

# CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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## THE MYSTERIOUS NATIVE CHERRY

The Native Cherry is one of the most easily recognised, most interesting and most mysterious tree of our local bush land.

The appearance of the tree is quite distinctive, and orienteers mark their position on their maps, to help with navigation through the bush.

Native Cherry has the appearance of a cypress, and usually grows in association with eucalypts. It is seldom very common, but there would not be a patch of bushland in our area without its share of the tree.

Early settlers to Australia, on examining the tree, found a fruit that to them resembled a cherry, hence the name. The tree has however, little in common with the traditional orchard cherry, and once the fruit is examined one can readily see why. Like the cherry, the fruit is small and fleshy, but with the stone outside the "cherry", being located on the outer tip! This is something of a misconception, for the stone actually has a swollen pulpy stem, and it is this stem that attracts birds and possibly smaller marsupials, and people. The "cherry" is quite good to eat, but the taste has little resemblance to that of the real cherry.

Probably, both the stem and seed are eaten, with the result that the hard indigestible seed passes through the bird or animal, and germinates where it is deposited.

However, there are more surprises about the Native Cherry. It is a root parasite, rather like the mistletoe. It is believed that the Wild Cherry draws its nutrient from the roots of a neighbouring plant, a gum

tree, so the seed when it germinates, must send down roots to seek a host tree.

Some gardeners have succeeded in growing them in pots, so Native Cherries appear to be able to live an independent existence. This is quite unlike the Mistletoe, where a host tree is essential. However, it is very difficult to get a Native Cherry to grow in a garden.

It is always worth examining a Native Cherry when walking through the bush. Sometimes a host tree is not obvious. Perhaps in these cases, the original host tree is dead, or perhaps there is a very extensive root system, or the Cherry is growing alone, without help from another plant. Sometimes the original Native Cherry has gone, and there is a ring of newer plants growing some distance away. The plants associated with Native Cherries are also interesting, and usually the species found are quite different to those in the surrounding bushland. Introduced plants seem to find the base of Native Cherries more congenial than elsewhere - perhaps they are not parasitised by the Cherry.

The scientific name given to the tree is *Exocarpus cupressiformis*. The word "exocarpus" is a somewhat inaccurate expression meaning "outside fruit", and the latter word "cypress like"

Native Cherries are also stated to be favourite roosting places for owls, so it is worthwhile looking carefully in any shapely Native Cherry you find in the bush.

## APRIL & MAY AT BARKERS CREEK

BY Wyn Palmer

- \*Cup moths emerging and mating
- \*Wood Ducks calling as they fly over in the evenings.
- \*"Wol", our resident owl Nightjar for several years, has not returned to his/her normal retreat this Autumn.
- \*Beautifully camouflaged Emerald Moths resting on shed walls, hiding their coloured undersides
- \*Sharp Midge Orchids in flower
- \*Parson's Bands orchids in flower
- \*Green Mantis laying its egg cluster
- \*Nomadic Sittellas about
- \*Cranberry Heath flowering
- \*Fly Agaric Fungi coming up in large numbers
- \*Foxes calling at night
- \*Brushtailed Phascogale renewing her nest
- \*Red tipped rosettes of Scented Sundews coming up.
- \*Silky hakea in flower
- \*Pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles harassing domestic pigeons.



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# The Protection of Birds.

This composition is entirely the work of the pupil.  
A. Hurvey F.S.  
7-8-14

Oh, how dull life would be without the song of some bird to cheer us! All birds were placed on the earth to be of use, even if it were only to bring joy into our lives. It would, indeed, be very queer, if, on a warm spring day we went strolling through the woods and could not hear the familiar laugh of the noisy jackass or the trill of the skylark, its song becoming clearer as it wings its way towards the clouds. The blue sky and the green trees would have lost their charm had these feathered songsters been silent. Many men slaughter these innocent birds for their pleasure, but now, most of those that are of any value to man, are protected by law; but were people to become Nature lovers, no law for their protection would be needed. Man would have a mind beyond the mere commercial value of birds and would each become a law unto himself, striving to keep as many as possible of our native songsters with us.

