

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



SEPTEMBER 1991

#171

FRYERSTOWN NOTES — BIRDS ON THE "PHONE."

Hours "wasted" by prolonged use of the telephone are often well compensated at our place. Today, during a good chat with my neighbour, I watched 8 different species of our larger avian inhabitants going about their morning activities.

On the ground at one end of a roll of oaten hay, two immature crimson rosellas fed contentedly, seemingly unaware, and out of sight, of two equally content galahs at the other end. Meanwhile, the eastern rosellas who raise their young each year in an old stump near the house, flew in for a pre-nesting sortee. Due to continual harassment from the crimson rosellas last year, which we think resulted in the loss of one of the eastern fledglings, we have put up several boxes around the place this year.

Two kookaburras established themselves in their favourite spots on the vegetable garden posts. These are also favoured by the tawny frogmouths after dark, being well placed for both worms and frogs in the nearby dam. Several grey currawongs, magpies and ravens cruised around, sometimes sparring with the kookaburras.

This year the magpies have so far been much less aggressive towards the last birds on my list of eight, the wood ducks. The two wood ducks (the same two as in other years, we presume) have been on the dam every morning for the last few weeks. Most of the year wood ducks shun us altogether, while down the track towards the town, there can be up to 90 feeding on the open paddocks of our non-bird-watching neighbours. The two who come at this time of the year spend most of the day sitting at the edge of the dam, or swimming in it, bathing and preening, or feeding in the paddock below. They also spend some time flying around the trees at the back of the house, where we always hope they are building a nest. They call to each other in their characteristic, deep, drawn-out 'quark', or cackle loudly, as they sit on a branch, presenting a classic profile against the low winter sun.

Perhaps it is this pre-nesting period, before there are

more mouths to feed, that the birds show more tolerance to each other. In past years we have noticed how much the magpies resent the ducks, and they seem to be well organised in their attack. They have a communal conference on the hill above the dam, then they either swoop on the ducks, beaks first, or they take a more subtle approach and stalk them from all sides, slowly closing in on them.

These 8 species were all predominant this morning. On other occasions time on the phone presents a plethora of little birds closer to the house.

Clodagh Norwood.

JULY AT SANDON

Birds seen drinking at the bird bath were

Superb fairy wren

Robins - scarlet and yellow (pairs)

Thornbills - brown and striated.

White throated tree-creeper

White-eared honeyeater

The honeyeater and tree-creeper are the two most constant visitors throughout the year, apart from the wrens and thornbills.

Birds seen on the property were

Honeyeaters- yellow-tufted,
white-naped, brown-headed,
fuscous, and yellow-faced.

Thornbills - buff rumped,
yellow rumped.

Rosellas - crimson and eastern

Red wattle birds - pair

Grey currawongs - pair

Speckled warbler - pair

Welcome swallows - pair

Grey shrike-thrush - pair

Grey fantail - only one

sighting of one of our most
common visitors in summer.

Varied sittellas - pair

Australasian grebe

White-winged choughs

Maned ducks

Galahs

Restless flycatcher

Laughing kookaburra

Golden whistler

Hooded robin

Diamond firetail

Magpies

Silvereyes

Crested shrike-tit

[List provided by S. Starr]

WHITE BOX AT CHEWTON

On a trip to Glenluce, white box were noticed growing at the edge of the Fryerstown road, about half way between the Wattle Gully mine and the water race at the top of the hill. I have made many trips along the road had not previously noticed them here.

White box are rather like grey box, but the leaves are

usually more or less powdered white, in contrast to the green leaves of grey box. The buds and usually the fruit are covered with a dense white bloom, and the juvenile leaves are large, white and round and stalked, rather like a larger version of juvenile red box leaves.

White box grows at Chewton, both in and near the Chewton Cemetery, not far distant from the Wattle Gully area. It is also moderately common in the north-western parts of the Maldon Shire, and near Lake Eppalock.

E.P.

NOTES FOR JULY & AUGUST

ADDITIONS TO THE PLANT LIST. The following were noted in Muckleford Gorge on a USA walk to Muckleford Gorge. All are new records for area 3: blanket fern, austral stork's-bill, blackwood and rock correa.

SACRED IBIS. Flock of 17 along Moscript Street in Campbells Creek on July 9th. (EP)

SATIN BOWERBIRDS. Flock of 18 at Marysville, feeding in grounds of a guest house on Jul 8. Two satin; others were female or juvenile. (EP)

CATTLE EGRETS. Flock of 6 at Yea on Jul 8. With sheep.

