

# CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



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## Surprises in the Summer Bush

Rita Mills

Cooler weather this Summer has given me the opportunity to get into the bush this season, and I have been quite surprised at what I have found in flower. Some plants I expected to see, such as the Sweet Bursaria, Wirey Buttons, Pale Flax Lily and Magenta Storksbill, but others I didn't expect to see.

The outing in December to White Gum Road and the Walmer bush yielded a new orchid, the Graceful Leek Orchid, as reported elsewhere in the Magazine, and Lemon Beautyheads (*Calocephalus citreus*) in bud.

Early in January a few of the Club members went out to Glenluce Springs one evening for a picnic tea. There we found the River, or Swamp, Bottlebrush (*Callistemon palludosis*) in flower, and a tea-tree which proved to be a new record for our plant list, the River Tea-tree (*Leptospermum obovatum*). Yellow Box and Yellow Gum were attracting the birds, especially the Yellow-faced Honeyeaters.

Swamp Isotome (*I. fluvatilis*) and Rock Isotome (*I. axillaris*) were at Harcourt Res. and Mt. Alexander respectively. The Rock Isotome would doubtless have been in flower on Tarrengower and Nuggetty, too.

Tall Lobelia (*L. gibbosa*) was reported from Barkers Creek, Green Gully and near the Red, White and Blue mine in the Muckleford bush, while I saw it on a drive through the bush from Fryerstown to Taradale. The surprises of that drive were *Grevillia alpina* and *Karalla* (*Gompholobium huegelii*), and Mitchell Wattle still in flower.



Admittedly the flowering on the Ridge is later than around Castlemaine.

It was a walk in Kalimna, up behind the High School, on the 27th Jan which really provided some surprises - Cranbeery Heath, Sweet Marianth, the little Goodenia, Rough Mint Bush, Fairy Wax, Grey Everlasting, Gorse Bitter Pea, Grevillia alpina and Grey Everlasting, some with only a few flowers, some with quite a respectable number of flowers. There was also Magenta Storksbill (*Pelargonium rodneyanum*), Yellow Rush-lily (*Tricoryne elatior*), Sweet Bursaria and Wirey Buttons, but I expected them.

On trips further afield, the most memorable sight was seen in two places - thousands upon thousands of Blue Pincushions (*Brunonia australis*) in full flower in the bush near Chute and at Mt Langi Giran near Ararat.

## ORCHIDS OF THE CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT

### One of a Series

#### Graceful Leek Orchid, (*Prasophyllum gracile*)

Flowering - September to January

The December outing, which was "planned" finally as we met up at the SEC, proved to be something "special" as Ern Perkins found an orchid which was new to the plant list, and not on Mr Taylor's list. It was noticeably different from the other leek orchids found in the district. It was found in the Walmer bush.

*P. gracile*, along with two others, is now regarded by some to be synonymous with the Slatey Leek Orchid (*P. frenchii*). but, according to Woolcocks, further investigation of the group is necessary.

The lateral sepals in *P. frenchii* are not joined, but in *P. gracile* the first 1/3 is; the tips may be crossed or spreading. The flower is "reversed, having the tongue above the column, the petals are narrow and incurving, the tongue is on a very short stalk, is wedge shaped, strongly recurved past the middle, and has a callus plate extending nearly to





the tip. The edges are slightly ruffled, and there is a constriction just above the bend, more obvious in some flowers than others. The plants are quite variable.

The flowers vary in colour from maroon to yellowish green, those we sow varied between pink and yellowish green.

The plant is up to 45cm tall, with numerous flowers about 1 cm across. One specimen we saw had about 30-35 flowers. The leaf lamina, which was beginning to wither at

flowering is not as long as the inflorescence.

It is a widespread species, and possibly hasn't been recorded before because of its time of flowering, because, although September is stated as the beginning of flowering, it has not been seen here until we came into the bush in December.

The day following the outing Ern, and Frank Blake went out again, and between them counted 200 specimens.

Rita Mills



## BIRDS OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

A leaflet advertising "Pretty Valley Lodge" at Falls Creek was included in a recent issue of the "Bird Observer", and a group from Castlemaine F.N.C. decided to take advantage of the offer.

It would be hard to find a better place for summer holidays - excellent food and accomodation, beautiful scenery and lots of wildflowers, as well as some interesting birds.