A very valuable bird that well deserves its protection is the jackass, a large brown bird with white markings. It does not bother to build a nest, but hunts for a comfortable well-protected hollow in a tree or stump and there lays its two large eggs. The jackass diets mainly on lizards, insects and snakes, but during the

mice plague of last year, the people of the vast wheat growing areas to the North of Victoria were provided with a valuable practical demonstration of the value of the jackass, for it accounted for thousands of the mice that over ran the wheat stacks that contribute so much to the wealth of Victoria.

Another beautiful, protected bird, is the magpie. On a bright spring morning, "Hark to the white backed magpie carolling his cheerful lay." He is one of Nature's best songsters and becomes a fine mimicker if trained young. Some magpies may be a little destructive by pulling up crop shoots but the good they do by eating insects, quite counteracts the damage done. The nest of the magpie consists of bark and twigs. In this rough structure the female lays her three speckled eggs. Fortunately, Australian boys and girls are beginning to realise that the magpie is part of their inheritance and are beginning to take a pride in this graceful bird, being quite ready to assure you that there is no other singer that can compare with it. This is the spirit we want to foster with regard to our feathered friends - this is true protection.

A very quaint little bird, streaked with black, white and brown and much resembling a chicken, is the quail. Being a favorite sporting bird, it needs protection during the nesting season. The quail finds a hollow in the ground and in this she lays her eggs. Round our district, it is a very familiar bird and one often recognises before actually

seeing it, for, at the approach of the intruder, it rises with a whirr, reminding us of the sound of an aeroplane in the distance. Since it is such a welcome addition to the dinner-table, one should be a true sportsman when hunting this bird and remember that there is far more pleasure to be derived from a small bag of game well earned than from a large bag easily obtained. The very fact of its being so highly esteemed as a table bird should be sufficient reason to convince us that it well deserves its protection during the nesting seasons and while the young are being reared.

We often hear it said that Australia is a land of contradictions, and a bird that is one of these contradictions, is the black swan; for what person from the old world, before the discovery of Australia, ever heard of a swan being black! yet, we fortunate Australians may see them very often as they pass in their distinctive wedge shaped flight from one feeding ground to another, their long necks outstretched, and uttering their peculiar call. At any time they may be seen in large numbers on the small lakes at the back of the sea cliffs in our district and people have become so used to their presence there and admire their graceful appearance on the water so much that one would scarcely stop to question whether they are protected or not, no one thinks of molesting them.

Since all the birds of our land are so interesting, we should learn to love, know and carefully protect them. We should set ourselves

out to study their habits, for knowing them means being proud of them and of the land we live in & they were given by Nature for our enjoyment and appreciation and not to be wilfully destroyed. With the development of nature study in our schools, children are learning to take more interest in birds and their habits and so will be able to pass on to their descendants a remnant of most of the species of birds given to us by Nature for our enjoyment.

Teacher's Training College,

Grattan-street, Carlton.

15-12-19

Memorandum.

Dear young friend —

You have been awarded 1<sup>st</sup> prize for Grade VIII in connexion with the Essay Competition of the Gould League of Bird Lovers of Victoria.

Please find enclosed cheque for £2-2-6 which includes 6d exchange. (the remainder in stamps).

Kindly forward me receipt at your earliest convenience.

With congratulations on your success and best wishes for a Merry Xmas.

Yours faithfully  
Percy Shannan.

Katherine Johnson was the mother of  
Mrs Val Lakey of Maldon.

## CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Excursions leave promptly at the times shown. Date, time and locality of excursions may be changed at the monthly meetings; if not at the meeting check with a committee member.

Monthly meetings at High School at 8.00 p.m.

Sat 6 Jun-Mon 8 Jun. GEELONG F.N.C. CAMPOUT AT CASTLEMAINE. All excursions leave from Rose Garden car park, Downes Road.

