

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



NOVEMBER 1990 #162

WYPERFELD

by Simon Kennedy, Moyston.

On the 22nd of September 1990 my father, nine year old brother and I set off to Wyperfeld National Park. This article will be mainly be about the birds, but this park has plenty in store for bushwalkers, animal watchers, or whatever you call people into kangaroos etc., and plant lovers.

The camping ground is very spacious (over a kilometre long) and very safe for young children. There is an excellent information centre with booklets and information on certain aspects of the region, for example, history, weather, soil types, maps, bird and animal lists, and also there are displays. There are booklets to nearby National Parks and State Parks (handy if you are touring the Mallee region) and information on up and coming activities organized by the Rangers such as spotlight walks, searches for Mallee Fowl, beginners bird walks, etc. These activities are good for both adults and children.

As we approached the park entrance I spotted a couple of White-backed Swallows in a dead tree. The first birds seen as we entered the park was a pair of Mallee Ringnecks and a Little Corrella as it flew overhead. One bird that was in large numbers around the camping ground and near the park entrance was the Emu. This is the place to see lots of Emus.

After having a little trouble with the tents, which is customary in our family, we set off along the track I was looking forward to travelling on, the Lake Bambruck track, which starts just near the eastern end of the camping ground which was where we were camped.

The walk was excellent. This track travels across dunes with mallee and heath on them and goes down into gullies of Redgum and Black Box near the start and finish, and has Bulloak, Cyprus Pine and Porcupine Grass/heath gullies in the middle. About a third of the way along we saw a Redthroat in the heath, and a little later on two Pink Cockatoos were scared off by Tristan, then a Southern Scrub-robin crossed our path within reaching distance, and towards

Lake Bambruck a Splendid Wren approached us to within 6 - 8 feet, displaying its blue brilliance. At Lake Bambruck a loud, harsh call indicated the presence of Regent Parrots, when a few seconds later I saw the birds. I was surprised by their speed in flight and their size. we also saw ten little Emus and their father bolting across one of the gullies, and a Red-capped Robin near the "shore" of Lake Bambruck, as well as more Mallee Ringnecks.

The following morning I didn't sleep after 4.30 am and heard a lovely Boobook Owl duet, a Tawny frogmouth, a call that probably belonged to a nightjar, and, a little later, Magpies, Lapwings, Kookaburras, and Grey Butcherbirds made up the dawn chorus.

Later in the day we went to Black Flat. This area is mainly Riverine woodland, excellent for Regent and



Red-rumped Parrots, as well as large numbers of Brown Tree-creepers. We saw a Regent Parrot poke its head out of its nest hollow just near the track only 20 - 30 feet away, and Tree Martins were breeding here too - Tristan insisted they were White-backed Swallows.

Lake Hindmarsh is worth a visit. Great Black Cormorants and Pelicans were on the lake, as well as a pair of Great Crested Grebe in what was apparently a courtship ritual. The birds on the shore included White-browed Babblers, Peaceful Doves, Galahs and Cockatoos, White-browed Woodswallows, again, many Tree Martins, a Diamond Firetail, a Sacred Kingfisher and Tristan found a Willy Wagtails' nest with eggs.

I returned to the Lake Bambruck track on my own the last day to see more Regent Parrots (a flock of 15 to bring up to 34 the number I'd counted), Inland Thornbills, a flock of 5 Pink Cockatoos in a Cyprus Pine, Variagated and Splendid Wrens, another Southern Scrub-robin, a little Eagle, a Yellow-throated Miner, and a Purple-gaped Honey-eater in its nest only a few feet above my head in a Mallee tree.

Eastern Lookout has a superb view of the surrounding Mallee. It was heartening to see all this mallee safe from farmland. There is an excellent nature drive, and I saw some White-faces in the carpark.

Other species I saw were Varied Sitellas, Striated Pardalotes, Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, Yellow Thornbills, Weebills, Wedgetailed Eagles, Australian Ravens (looking for lunch around our tent), Pallid Cuckoos, Rufous Whistlers, Black-winged Currawongs, Crested Pigeons, White-eared Honey-eaters (quite common in the mallee) Tawny-crowned Honey-eaters, White-plumed Honeyeaters and Magpies, to name a

few. I saw 59 species inside Wyperfeld in three days, which shows it is rich in bird life.

Wyperfeld is an excellent place for a nature holiday, but it is very hot in summer and bees are a nuisance. Winter nights are just as cold as anywhere else in Victoria, so I think that when we went was about the best time, also because the birds were breeding and the migrants had arrived. Autumn is good weatherwise.

The park has no showers or flushing toilets. There is a wash-house. Water should be taken into the park as there is a limited tank supply. Camping costs \$4 a night. We camped at the eastern end away from the majority of people who go there for a cheap caravan holiday. When you see a good camping spot, remember it and search on, you may find a better one as there are many good camping spots.

Splendid Wrens should be found at about the "3" post on the Lake Bambruck trail. I went to that area several times and didn't fail to see a male, and got some long observations. Regent Parrots are hard to miss at Lake Bambruck and Black Flat, and Mallee Ringnecks will let you get quite close to them in the camping ground. I saw a pair feeding young in some Cyprus Pines halfway along the Lake Bambruck trail.