Pipits were perhaps the the commonest bird. Near Castlemaine we find them in open paddocks or flying from the edge of the road. On the High Plains they were very common in the short heathy scrub, and quite tame. Once when walking along a narrow path, a Pipit kept in front of us for about 50 metres - running a short distance, then waiting for us to catch up before running again.

Ravens were also very plentiful and conspicuous, sometimes alone or in pairs, and sometimes in flocks of twenty or so. Basalt crags seemed to be the favorite perching place for the flocks. The call was "kaw kaw kaw kaw" and the ravens were identified as Little Ravens.

The Royal Grevillea was still in flower, and this was perhaps the attraction for the Crescent Honeyeater. It is a little like the local New Holland Honeyeater, but the yellow on the wing is much duller.

A group of Large Black Cormorants were living on Rocky Valley Dam. We were able to stop and watch them at work fishing.

Flame Robins were common in the heathy areas. Their favorite haunt seems to be where there are some Snow Gums scattered amongst the heath. Like most robins they seem to seek attention, and even without binoculars could be seen very clearly.

Olive Whistlers were about too, and we were able to see some very clearly.

I was surprised that hawks were not more common. Only one species was seen - a Nakeen Kestrel flying low over the heath.

Magpies were moderately common and we saw a small flock of them on most days.

We were told tht a pair of Emus could often be seen near Mt Nelse, and we were pleased to see not two, but three of them on the nearby Spion Kopje. Apparently they live on the High Plains in summer and move down to lower elevations as the waether worsens.

E.P.



# FALLS CREEK IN THE *Summer!*

**P**retty Valley Alpine Lodge offers luxury accommodation at Falls Creek. We are pleased to present our comfortable and friendly lodge for your consideration when choosing your summer holiday.

**The Location.** Pretty Valley Alpine Lodge is within the Falls Creek Village and offers superb views of Spion Kopje and the surrounding peaks. Our position in the village gives you easy access to the village facilities.

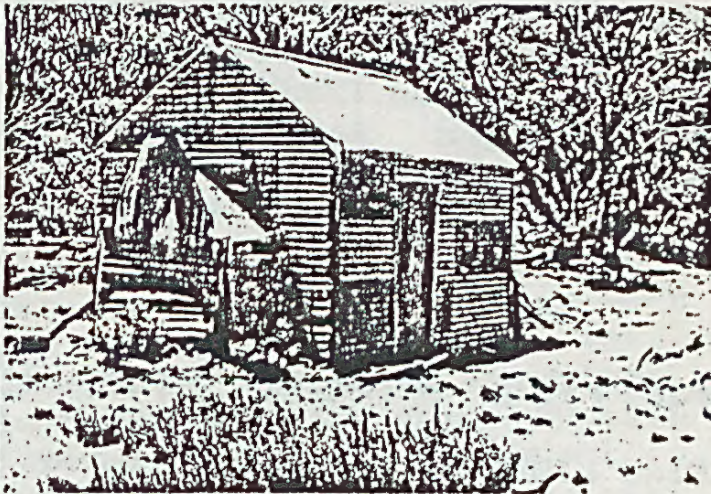
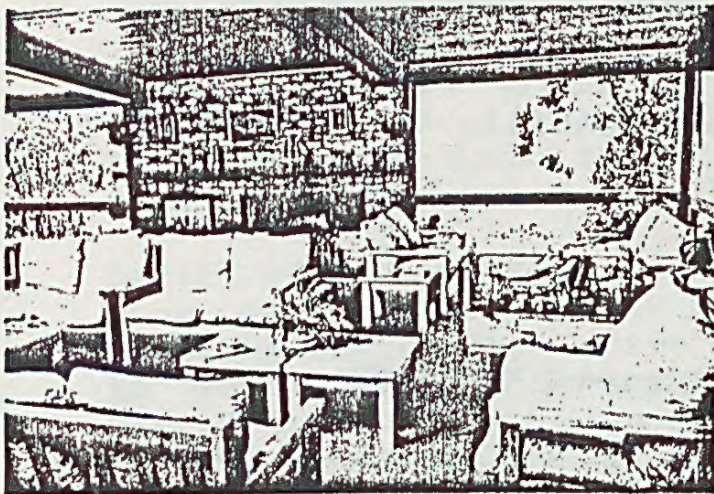
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**The Meals.** Our tariff includes three meals daily. The day starts with a cooked breakfast. Lunch is provided at the lodge. Picnic lunches are available

on request. The three course evening meal is prepared to the highest standards. Tea and coffee is available at all times.

