - rather anxiously (?) from a nearby bush. In the top dam yellow-tufted honeyeaters were bathing from the edge, white-naped honeyeaters were plunging from tree at the other end, and wattle Birds hurling themselves into the water - a most unusual sight.

The highlight of the week was lunch at Inglewood Botanic Gardens, where large flocks of yellow-tufted, brown headed and yellow-plumed honeyeaters were feeding above and around us. The yellow-plumed honeyeaters were new sightings for both of us.

On the way home from Tullaroop we saw three whistling kites, so we drove into the picnic ground for a better sighting. One kite dropped down over the dam and came up with what appeared to be a fish in his claws. Immediately the other two flew at it, we supposed trying to get the fish. Two ravens then joined in, but were also unsuccessful, and later gave up the chase. When the kites disappeared over the dam, the fisherman still had his catch.

K.T.

## RACOSPERMA TO BECOME AUSTRALIA'S FLORAL EMBLEM?

In the National Herbarium's list of the presently accepted names of Victorian plants, *Racosperma* is listed as an alternative name to *Acacia*. Many of our familiar wattles have already been given new names, although the new names are not always accepted. If the rather large task of changing all of the names is completed, and if the changes are accepted, then our National Emblem will become, I expect, *Racosperma pycnanthum*.

It appears that most of the specific names of wattles, that now end in -a will end in -um.

Some of the changes in the new list are

**LITTLE DUCK ORCHID** was originally *Caleana minor*. It then changed to *Paracaleana*, and is now back to *Caleana*.

**LEEK ORCHIDS**. The tiny autumn leek orchids have a genus of their own, *Genoplesium*. The familiar Sweet Leek Orchid is now *Prasophyllum truncatum*.

**ELBOW ORCHID**. The tiny elbow orchid, which is found in the forests south of Daylesford, is now *Arthrochilus huntiana*.

**ENGLISH COUCH** has a new name, and is *Elytrigia repens*. English Couch, which is usually found in damp areas, is not very common in this district.

**MOSS SUNRAY**. The tiny everlasting is no longer called *Helipterum*, but is now *Hyalosperma demissum*.

**TINY BOW-FLOWER**. This tiny daisy was *Toxanthes muelleri*, and is now called *Millotia muelleri*. The even tinier *T. perpusilla* will become *M. perpusilla*. We already have the Soft *Millotia*, which is quite common in our local bushland.

**HASTATE ORACHE**. The scrambling saltbush with large triangular-shaped leaves, and found in damp areas (such as along Campbells Creek, or at the sewerage works), has become *Atriplex prostrata*.

**LOTUS**. The introduced *Lotus pedunculatus*, found near Daylesford, has become *L. uliginosus*.

**PRICKLY TEA-TREE** which was *Leptospermum juniperinum*, is now *L. continentale*. This tea-tree is fairly common in the Wombat Forest.

**WHITE MARIANTH**. This is one of our very attractive wild-flowers. It was *Marianthus*, then became *Rhytidosporum*, then *Billardiera*, and now back to *Rhytidosporum*. [Perhaps, if there is doubt about a name, choose the longest and ugliest?]

**YAM DAISY**. There were two species. Now both are combined as *Microseris lanceolata*.

The source of these name changes is "A Census of the Vascular Plants of Victoria" by J.H. Ross, 3rd Edition March 1990. Published by the National Herbarium.

## THE RESCUE

On the evening of the Saturday after the last meeting I had been puzzled by the insistent "come-and play" bark that the dog had been keeping up for quite a while, despite being told to stop. I'd gone over to the wire of her run earlier, but because it was dark I couldn't see a thing, but she didn't come to the me as usual. About an hour later she was still at it, and as she didn't come to me again. I decided to get a torch to see that she wasn't hooked up by the collar in one of the bushes in her run. The torchlight revealed that she was O.K. but she was barking in the face of a poor little ringtail possum which had tried to get through a gap in the wire which was half covered by the strainer-post, and was stuck.

I went into the run, collected Kerrie and took her inside the house out of the way, collected an old towel and went to the rescue. When I put the towel over his head, talking sympathetically to him the whole time, the little possum, which was about 3/4 grown, backed back enough to release his hip from the wire. He was gripping my sleeve already, and, as he freed himself he climbed up my sleeve, gave me a nip to show he wasn't scared at all!, and shoved his nose firmly under my armpit and refused to budge any further.

I wanted to check that he was O.K., so got Doug to return Kerrie to her run, and took the possum inside, wrapping him gently in the towel. When I inspected him I found that he was quite unhurt, though his ears were probably ringing! He had lost a small patch of fur about 1/2" X 1 1/2" from his back, probably from pushing through the wire. I was still sympathising when he heaved a big sigh and his eyelids drooped and he relaxed. Eventually he tucked his head down and settled down for a much needed sleep. I took him over to show him to my son, his wife and their little daughter, and he still didn't disturb.

