

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

JUNE 1991

#168



A BREAK IN BARMAH

A short break seemed to be in order, so we decided to spend a few days in Barmah at the Caravan Park near the bridge, where there's quite a variety of birds, although this time we only noted 11 different species, including juvenile Blue-faced Honeyeaters. The owner says that there is a list for the Park of 42 birds - somewhere. We got a grand total for the Barmah/Moira forest area of 52 species. The most numerous were White-plumed Honeyeaters and Brown Tree-creepers, the biggest thrill a white-breasted sea eagle, and the most colourful the azure kingfishers.

On our first full day we drove to the Dharnya Centre ('dharnya' is the local Yorta-Yorta tribe's word for the red gum), and took the Barmah Lakes walking track. Much of the earlier part of the walking track is through regrowth with a few older trees, while down near the lakes are some magnificent old trees. Four years ago when I was staying at the Centre with the Victorian Nature Photography Group the young trees were only 3 or 4 feet at the most, but now they are 10 to 15 feet, and I felt like I was in another place. We saw lots of birds, mainly white-plumed honeyeaters, brown tree-creepers, yellow rosellas and white cockatoos, but we also saw quite a large flock of choughs, a whistling kite, spotted pardelotes (from only 3 or 4 feet), crested shrike-tits and black-faced cuckoo-shrikes. We also saw several kangaroos just after we stopped for morning tea.

When we got near the lakes we detoured to an interesting old red gum, and as we got back onto the track we saw a red-bellied black snake ahead. Doug had to chase it up to take its photo several times. It got a little huffy, and reared its head and flattened its 'hood', just to let him know. Doug was quite enjoying himself, but I can't say I was! Just after this we spotted a large raptor overhead, swinging around us in lazy circles, and wiggling its short tail. It proved to be a white breasted sea eagle, and apparantly an old bird, as, according to the book, the older the bird, the lighter they are underneath, and this one's 'finger' feathers had very little black.

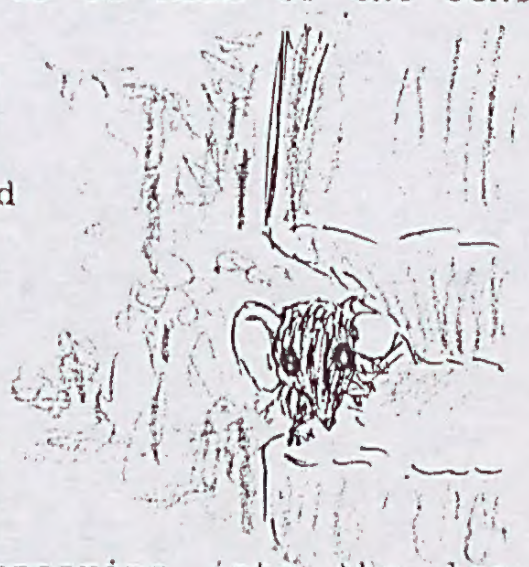
When we got back to the Dharnya Centre we went in to have a look around. It tells the geological, natural, aboriginal and pioneering history of the area, and is well done. We spent quite a while there. Meantime a school group staying at the Centre was busily shaping plasticene 'artifacts' and decorating cardboard tube didgeredoos.

A short walk in the afternoon - after a siesta! - yielded an azure kingfisher, a water rat and a greater egret. That evening we decided to try out the barbeque. It's been made from the inner tub of a single tub washing-machine, and was very efficient!

On our second day we headed for Mathoura and the walking track and bird hide near Picnic Point in the Moira forest. It was very dry and the water was a long way from the hide, which we reached after about an hour's dawdle from where the sign said '20 minutes'. We certainly didn't need gumboots as Leslie and Ern Perkins did when they were there. There were numerous wrens and white plumed honeyeaters, and we saw four water rats. We also saw white-browed scrub wrens, a little grass-bird, and a swamp harrier, but most of the water birds were too far off for identification on the small patch of open water. The best spot for water birds was where a channel crosses the road between Mathoura and the Barmah turn-off. Although the birds were inclined to move off when we stopped we were still able to identify intermediate and greater egrets, Pacific and white-faced herons, white and straw-necked ibis, grebes, (sp unknown), black duck, little pied and little black cormorants, whistling kites and at least two other duck species which we weren't able to identify.

