CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

NOVEMBER 1987 VOL 12.10

#129

Orchids are for Everyone

A very disturbing aspect of recent bushwalks has been the number of holes found where orchids used to be. there are a lot of people beside Field Nats club members who have their favourite spots which they visit regularly just to enjoy seeing their old "friends" year after year. One of these people reported to me that 6 or 7 of a group of Red Spider Orchids (Caledenia pattersonii var. concolor) disappeared from the bush between the time she checked them and found them in bud and not far from flowering and her next visit less than a week later. It is most unlikeley that the plants will survive - as they propigate from seed.

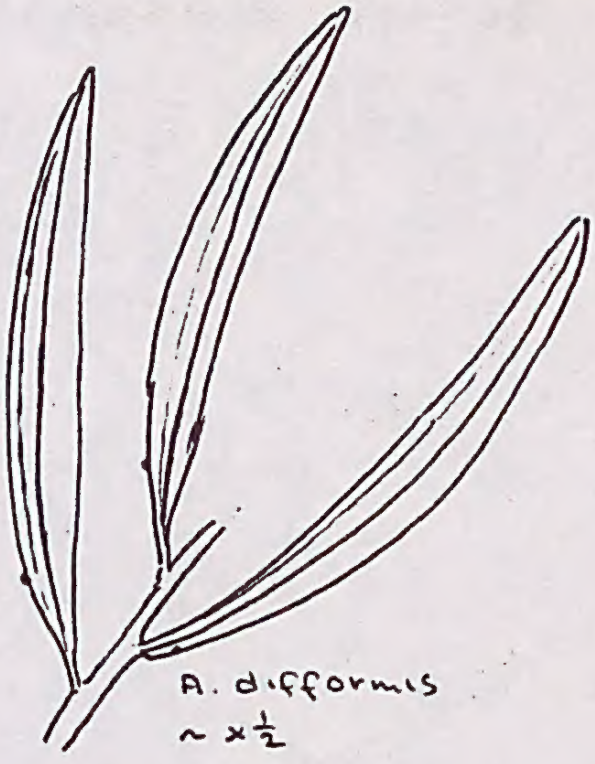
I just wish that people could derive pleasure from seeing them in the bush, in their natural situation, and not look on them as some sort of challenge, and in their greed selfishly and illegally dig them up, depriving others of the pleasure of seeing them. This applies to other plants, too, of course, but orchids seem to be the main target.

If someone can't bear not to be growing native orchids the ones that are suitable for growing are are available from specialist nurseries.

I like to think that no Field Naturalist is capable of heading bushwards with a trowel. Please, nobody disillusion me!

Ed.

MYSTERY WATTLE AT MT GASPARD.



Acacia difformis, or the Mystery Wattle, was first discovered in Victoria about 20 years ago, growing at the edge of the Warby Ranges. It has since been found in a variety of places. I have also seen it In Reef Hills (at Benalla), at Goorambat, in the Whipstick, and near Natteyallock. Near Castlemaine it has been found at Clydesdale, in the Sandon forest, at the edge of Muckleford forest and now on the Mt Gaspard Road.

From Castlemaine,take the Woodbrook road to the Gap Road; turn left towards Maldon and then turn right after about 2 kilometres along the Mt Gaspard Rd. The Mystery Wattle is growing near the highest point of the road. About a dozen small trees can be found here.

Mystery wattle is easy to recognize. Its leaves are about the same size as those of the Golden Wattle, but they are duller, and have a faint second vein. In Northern Victoria, Mystery Wattle may flower in July or January. I have not seen the local plants in flower, but a watch at these times is indicated. The flowers are quite dull and not at all showy like most other wattles. And they seem to set seed very rarely - I do not know of anyone who has been able to find seeds on one.

The Mt Gaspard Road has an interesting range of wildflowers. There are some beautiful specimens of Austral Indigo. Silky Guinea Flower is quite common. It is a much more erect shrub than the local Tangled Guinea Flower, and has soft furry leaves. Loose-flowered Bush-pea and Urn Heat are also to be found along the road. Unfortunately, most of the wildflower areas along the road are infested with introduced grasses, and so their long term future must be in doubt.