FLAME ROBINS. A flock of 26 was seen along the Metcalfe-Malmsbury Rd on 15/7/91. A large flock (perhaps 100 birds) along Neerman School Road. Flame robins appear to have been more plentiful this year. (EP)

WOOD DUCK. A flock of 45 was seen near a dam between Metcalfe and Malmsbury on 15/7/91

LITTLE EAGLE. Was observed feeding on a rabbit (BP)

BLUE WRENS are colouring at Vaughan (DA).

GOLDFINCH. Flock of 60+ was seen at Maldon (EP).

BIRD LIST ADDITIONS. New area records for July include galah (e), maned duck (e); nankeen kestrel (f), brown falcon (f), masked lapwing (e), silver gull (e), long-billed corella (e), white-plumed honeyeater (d), sulphur-crested cockatoo (e), welcome swallow (e), flame robin (e), willy wagtail (e), blue wren (e), yellow-rumped thornbill (d), white-fronted chat (f), magpie lark (e) and grey currawong (d).

EPACRIS is flowering through the Blackwood area. Red and white forms are present.

INDIAN MYNAH was seen at Fogarty's Gap. (EP).

QUESTION CORNER

MAHOGANY GUM

Q: What is the name of the tall eucalypt on the right, and the Campbells Creek Railway crossing on the way to Irishtown?

A: Mahogany Gum (or *Eucalyptus botryoides*). It is native to Gippsland and eastern New South Wales. There are some good specimens along the lower reaches of the Snowy River. It has often been planted in Victoria, and grows to make a fine tree.

BLUE DEVIL

Q: Some books refer Blue Devil as *Eryngium rostratum* as indigenous. Other authors refer to it as *Eryngium ovinum*. Lamp and Collet, in their book on Australian weeds say that "The plant occurs throughout temperate Australia but it originated in temperate South America (Black 18964). And some give its family as Umbelliferae, and others as Apiaceae. Which are correct?

A: The Melbourne Herbarium (1990) considers *Eryngium ovinum* to be the correct name for this species. It is a native. Blue Devil was first named by Cavanilles in 1800-1801 as *E. rostratum*, presumably from a South American specimen. Some Australian publications still use this name. In the Flora of South Australia (1986) its name is given as *E. rostratum*, with the note "It is unlikely that our plants are conspecific with the South American *E. rostratum sensu stricto*". If the name *E. rostratum* is used, then the plant is native of both Australia and of South America.

Blue Devil was also named by Cunningham in 1825. He called it *E. ovinum*. Those who think that the Australian and South American plants belong to different species use this name. Thus *E. ovinum* is native to Australia only, and *E. rostratum* native to South America only.

Its interesting to think that the name applied decides whether or not it is a native of one or of two continents.

The actual wording in Black's 1964 Flora of South Australia is "Southern districts to Flinders Range; Kangaroo Island; South East. Summer.- Temperate Australia; temperate South America."

This has apparently been misread to mean that it originated in South America, rather than it also occurs there.

Umbelliferae and Apiaceae are both used to describe the parsnip and carrot family. Umbelliferae is the older word. Some botanists believe that all family names should end in -aceae, and hence the change to Apiaceae. Other families have suffered a similar fate. For example, the daisy family has changed from Compositae to Asteraceae, the grass family from Gramineae to Poaceae and so on.

FALCON

Q: Looking out of our window (Stewart St) I saw a bird with a dark hawk-like beak. It was dark grey on the back and had a bright yellow eye. The under-parts could not clearly be seen but appeared to be a light grey (about the colour of a paling fence). It would be larger than a magpie.

A: Hawks are difficult to identify. It was possibly a grey falcon. Has any reader a better suggestion?

BULRUSH AND CUMBUNGI.

Q. What is the difference between Cumbungi and Bulrush?

A. None. Both names are given to the one plant. Other common names are cat's tail, reed-mace, wonga and miranda. Bulrush is common along many of the local streams. It is a cosmopolitan species i.e. it occurs in many parts of the world in addition to Australia. The flowers are in a dense spike, and it produces masses of fluffy seeds.

Common reed is also frequently found along water ways. Common reed is a grass, and has sprays of flowers.



ROSE ROBIN

Q. What is the identity of the bird found dead near the house (north of the botanic gardens)?

A. A male rose robin. Some of the identifying features are the pink breast, the white edges to the tail, the small white forehead and the dark-grey back.

Rose robin is a very uncommon bird in this district.