The Picnic Point camping ground impressed me as a good place to stay some time. I'd love to do some of the other walking tracks in the Moira forest.

Saturday was the day of the BIG WALK. We packed morning tea and lunch into a back pack, and set off about 9.30 am. After we'd reached the path along the river I spotted what I thought was a bird moving quickly along a log. The binoculars proved it was a yellow-footed antechinus. It was quite orange/rufous underneath and grey above. As it scuttled along the log it held its tail in a high curve. We were able to watch it for 2 or 3 minutes as it nibbled and washed before disappearing into the log. We had our morning tea nearby, but it didn't appear again.



We crossed a rough bridge over the creek onto the island, and had only gone about 400 yards when we saw a fox sniffing around. It found something edible and munched that up, went over to a bush and marked that, and then sank down and disappeared. There was no gutter there, only rough grass and I was intrigued that it could disappear so completely in so little cover.

Only a little further on we saw our second antechinus peering at us from the scarf of an old ring-barked tree, the sun shining through its ears, which is what caught my attention. This was at 11.30 am, in bright sun. How I wished I hadn't left the zoom lens of the camera home!

The trees in this area were tall and reasonably straight in the main, and sleepers were still being cut. We walked through the forest for about three miles before coming to the river again, and, as it was the weekend, we saw quite a number of campsites in the time that we followed the river bank. We saw another antechinus along here, too, and another azure kingfisher - despite the fact that across the river was the noisiest campsite ever with several teenagers with essential rowdy music, three dogs and some adults. They were enjoying themselves, too, but a little differently from us!

The track that we took on the island was about 5 miles round, and for the whole length we saw brown tree-creepers constantly, usually 4 - 6 being nearby at any one time.

There's an 'interesting tour of the forest' pamphlet available at the Dharnya Centre, and, I think, at the store, too. It takes you along rather corrugated and/or sandy tracks for about 42km. There's a good map available of the forest, too. It is certainly a good spot to spend a few days, whether you are a fisherman, walker, birdwatcher or just plain 'nature-nut', and we had the advantage of very pleasant weather, too.

Rita Mills

WHERE TO SEE BIRDS NEAR CASTLEMAINE PART 2

Often areas on the boundary between cleared or semi-cleared farmland and bushland are good places to look for birds. Many birds seem to prefer open ground near cover. Nearby water is also advantageous.

VAUGHAN SPRINGS RESERVE

The reserve is a good place to see wrens - usually a family or two can be seen hopping about the picnic area.

Close to the park are many varied habitats, including shrubs and trees along the river, undergrowth along some of the dry gullies, areas of introduced (native) trees and shrubs, bushland areas and cleared or semi-cleared farmland. All can be good bird areas.

Good places for a walk, and bird watch, are along the north side of the river towards Central Springs, along the walking trail to the south side of the river towards Sailors Gully, and in the vicinity of the river near the picnic area.

GLENLUCE SPRINGS

Glenluce Springs is a very pleasant place for a picnic, and birds are often plentiful. There is some cleared land nearby, some bushland areas and trees and shrubs along the river.

One of the best places to watch is on the rocks near the car park. Here you can look over the river, and be at an elevated level that makes observation of foliage birds easier. It is surprising how many birds can be seen in half an hour or so. Robins, wrens, firetails and scrub-wrens are often seen here, as well as many others.

You can also explore along the billabong just upstream. In dryer weather the river can easily be forded, and there is a path leading towards Vaughan.

LODDON RIVER CROSSING - GLENLUCE

The Glenluce - Drummond road crosses the Loddon River about a kilometre south of the intersection with the Fryerstown-Vaughan Road. A picnic area is on the left, just over the bridge.

Many birds are usually to be found along the river, in the paddocks just beyond the river, on the flat area in the reserve, and in the trees on the hillsides.

GOWER SCHOOL

The old Gower School is on the Castlemaine-Maldon Road, about 10 km from Castlemaine. It is at the start of the Smiths Reef Forest - on the right hand side of the road.

A walk towards the boundary is often productive. Look also in the tree tops.

The range of birds seen varies, perhaps depending on the number of eucalypts in flower.