Sat 9 am. Gower School and Muckleford

Sat. 11 am. Local Geology

Sat. 1.30 pm. Local Eucalypts tour to Mt Alexander

Sat 7 pm. Slides of Castlemaine District - at Anglican Church hall (Cr Forest St and Kennedy St)

Sun 9.30 am. Mineral Springs tour, all day

Sun 7 pm. Wildflowers of the goldfields. Anglican Church hall (Cr Forest and Kennedy St)

Mon 9 am. Clay Pits, Monk, Spring Gully. Take lunch.

Mon 2 pm. Geelong FNC depart for Geelong

Fri 12 June. KASHMIR - FLOWERS, LAKES and MOUNTAINS with Gretna Weste.

Sat 13 June. SHICER GULLY. Leave S.E.C, Mostyn St at 1.30 p.m., or meet at Guildford P.O. at 1.45 p.m. Leader is Berri Perry.

Wed 8 July. FRAZER CAVES, TASMANIA. We have been invited by Bendigo F.N.C. to hear Prof. Jim Allen, Professor of Archeology at Latrobe University, who will speak about his visit to Frazer Caves, Tasmania. Dept of Agriculture, Epsom, at 7.30 p.m.

Frid 10 July. EUROPE AND AMERICA with Mr G. Barry.

Sat 11 July. A walk through Barkers Ck/Moonlight Flat pine plantation. Leave S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30 p.m. Leader is Rita Mills.

Fri 14 Aug. Simpson Desert with David Plant

Fri Aug 28-Sun Aug 30 LITTLE DESERT LODGE. August campout of W.V.F.N.C.A. Book directly with Little Desert Lodge, Winiam, 053 915 232. Twin room share \$28.50 per person per day; motel type \$35.00. 30 powered sites.

Frid 9 Oct. CHINA with John Zwar.

Fri 9 Oct-Sun 11 Oct ST ARNAUD CAMPOUT of W.V.F.N.C.A.

## C.F.N.C. AGENDA (cont)

Fri 16 Oct-Sun 18 Oct RUSHWORTH CAMPOUT. Springtime get together of Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association at Rushworth. Accomodation at Waranga Holiday Camp (camp building with bunks) or overnight vans. For bunk or meals book with Marie Allender, 19 Hawthorn Ave, Caulfield North 3161 (03 527 2749). For camp sites and vans book direct with Mr and Mrs Houghton, Waranga Holiday Camp, Tatura Road, Rushworth (058 66 1243). The campout will start with slides and social evening on Friday, and a Saturday excursion, with half day excursion on Sunday.

Sun 18 Oct. MUCKLEFORD FOREST with Bendigo F.N.C. Meet Market Car Park at 10.00 am. Bring your lunch.

CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.  
BOX 324 CASTLEMAINE.

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Subscriptions for 1987 are

Pensioner/student	\$3	Single	\$5
Family	\$8	Supporting	\$12
Newsletter Posted	Membership subscription plus \$5		

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Supper roster

June : B. Eames, L. Perkins

July : F. Blake, E. Blake

## NOTES FOR MAY

GOLDEN WHISTLERS 8 to 10 male Golden Whistlers have been seen together at Chewton by B. Ibbotsen. Three of the males were displaying on the same tree.

INVERTED MOUSE SKIN was found last month. B. Perry has found that the Yellow-footed Antichinus typically inverts the skin of its victim. The animals are often seen near her home at Guildford, usually near the ground e.g. low stumps.

NANKEEN NIGHT HERON The juvenile is still present near the lake at the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens.

BUNYA PINE SEEDS Bunya Pines are seeding prolifically this year. The seeds are edible, and about the size of an inshelled almond.

A TEAM OF MAGPIES! A flock of 24 magpies HAS BEEN seen feeding on the High School oval. Magpies are quite common, but usually are spread over the golf links and surrounding areas.