This area is a bushwalkers paradise, with dozens of long and interesting walks available. Western Grey kangaroos feed in large numbers on the dry lake bed next to the camping ground, and the sighting of a Mitchell's Hopping Mouse is a realistic possibility on a spotlight walk. There are excellent picnic areas, and the sunsets can be spectacular.

Wyperfeld's camping area is about 15 miles from Yaapeet, where there is a general store. Rainbow and Hopeton, (both reasonably near by) have Caravan Parks and Motels.

Wyperfeld is an excellent place for mallee birds and plants. It's well worth the trip.

JACKASS FLAT

Recently I visited Jackass Flat to view the replanting project being carried out by the Bendigo Native Plant group. Some of Jackass Flat has been stripped for gravel, and there are some large patches devoid of any vegetation. Areas have been fenced, and plants indigenous to the area have been planted. There has been some direct seeding, and plants have been nursery grown from seeds and cuttings.

Jackass Flat is to the north of Bendigo. It can be reached by following the tram line past the joss house, and continuing for about half a kilometre past the Ironbark nursery.

I was quite surprised at how different the vegetation is to that of the Castlemaine bushland. Plants that are common at Jackass flat include leafless currant-bush, slaty she-oak, totem poles, violet honey-myrtle, green mallee, golden pennants, narrow-leaf star-hair, stiff westringia and ruddy beard-heath. All of these are absent, or very rare, in our bushland.

NATIVE SEED ORCHARD

At a meeting held in Bendigo on October 23rd, it was decided to work towards establishment of a Native Seed Orchard. In the orchard, native understory plants would be grown, and the seed harvested. Grants for capital costs in setting up the orchard will be sought, and most of the labour will be provided by Bendigo Environment Services (a small "not for profit" company which employs intellectually disabled adults). Suitable land will be sought from the Department of Conservation and Environment.

The orchard would provide seed that could be used for a variety of purposes, such as

- mining and quarrying rehabilitation
- landscaping projects
- rehabilitation of degraded land
- road construction and other earth-moving projects.

Research has shown that direct seeding can establish native vegetation at a fraction of the cost of growing plants in nurseries, even when the seed has to be collected from scattered plants. It is anticipated that manual collection of seed from the seed orchard could reduce costs still further.

There will also be opportunity to produce seeds of rare and endangered plants, so that seeds from these could be used in revegetation projects.

At present in planting projects (for example, establishment of grasses after road construction), the only bulk seeds available are of introduced species. The seed orchard will help to make native seeds available.

Acacias and larger eucalypts will not be included in the orchard at this stage - seeds from these species are relatively easy to obtain.

Further information can be obtained from Ian Higgins.

THE LOCKWOOD FOREST

The Lockwood Forest is next door (on the eastern side) of the Mohair farm. It can be entered from several entrances near the Mohair farm, or from the Alt Calder Highway, about a kilometre north of the Maldon Road junction.

Notable plants in the forest are leafless currant-bush (a close relative of the native cherry), cross-leaf honey-myrtle, neither of which are to be found in the local bushland. There are also large patches of peach heath and common fringe-myrtle. Mystery wattle is also fairly plentiful in some areas of the forest.

CONSERVATION OF NATIVE GRASSES

Of all of the Australian fauna, grasses are one of poorest conserved. Most of the natural grasslands have been used for grazing, and eaten out, so that the original grasses and native herbs have been replaced by alien grasses and alien weeds, such as onion grass, cape weed and docks. Other areas have been "improved" with clovers and fertilizers.

There are several ways to conserve native grasses

(a) by conserving representative remnants in biological reserves.

(b) by using native grasses in large-scale planting projects, for example, along roadsides and freeways in revegetation projects, along gas and electricity corridors, aerodromes, parklands, golf courses and so on. Native grasses can also be used in home planting schemes.

There are advantages in planting native grasses. They are generally deeper rooted and adapted to low-nutrient soils, so they are better able to cope with dry conditions than exotic grasses, and need less fertiliser. They grow more slowly and so need less mowing. And they keep green longer in summer, so are less of a fire hazard.

Australian grasses also provide habitat for native animals, such as seed-eating birds, that require native grasses.

CAPE YORK SAFARIS

Geelong F.N.C. is planning two safaris to Cape York with natural history specialist Allen Mulder during Aug/Sept 1991. Geelong F.N.C. invites people from other FNCs to join the safaris. Safari "S" will need sufficient bookings by 30th November.

SAFARI "N". A group of 14 people depart from Cairns on day 1 (Aug 18 approx) by 4WD bus on a north-bound safari, camping at approx 12 sites with 3-4 days at each of Iron Range, Shelbourne Bay and Jardine River. The return to Cairns is on Day 21 by aeroplane from Bamaga

SAFARI "S". Another group of 14 people depart Cairns by Aeroplane during the morning of day 21 on a south bound safari, returning to Cairns on Day 42.