GOWER - OFF PULLEN'S ROAD

To reach this area, continue past the Gower School for a few hundred metres, and veer left off the Maldon Road. A few hundred metres along Pullen's road the Muckleford Forest begins. The area near the start of Muckleford forest often has a large and varied bird population. A dry weather dirt track leads off to the left to a quince tree, about a hundred metres from Pullen's Road.

It is surprising how many different habitat areas are represented in this vicinity. Look in the usually dry dam, in the quince tree; along the scrub and blackberries on the eastern boundary, in the tops of the trees, in the cootamundra wattles, and in the heathy scrub to the south. The north side of Pullen's Road may also be worth looking at.

SPRING GULLY

Spring Gully can be reached from Chewton. From Castlemaine, turn right along Eureka Street, and continue south for 2 km to the Monk (the hill on the left) another 2 km

to the T intersection. Take the left turn to Spring Gully. The road to Spring Gully is very steep in parts, and is often quite rough, so take care.

There are unprotected mine shafts at Spring Gully, so extreme care should be taken.

Spring Gully is in the valley of Spring Creek, a tributary of Fryers Creek.

Look in the undergrowth, in the forested areas and in the partly cleared paddocks.

The return journey can be made via Campbells Creek. -At the T intersection, continue west rather than turning left towards Chewton. On reaching the bitumen road, turn right towards Campbells Creek.

[To be continued. Contributions to the series are invited]

BOOBOOK OWL. An owl has used a peppercorn tree in Campbell Street as a day time roosting place on several occasions. It was difficult to identify because of its sheltered position, and hunched attitude - it has been difficult to get a good look at its face. From its size, its brown-streaked breast, its solitary habit, and its lack of concern about the watchers below, it is thought to be a boobook owl. (EP)

GREAT OCEAN ROAD APPEAL

The appeal is being organised by the Great Ocean Road Appeal Committee, and authorised by the Victorian Conservation Trust. Aim is to raise \$500 000, to be used for land purchases between Anglesea and Airey's Inlet. Land will be purchased as it becomes available, and added to the Angahook-Lorne State Park.

Further information can be obtained from the Secretary.

Donations should be made to Victorian Conservation Trust, 8th Floor, 49 Spring St, Melbourne 3000.

HATTAH CAMPOUT 30 Aug-1 Sept

The Sunraysia Field Naturalists Club is conducting the Spring campout of the Western Victoria Field naturalists Clubs Association at Hattah, from Aug 30th - September 1st, 1991.

Camping facilities are available at Lake Hattah. This camping area has pit toilets, but no showers or drinking water.

Other camping facilities are at Ouyen (35 km from Hattah) and Nangiloc. The former has overnight vans.

SANDON BIRDS IN APRIL

Birds seen drinking were

White-throated treecreeper
Superb fairy-wrens
Silvereyes
Speckled warbler
Grey fantail (pair)
Striated and spotted pardalotes
Yellow robins (pair) and scarlet robins (pair)
Striated, buff-rumped, yellow-rumped and brown thornbills
White-plumed, fuscous, yellow faced, white-eared, brown-headed and white-naped honeyeaters
Willy wagtail
Crimson rosella (adult & juvenile).

Birds seen nearby include

Flocks of Yellow-tufted honeyeaters
Red wattle-bird
Diamond firetails (3)
Grey shrike-thrush
Welcome swallow (pair)
White-winged choughs
Crested shriketit
Varied sittellas
Restless flycatcher
Rufous whistler
Golden whistler (song first heard on 28/4)
Magpies

Errata for March list

White-eared Honeyeater (mistakenly typed as New Holland honeyeater)
Superb fairy-wrens were seen drinking and choughs were nearby.

Thanks to Suzanna Starr for providing the list.

NOTES FOR MAY

PEREGRINE FALCON? A hawk, thought to possibly be a peregrine falcon, was observed near the scout hall (Reckleben St) during April. It was on the ground when seen (AH)

PURE WHITE HONEYEATER was seen on May 9th on the 7th hole on the Castlemaine golf course (near the Pyrenees Highway). Its feeding and actions were like those of a white-plumed honeyeater. (AH)

WHITE-FACED HERONS IN HOUSE BLOCKS (cont). Latest report is of a fish pond in Lyttleton Street being cleaned out by white-faced herons. (PS)

YELLOW ROBINS have been under house eaves at Guildford
CRESTED SHRIKE-TITS have been reported from Castlemaine
North and from Gaulton Street gardens (RM & MO)

PIED CURRAWONGS are back in numbers in the northern part
of Castlemaine (FB)

GOSHAWK? took a chicken at Chewton, by entering the poultry
pen. It was said that goshawks have been known to catch
poultry and pull them through wire netting.