I rang Berri Perry to ask if she had any idea what he was likely to do, and what best to do to let him go. I needn't have worried though. He settled down tighter and slept for 1 1/2 hours while I nursed him, and even carried him round, before he finally disturbed. I offered him some gum leaves, but he just tucked his nose down again until I took them away. I took him outside, and he just jumped down from the towel, and waddled off, making a squeaking noise when I walked towards him to see he was all right, and disappeared into the night.



It must be one of the loveliest experiences I have ever had with a wild animal, to have had him trust me so completely, and to be able to nurse that warm (if rather aromatic!) small bundle until he felt fit enough to face the world again.

Rita Mills

## IN SEARCH OF THE ROSE ROBIN

In late June we went to the botanic gardens to try to see the rose robins. I had been there a few days earlier and had seen many small birds but no robins. I was rather puzzled that this time there were no small birds around. We were enjoying the distant calls of the Pied Currawongs, which grew louder as the flock moved nearer, until we were almost deafened. In one tree near the barbecue area where were eight currawongs in a tree and in their midst was a kookaburra, crouched low in a branch - he was being attacked verbally and obviously not enjoying it.

Suddenly all the currawongs moved away and after about five minutes we heard noises of small birds across the creek. Here we saw and heard red-browed finches, wrens, several spotted pardalotes, a fantail, striated and buff-rumped thornbills, yellow-faced honeyeaters, all being very active, and then the male rose robin landed on a tree just in front of the car.

Now that the gardens were quiet again, the robin and the female robin and most of the birds began moving over the creek into the gardens. We drove back to the barbecue area and had another good look at the male robin, but we could not find the female.

Has anyone else noted the complete absence of small birds in areas where the Pied Currawongs are flocking & calling?

Kaye Turner and Maggie Oliver

### SUPPER ROSTER

July: S. Box, K. Turner      Aug: C. Norwood, B. Perry

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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.

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#### Subscriptions

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

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## YELLOW GUM

A sample of a gum flowers provided for identification is thought to be Yellow Gum (or *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*). Yellow Gum is the common smooth-barked eucalypt of the dry goldfields forests. (The other smooth-barked eucalypts are Red Gum which is usually near streams, and Manna Gum and Candlebark, both of which favour areas with a wetter climate or different soils).

The flower specimen has unusually pointed caps. In yellow gum, the flowers usually grow from the leaf bases. In this specimen the flowers appear to be in sprays. This affect may occur because some of the leaves have been lost

A distinguishing feature of yellow gum, and its close relatives, red ironbark and yellow box, is the sterile outer filaments. In most other eucalypts, all of the filaments end in anthers

The specimen was from Castlemaine North.

## DWARF BUSH-PEA.

A sample consisting of a small spray of leaves is thought to be dwarf bush-pea, one of the many local "egg and bacon" plants. The specimen was found along a water race, near Mt Alexander.

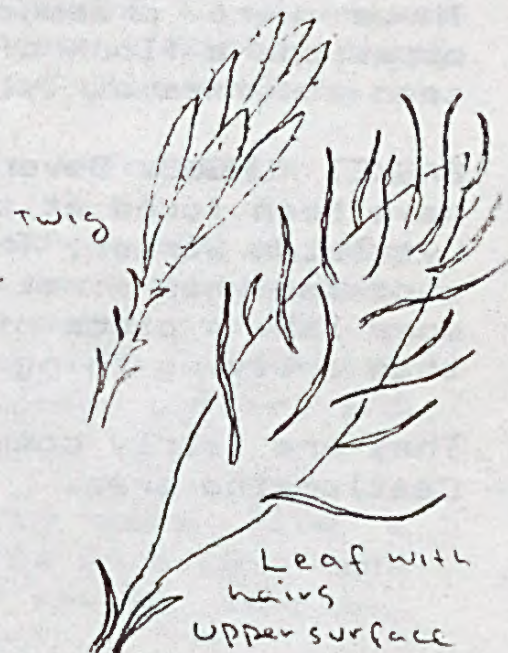
The bush was unusual, in that it was more or less prostrate, and dwarf bush-pea is usually an erect shrublet, growing to 30-50 cm. It may be that the habit of this specimen has been caused by grazing.

First impression of the specimen is that of dwarf bush-pea, and examination with a lens supports this. There are tiny stipules at the leaf bases, the leaves are hairy, and slightly concave. Comparison with a pressed specimen shows little difference.

An examination of the plant when in flower is desirable to confirm the identification.

## WETLANDS RECORDS

Do you know of water-level records for any local dam, swamp etc. Such information is needed for a project by Dr Jane Roberts of CSIRO.



# NOTES FOR JUNE

ADDITIONS TO THE CLUB'S BIRDLIST include black-chinned honeyeater (g), brown treecreeper (g), collared sparrowhawk (g), little pied cormorant (f), lapwing (f), galah (f), white-browed scrubwren (f), jacky winter (r).

CASTLEMAINE NORTH BIRDS. Wattle birds are very numerous. Several pied currawongs visited for a day. Striated thornbills have been visiting. [RM]

BRONZWEWINGS MIX WITH GALAHS. Flocks of galahs are a common sight on the Mt Alexander Golf Course. On two occasions, 4 or 5 bronzewing pigeons have been feeding with them, together with two magpies. [FB]

PIED CURRAWONGS IN TOWN. They are again visiting the town. They are seen at the north end of the town only. Why is this?