You can continue along the Mt Gaspard Road, and reach the Calder Highway, or turn north from the road to near Ravenswood, and then take the road westward to the Maldon-Lockwood road. This road has some fine wild-wildflower areas too.

THE BRADLEY METHOD OF BUSH REGENERATION.

(REPRINTED FROM HERITAGE AUSTRALIA, 1984.)

[The Bradley Method of Bush regeneration was first developed in New Souh Wales, but the principles still apply to local bush.]

The aim of the Bradley Method is to remove weeds from natural areas in such a way as to restore and maintain the native plant community through natural regeneration. For the purposes of bush regeneration a "weed" is defined as a plant out of place.

For each area to be regenerated by the Bradley Method the following is considered

*The ratio of cover provided by native and weed species and the height of both canpopies.

*The diverstity and number of native plants. A large number of native species generally indicates a healthy plant community.

*Life form of the natives. If the natives present reporoduce vegetatively (for example, by rhizomes in Soft Bracken) they will colonise a weeded area quickly and work can proceed quickly.

*The main species present. For example, even dense walls of Lantana generally have some native species growing under them, as the Lantana canopy allows some light to reach the ground. On the other hand, ground cover by dense Morning Glory generally has few or no natives as the Morning Glory smothers all growth. Work can therefore progress far more rapidly in a Lantana infested area than in an area infested by Morning Glory

*The ease with which weeds can be removed. Weeds which root at the nodes, for example Wandering Jew and Morning Glory, regrow quickly, and much time must be spent in maintenance. Progress and regeneration is therefore generally slow. Large plants with deep and extensive root systems, such as Camphor Laurel, also slow the rate of work. Shallow rooted plants such as Lantana are easy to remove and work can proceed as fast as the native plants regenerate.

*The proximity of a healthy plant community. If a badly infested area is adjacent top a healthy area there are native plants available to colonise the areas weeded in the dense infestation. If no plants grow adjacent to

the infestation, there is little hope of regenerating by this method.

The basic principles of the Bradley Method of Bush regeneration are:-

(a) Work from the least weed infested areas to the most denslely infested. In the least infested areas there are abumnbdant native plants and seed to colonise the area from which weeds ahve been removed. In dense weed infestations, the number of weed propagules far outnumber native propagules so weed growth rather than native plant growth can be expected.

(b) Minimal soil disturbance. This includes replacing top soil in its correct position so that the stored seed in not buried too deeply, and keeping the soil deeply mulched. Weeds favour open, distrurbed areas.

(c) Allowing native plant regeneration to dictate the rate of weed removal. Native plants which regenerate must be allowed to form a dense, healthy group before further adjoining weeds are removed. These natives can then successfully colonise the newly weeded fringes. If too large an area is cleared before native plants are capable of colonising it, weeds will successfully compete against native plants.

Wednesday Outing to Bell's Swamp

A small but enthusiastic group spent a delightful couple of hours with their eyes glued to binoculars, enjoying the warm sun, ignoring the chilly breeze, and putting together a list of 36 birds. Sight of the afternoon were a number of evenly distributed white necks "growing" out of the swamp grass!

Birds seen were:-

Willy Wagtail
Red-rumped Parrot
Little Pied Cormorant
Little Black Cormorant
Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Pied Stilt
Coots
Dusky Moorhen
Superb Blue Wren
Grey Teal
Hoary-headed Grebe
Little Australian Grebe
Blackfaced Cuckoo-shrike
Dusky Woodswallow
Kookaburra
Masked Plover - including a group of 8
Black Duck - several families, inc. one with eight still-

Starling
Sacred Kingfisher
Corellas (Long-billed?)
Mudlark
Sparrows
Tree Martins
Welcome Swallows
Galah
White-faced Heron
Pacific Heron
White-eyed Duck
White Ibis
Red Wattle-bird
White-plumed Honeyeater
Swamp Harrier