FOX was seen in Duke Street early in the morning.

CORELLAS and GALAHS. About 30 long-billed corellas have
been feeding at Fryerstown, in the company of about 100
galahs. (CN). Large flocks of long-billed corellas have
been seen in the bush near Trentham (SB)

RABBITS were though to be less plentiful now, no doubt as
the result of 1080 poisoning campaigns. (GE)

BURNING OF BUSHLAND. Extensive burning by Department of
Conservation & Environment has been reported from many
areas, such as Daylesford and near Glenluce. The dry
conditions has meant that many such burns have been rather
fierce. Some concern was expressed at the result of
burning from perimeter fires, which have the effect of
trapping wildlife.

THE PUMA? It was reported that a large cat-like animal had
been seen between Maryborough and Castlemaine.

AUSTRALIAN HOBBY has again been seen perching on a
television antenna in Wheeler Street. (GB) [No doubt
during one of the Attenborough programs]

LITTLE FALCON or PEREGRINE FALCON? has been seen in Pound
Lane, Guilford on 22/5/91 (BP)

HARDHEAD. A flock was seen on a dam at Muckleford (GB)

FLAME ROBINS have arrived in the district again. Flocks
were seen along Skinners Lane in Maldon on 17th May, along
Muckleford Road on 21st May and at Glenluce on 24th May.
Both males and uncoloured birds were seen (EP)

FLOCK OF FIRETAILS. A flock of almost 3 dozen red-browed
firetails was seen feeding near the creek in Moscript St,
Campbells Creek on 24th May. Silver Eyes and Yellow-rump
thornbills were also present. (EP)

WHIRRAKEE BIRD NOTES. These include a black-eared cuckoo
at Lyall (2/1/91) and Latham's snipe at Harcourt North
Reservoir (9/2/91). Latham's snipe has previously been
recorded in C.F.N.C. bird list for Eppalock and
Muckleford.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 14 June. FROGS with Tom Burton. 8 pm at High School

Sat 15 June. DAM CRAWL. A tour of some of the watering places of Smiths Reef and Muckleford. Leader is George Broadway. If weather is fine we will walk to some of the sites. 1.30 pm sharp outside S.E.C., Mostyn St.

Sun 16 Jun. FRYERSTOWN TOUR. Bendigo F.N.C. excursion to Fryerstown. Leave market car park (Forest St) at 10.00 a.m. Castlemaine F.N.C. members invited.

Fri 12 July. THE HIMALAYAS with Berri Perry. 8.00 p.m. at the High School.

Sun 28 Jul. BLACK HILL. Bird Observer trip to Black Hill.

Fri 9 Aug. Jane Calder.

Fri 30 Aug - Sun 1 Sept. HATTAH. WVFNCA campout organised by Sunraysia Club

Tues 3 Sept-Fri 6 Sept. CAPE BROOM WEED PULL at Botanic Gardens with Australian Trust for Volunteers.

Fri 13 Sept. BRITISH ISLES REVISITED. Nicolette Hooper

4-6th Oct. CAPE BRIDGEWATER. WVFNCA campout, organised by Portland CFNC.

Sun 6 Oct. MUCKLEFORD FOREST with Ballarat F.N.C.

Fri 11 Oct. NOCTURNAL with Rob Watkins.

Sat 12 Oct. LAURISTON WILDFLOWERS. 1.30 p.m.

Fri 8 Nov. Pat Bingham

Sun 20 Oct. MALDON STEAM TRAIN WILDFLOWER TRIP. Date of Bendigo Native Plant Group outing. 1 p.m. at Maldon RS. Later trains at 2,3 and 4 p.m. so choice of several for return. Cost \$4 adults, \$2 children

Sat 9 Nov. TIPPERARY SPRINGS. Walk from the springs to Twin Bridges. Leader R. Mills. 1.30 pm at SEC, Mostyn Street. Leader R. Mills.

Meetings on the second Friday of each month (Jan excepted) 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 are invited to attend.

Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.