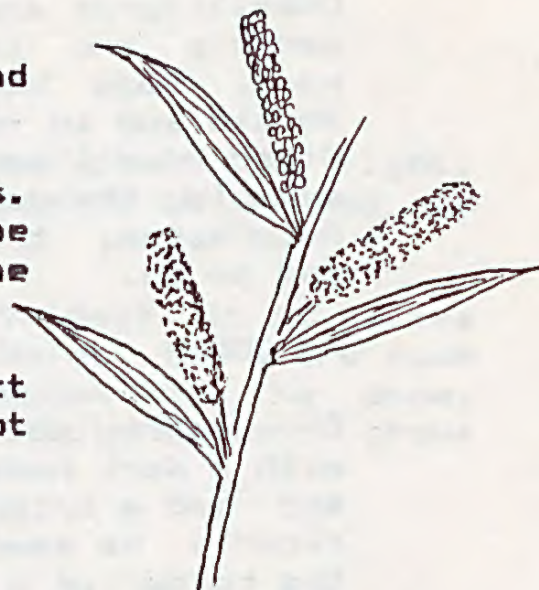
Over the past few years, birds have been seen along Barkers Creek in the botanic gardens. They are usually found near undergrowth.

SPIKE WATTLE

Q. Can you identify this wattle, found in the Fryers Ridge forest?

A. Spike wattle, or *Acacia oxycedrus*. It has sharp-pointed leaves and the flowers are in spikes, rather than the usual balls.

Spike wattle occurs in this district in the Fryers Ridge Forest. I have not seen it elsewhere near Castlemaine.



GROUND FLORA

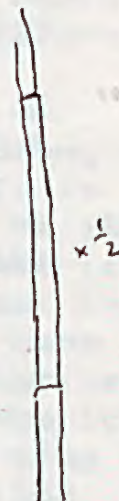
Q. What is meant by "ground flora"

A. This is something that it is difficult to put a finger on. However, you can put your foot on it.

TALL SPIKE RUSH

Q. Can you identify this plant? And does it grow locally? It is used for basket making?

A. Plant specimens without flowers are often difficult to identify. However, this is clearly the 'tall spike-rush' (or *Eleocharis spacelata*). It is sometimes found on local dams. The best patch that I know of is in Lake Wendouree. It is abundant in the shallow water along some of the edges, for example, at Fairyland at the north-western part of the lake.



It would be a good plant to grow on a farm dam. Ian Higgins, in "Castlemaine Plants for Castlemaine Gardens" writes "Attractive reed-like aquatic plant for dams and lakes etc. It spreads by underground runners". Perhaps some members with dams could start a small industry, and supply basket makers with their materials.

MYRTLE-LEAF WATTLE.

Q. Can you identify the wattle, found south of Ballarat?

A. The myrtle-leaf wattle (or *Acacia myrtifolia*). Some of the distinguishing features are the small 'leaves'. Typically the leaves are about 2 cm long and have a prominent, raised central vein and the rims are thickened and vein-like. The flower balls have only a few flowers - often only 2 to 4.



It is quite common in southern Victoria and along N.S.W. coast. It usually grows to about a metre and makes a good garden plant.

FRECKLED DUCK AT BALLARAT

On April 15th of this year, a pair of Freckled Duck was seen on Lake Wendouree. This was the first record for these birds on the lake. Within about a week, another four birds arrived, and stayed at the lake until early in August. The freckled duck can be recognised, even from a distance, by its peaked crown and dished beak.

BIRDS IN KALIMNA

This list was compiled by Phillip West on 30 June, 1991.

Common bronzewing	Red wattlebird
Crimson rosella	Yellow-faced honeyeater
Scarlet robin	Yellow-tufted honeyeater
Golden whistler	Eastern spinebill
Blackbird	Mistletoe bird
Grey shrike-thrush	Silvereye
Buff-rumped thornbill	House sparrow
Yellow-rumped thornbill	Starling
Brown thornbill	White-winged chough (~50)
Yellow thornbill	Pied currawong
Striated thornbill	Magpie
Varied sittella	Australian raven

C. 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 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

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 13 Sept. BRITISH ISLES REVISITED. Nicolette Hooper. 8 p.m. at High School.

Sat 14 Sept. THE MONK/SRPING GULLY. Meet at SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 p.m., sharp.

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

Sun 6 Oct. MUCKLEFORD FOREST with Ballarat F.N.C. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 10.00 a.m sharp or Green Gully at 10.15 a.m.

Fri 11 Oct. NOCTURNAL with Rob Watkins.

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

Sat 2 Nov. KALIMNA WALK. 9.30 a.m. as part of garden festival.

Fri 8 Nov. BONY-BIG FELLA BIRDO - an examination to references in birds in the Arthur Upfield novels about the Aboriginal detective, Napolean Bonaparte. Talk by 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.

SUPPER: Sept 13 F & E Blake Oct 11: K Turner & L Perkins

MEETINGS: 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.

COMMITTEE: Ern Perkins (Pres), Chris Norwood (VP), Rita Mills (Newsletter), Maggie Oliver (VP), Barbara Maund (Sec), Clodagh Norwood (Treas), Kaye Turner, George Broadway, Enid Hall, Brenda Envall and Beris Perry.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Newsletter posted - subscription plus \$6
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