KOOKABURRAS are very plentiful this year in the Guildford area. [BP]

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLES can often be seen soaring over the Guildford Plateau. It is a good place to see them. [BP]

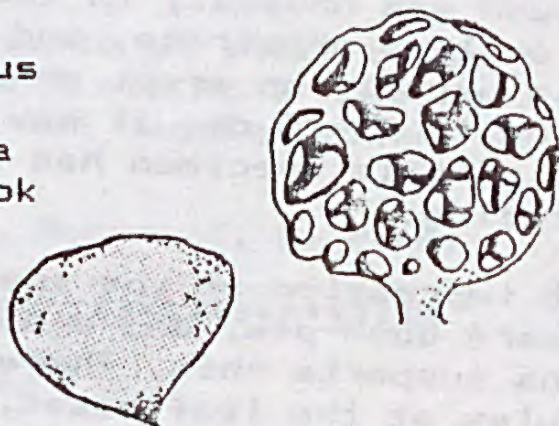
BROWN GOSHAWK was seen to fly in and sit on a fence post near Lake Corangamite [GB]

GANG GANG COCKATOOS AT TRENTAM. A pair was observed. [SB]

YELLOW-TAILED BLACK COCKATOOS AT TRENTAM & TYLDEN. Three were present all through summer, and on several occasions a flock of 10-13 was seen. [SB]. They are also seen at times at Tylden [CP].

BASKET FUNGUS. Several Basket Fungus have been found at the east end of Lyttleton Street. These fungi are a surprise when first seen - they look more like a piece of white plastic than a living thing.

They are fairly common in the Castlemaine area.



GOLDEN WATTLE IN FLOWER. On the Club's excursion in June to Fryerstowne, some of the Golden Wattle along the Fryerstown - Taradale road were in full flower.

BLUE-FACED HONEYEATERS AT DUNOLLY. Following a tip-off, two members went to the Dunolly school on 24/6/90. Noisy miners were plentiful, noisy minors scarce (it was a Sunday), and musk lorikeets were very plentiful. A number of blue-faced honeyeaters were also seen. They are quite large birds (bigger than the noisy miners, and with distinctive yellowish-olive backs). All of these birds were apparently attracted by the flowering of the Yellow Gums. The range of blue-faced honeyeaters is from northern Victoria to northern Queensland and Northern Territory. They are occasionally seen at Bendigo and Eppalock. (EP)

## THE ROSE ROBIN SEEN AGAIN

On the Queen's Birthday weekend in 1987, members of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club visited Castlemaine. One of the highlights was the sighting of a rose robin in the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens.

On the Monday of Queen's Birthday, 1990, a male rose robin was again seen, briefly, in the gardens. A visit to the gardens two days later was productive, and the male was able to be observed for about half an hour, during which time most of his time was spent in leafless deciduous trees. The female was also seen. Since then, the robins have been seen by a number of Club members.

The Readers Digest bird book gives this information.

"In winter the rose robin sometimes moves out of the heavy forests and mountain regions to mangrove swamps, suburban gardens and even city areas where there is cover. In the drier northern parts of the wintering range the bird is found in scrubby lowland gullies and patches of timber on the hillsides".

"In its feeding habits, the bird is more like a flycatcher than a robin. It often sits on a twig and launches out, with tail fanned, after flying insects, to take them on the wing."

This describes its home in the gardens, and its behaviour, very well.

# CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

- Fri 13 July. Mt KOSCIUSKO. Wildflowers of the Snowy Mountains, with Rita Mills and Peter Starr. 8.00 pm at the High School.
- Sat 14 July. MUCKLEFORD FOREST. Birding in the Muckleford Forest. Leave SEC, Mostyn St 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.
- Sat 15 Sept. PINK CLIFFS (HEATHCOTE) and MT IDA. Leave from 27 Doveton St at 10.00 am sharp. Take lunch.
- 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. Meet Dargile Forest at 10.30
- Fri 12 Oct. TREKKING IN THE HIMALAYAS. Jim Nichols and Lob Sang D Lama. High School at 8.00 p.m.
- Sat 13 Oct. BLACK HILL, KYNETON. Leave SEC at 1.30 p.m.
- Oct 26-28 GRAMPIANS. WVFNCA campout at Churches of Christ Centre, Halls Gap
- Sat 3 Nov. KALIMNA WALKING TRACK. 9.30 am. (Cast. Festival)
- Sat 3 Nov. MUCKLEFORD TOUR. 1.30 pm. (Cast. Festival)
- Wed 7 Nov. KAWEKA WALK. 6.30 pm with Kaweka Committee.
- Fri 9 Nov. THE PREHISTORY OF DISCOVERY BAY (S.W. Vic). Speaker is Michael Godfrey. 8 p.m. at High School.
- Sat 10 Nov. MUCKLEFORD TOUR. 1.30 pm (Cast. Festival)
- Sun 11 Nov. KAWEKA WALK. 3.30 pm with Kaweka Committee.
- 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.

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