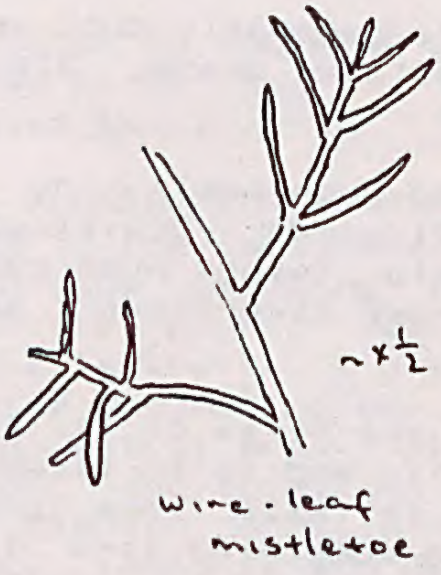
fluffy ducklings
Australian Raven - one spotted nest-robbing
Swan families, at various stages of development
Mountain Duck - inc. one family.

MISTLETOES GALORE

Perhaps the best place to see Mistletoe in the Castlemaine district is Gaash road, where three different mistletoes can be seen, and even three can be seen on the one tree!

Gaash road leads from Harcourt to White-gum Road. At Harcourt, turn left from the highway just before reaching the railway bridge. A kilometre from the town turn left at the cross-roads along Gaash road, away from the Calder Highway. Two mistletoes are very common along here, both growing on wattles. The Wiry Mistletoe (Amyema preissii) is well named, as the leaves are rather wire-like in appearance. I have only seen it growing on wattle trees as it is here.

Grey Mistletoe (A. quandang) is quite different in appearance. It has broad, flat, greyish leaves, and the flowers point upwards. It is very common along this road and also along White-gum road. Like the Wiry Mistletoe, it is found on Acacia species.



The third mistletoe was not in flower, but because it was growing on a wattle it is probably the Drooping Mistletoe, (A. pendula). It is much less common here than the other two species.

Once a tree becomes host to a Mistletoe, it attracts Mistletoe birds. These birds are responsible for spreading mistletoe seeds, so the chance of further infestation increases. And possibly, as the population of Mistletoe increases, still more birds will be attracted, and so on.

It is surprising that Lightwood does not seem to attract mistletoe along this road; the parasite is restricted to the feathery-leaved wattles.

20 ORCHIDS AT MUCKLEFORD

Twenty different orchids were seen during the excursion to Muckleford and Smiths Reef, by members of Castlemaine, Bendigo and Maryborough and Tasmanian Field Naturalists Clubs.

The orchids seen were

Musky caladenia - moderately common
Hooded caladenia - very common, and some large patches
Pink fingers - several seen, most had finished flowering
Greencomb spider-orchid - near Red, White & Blue mine
Purplish beard-orchid - very common
Leopard orchid - a few still in flower
Golden moths - some in flower near the railway
Wax-lip orchid - very many seen in some areas
Common onion orchid - young plants, starting to flower
Swan greenhood - half dozen plants seen
Nodding greenhoods - several seen,at end of their season
Dwarf greenhood - almost finished flowering
Tall greenhood - one or two seen
Bearded greenhood - several seen
Rabbit's-ears - very common in few localities
Dotted sun-orchid - some seen had a pinkish hue
Crimson sun-orchid - seen in several localities
Scented sun-orchid - some very showy specimens
Slender sun-orchid - insufficient sun to open
Salmon sun-orchid - seen in several localities

A Painted quail was seen at the edge of the road in Muckleford, with three juveniles. They scurried into the bushland and soon became invisible. Other bird sightings included Rufous Whistler (at the Boronia patch), Sacred Kingfisher (at the Red White and Blue Mine), and Pacific Heron (at the dam in Smith's Reef).

Grasses, except for Shell Grass were generally not yet flowering. However, a sample of Wallaby Grass, Blown Grass and Annual Fog-grass were seen.

Other plants of note included Matted bush-pea making a fine show, Blue Squill, Small-flowered Grevillea, Hundreds and Thousands, Common Eutaxia, Twiggy bush-pea, Heath tea-tree, Fringe-myrtle, Slender Rice-flower and Woollyheads.

The Sticky Boronia, burned out in the fires of a few years ago, is regenerating quite well, and is in flower. As yet most are not very tall and it will take some years yet for the area to return to something like its previous state. The other burned area, on the Maldon road is also regenerating slowly, with few shrubs of any size on it.