Cost is approx \$1850 per person including cruise to Thursday Island and flight between Cairns and Bamaga. Current quote for group booking Melb-Cairns by air is \$533 return.

The safari has bush camping, portable toilet, 9 x 7' tents with flys, air beds, canvas chairs with backs, supply vehicle, 4 staff, no air conditioning or piped music, and no camp duties. BYO sleeping bag and eating utensils. Salad for luncheon and 3 course meal at night.

Bookings are \$400 per person to Geelong FNC inc, PO Box 1047 Geelong 3220. Mark envelope and pay cheque to Geelong FN Club CY Safari. Safari "S" bookings will be refunded if there are insufficient bookings. Telephone enquiries to Dick Southcombe 052 433 916.

NOTES FOR OCTOBER

NOISY FRYERBIRDS have been present at Blakeleys Road, Castlemaine North for some weeks. (RM)

CRIMSON ROSELLAS have been abundant this season - noted by a number of members.

PLUMED WHISTLE DUCKS were seen on a dam near Greta (south of Wangaratta) early in October (LP)

LORIKEETS are in flocks at present. Purple-crowned Lorikeets has also been noted (KT & PB)

INDIAN MYNAH was noticed on the Harcourt north - Sutton Grange road on October 23rd. It was between the reservoir and the Mt Alexander turn off. (EP)

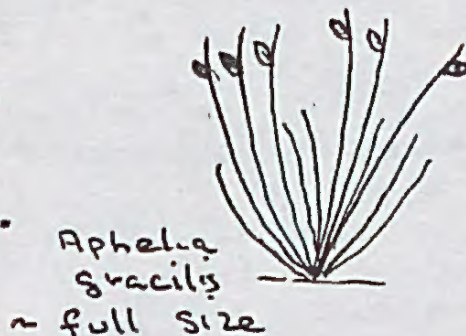
RED-CAPPED ROBIN was seen in the Lockwood Forest on October 20th. (LP)

SPRING WILDFLOWERS. Waxlip orchids are in bloom. Although it has been a good year for wattles, other wildflowers have been less common. Pink-fingers have not been numerous. An indigofera near Tunnel Hill has made a fine display

RAVENS AT TRENTHAM. A flock of 77 ravens near Trentham was thought to be Little Ravens (SB)

LEAFY TEMPLETONIA from private property at Muckleford was displayed at the meeting. It is a tiny straggling plant with delicate egg-and-bacon flowers; part of the reason for being seldom seen is due to its habit of growth.

SLENDER APHELIA at Sedgewick. A small patch of slender aphelia has been found growing in the Sedgewick forest. This tiny sedge-like plant is in the centrolepis family. It is only the second record in the district for this plant.



PURPLE SWAMP-HENS. Four were seen feeding at the picnic area on the Midland Highway, next to Campbells Creek, near Yapeen on Oct 22. (RM)

KOALA in LYTTLETON ST. A koala was found in a private garden at the east end of Lyttleton St. The koala was subject to bombardment by the resident magpies, which continued until the koala decided to leave for more peaceful surroundings.

KANGAROO was observed near the Verlin St/Happy valley Road - the Kangaroo departed towards the Kalimna bushland.

DEAD COOTAMUNDRA WATTLES IN KALIMNA. Some of the Cootamundra Wattles, that were heavily infected with wiry mistletoe, have died. Many of the local eucalypts can carry very heavy crops of mistletoe for many years without succumbing. Generally, wattles have a much smaller life span than eucalypts, and perhaps this explains in part, why they die more easily.

FEMALE STUBBLE QUAIL has been reported from a Gaulton St. garden.

ORIOLES have been frequently heard this summer throughout the district.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 9 Nov. GRASSES. Speaker is E. Perkins. 8 p.m. at High School. [note changed program]

Sat 10 Nov. MUCKLEFORD and SMITH'S REEF TOUR. Meet at parking area between Railway station and Cricket centre 1.30 pm. A Castlemaine State Festival event. Leaders E. Perkins & I. Higgins.

Sun 11 Nov. KAWEKA WALK. 3.30 pm with Kaweka Committee.

Thurs 22 Nov. Business meeting. 7.30 p.m.

Fri 23 Nov. ROADSIDE CONSERVATION. A survey of the Maldon Shire roadsides. Meet 27 Doveton St at 9.00 am. Take lunch.

Sun 25 Nov. CLUNES. Bird Observers' Club outing

Fri 14 Dec. CASTLEMAINE BOTANIC GARDENS. Speaker is Kevin Walsh. This is the final meeting for the year - please bring supper.

Sat 15 Dec. GLENLUCE DISTRICT. Bird watching at Glenluce and possibly beyond. Departure time to be arranged at Friday meeting.

Fri 8 Feb. MEMBERS AND VISITORS NIGHT

Mar 13. HOWMANS GAP. Labour Day weekend VFNCA and WVFNCA campout at Howmans Gap. organised by North East FNC.

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

SUPPER ROSTER

Nov: R Mills, E Duffin

Dec: M & R Holden

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.			