OCOBER OBSERVATIONS

WIRE RAPIER-SEDGE AT HARCOURT. A few samples of Wire rapier-sedge were found in th Harcourt reserve, on the first of this year's evening excursions. It is similar in appearance to the much more common sword sedge, but has wire like stems

SPOTTED SUN-ORCHIDS AT HARCOURT. Numbers of Spotted sun-orchids were seen, in full bloom, during the excursion to Harcourt. Other orchids seen were

Tall greenhood -now finished flowering.
Hooded caladenia - fairly common
Mosquito orchid - a few leaves only
Plumed greenhood - one patch in full flower
Pink fingers - several dozen seen
Scented sun-orchid - several specimens.
Bearded orchid - several dozen seen
Greencomb spider-orchid - very numerous, with some dense patches.
Leopard orchid - still in flower.

QUOLL AT GUILDFORD. B. Perry gave a report of an animal at Guildford, thought to possibly a native quoll. It has been attacking pigeons.

KING PARROTS ALONG THE LODDON. A report has been given of a pair of King Parrots frequenting Blackwoods, seen by a fisherman along the Loddon. This is well out of the usual range of these birds.

PARASITIC FLY. A report of a fly parasitic on a large caterpillar was given. Leach, in his "Australian Nature Studies" states that there are several thousand species of Icheneumon-flies; these are parasitic on grass-hoppers, moth larvae and beetle larvae.

ADDITIONS TO THE BIRD LIST

Sacred kingfisher	m	Nankeen night-heron	I
Painted quail	M	Common bronzewing	s

NEW PLANTS FOR PLANT LIST. Three new names have been added to the Castlemaine plant list. The Chile Nailwort (with the imposing name Paronchia chilensis) is a prostrate plant, found growing near the the creek at Campbells Creek. It does not have petals but the sepals have a projecting awn. It is also a new record for the North Central area. The Variable Spear-grass is fairly common, and sometimes is found along strets and roads. The Slender Aphelia (or Aphelia gracilis) is a tiny plant, found in mud near Diamond Gully. Babies' Tears (Erigeron mucronatus) was found during a Tuesday excursion in a water channel, in the Norwood Hill area.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Excursions leave promptly at the times shown. Date, time and location of the excursions may be changed at the monthly meetings.
Monthly meetings at the High School at 8 p.m.
Tues 3 Nov. KALIMNA. Meet 27 Doveton st at 1.30

Wed 4 Nov. TUNNEL HILL. Meet outside Castlemaine motel (on Melbourne Rd) at 4.15. Leader: F. Blake

Wed 11 Nov. CASTLEMAINE NORTH. Meet 118 Blakeley Rd at 4.15 pm. Leader: R. Mills.

Fri 13 Nov. WESTERN AUSTRALIA. A tour of W.A., and its wildflowers, with Rita Mills. 8.00 pm at high school.

Sat 14 Nov. Cemetery tour - visit Taradale and Spring Hill cemeteries and Loddon Falls. Wildflowers and birds. Leader: E. Perkins. SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp

Sat 14 Nov LYALL GLEN. B.O.C. excursion. approx 10.00 at Lyall Glen.

Wed 18 Nov. NUGGETTY RANGE. Bush-pea count on Nuggetty Ranges. Daylight saving, so you could bring tea. Meet 27 Doveton st at 4.15

Thurs 26 Nov. BUSINESS MEETING. 38 Campbell st at 7.30

Wed 25 Nov. MUCKLEFORD. A visit to the bushland west of the old prison farm. Meet 4.15 at 27 Doveton St.

Sun 29 Nov. CLUNES. Bird observer Club excursion to Clunes, Fells Gully and Clunes Swamp. Meet at Clunes P.O. at 10.00

Fri 11 Dec MEMBERS and VISITORS NIGHT. Bring some slides or specimens, or experiences. And a plate for supper if possible.

Fri 12 Feb. ANNUAL MEETING.

Sat 18- Sun 19 March WARRNAMBOOL. W.V.F.N.C.A. campout. This is during the wader season.

Sat 1 October. Bicentenary walk through Kalimna bushland. 2.00 pm; meet outside high school (Lawson Parade).

++

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club inc., P.O. Box 324

++