**Our Facilities.** After the day's activity, make use of our spa pool and saunas. The spacious lounge and friendly bar enables you to relax in comfort. Our open fireplaces create a warm atmosphere for a pleasant evening. A laundry is available for guests' use.

**The Bar.** Bazza's Bar adjoins the lounge and is a very popular rendezvous. An extensive range of wines is available for your selection.



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- Relax in the unspoilt alpine environment.

**Pretty Valley Alpine Lodge is the place for your next holiday.**

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A choice of single, twin, double or multi-share rooms.  
Fully licensed bar and dining room with an extensive wine list.  
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**BARRY JONES, PRETTY VALLEY ALPINE LODGE**  
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**IAN WILLIAMS, PEREGRINE EXPEDITIONS**  
9th Floor, 343 Lt. Collins St, Melb, Vic. Tel: 602 3066

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Christmas/New Year Observations  
Barkers Creek

from the Palmers

Pair of Red Wattlebirds nesting in Mistletoe.  
Swamp Wallaby with tiny joey hopping behind.  
Yellowfaced Honeyeaters' nest, with young, in coffee bush.  
Kookaburras nesting in hole nearby.  
Yellowfaced Honeyeaters' nest and young gone - work of Kookaburras?  
Three foot Brown snake on our verandah.  
Golden Whistler male feeding a reddish-brown chick.  
Family group of Buff-rumped Thornbills feeding together.  
Blue Wrens' nest with three eggs in coffee bush - very exposed, so cover added.  
Seven (or more) young Brush-tailed Phascogales leaving nest-log for evening's hunting.  
Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters' nest in blackberry bush.  
Tall Lobelia (L. gibbosa), several patches in flower.  
Blue-wrens hatched and growing fast.  
Speckled Warblers feeding with Scarlet Robins.  
Young Crismson Rosellas trying out their voices.  
Brown-headed Honeyeaters and Weebills collecting wool for their nests.  
Young Blue Wrens flying.

## NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE

**BIRD LIST** The third edition of the Club's Bird List has been prepared and is available for purchase. Cost is \$1.

**DEVELOPMENT AT PENNYWEIGHT FLAT.** The committee has decided to support non-development in the Pennyweight Flat area.

**HERITAGE WEEK.** The Club has been asked to conduct groups around the Botanic Gardens as part of the celebrations for Heritage Week. Date(s) and times(s) are to be decided.

**WATTLE FLAT.** The Club has asked the Dept of Conservation, Forests and Lands not to take timber from the ridge in Wattle Flat Forest that contains the new Leek Orchid as well as other interesting plants.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1987.** The Committee has recommended that the subscriptions for 1987 remain unchanged.

**TASMANIAN ARBORETUM.** We receive the newsletter from this group. See E. Perkins if you would like to read this interesting bulletin.



## DECEMBER AND JANUARY

**BUFF-BANDED RAIL.** The sighting of this bird by Ian Higgins is an additional bird for the Castlemaine Bird List. Ian saw the bird, with a chick, near the junction of Barkers and Forest Creek. The bird is very distinctive and unmistakable. It is probably quite common, but is seldom seen. A group visited the area to repeat the sighting, but without success - in the locality there is ample reed beds in which to hide.

**DECEMBER MEETING.** R. Mills showed a collection of nests, donated by the Palmers. A fossil tree from near the NSW, SA and Queensland border was shown by G. Leidl. A sample leaf with tiny black eggs was shown by B. Ibbitson. Pressed specimens of Flat Spurge (from Nuggetty) and Rusty Hood (from Chewton) were also on display.

**TARRENGOWER BIRD LIST.** At the evening excursion to Tarrengower on December 3rd, these birds were seen

Wedge-tailed eagle	Brown Falcon
Spotted Pardalote	Superb Blue Wren
Kookaburra	Striated Pardalote
Grey Fantail	Rufous Whistler

In addition, some feral goats were seen, high on the mountain slopes

**DARTER AT LAKE MOKOAN.** Two club members had an excellent view of a Darter, while both members and the Darter were enjoying lunch. The Darter was patrolling the shore about 10 metres from the edge, swimming for about 50 metres, mostly under water, before turning back in the opposite direction. Darters are a little like a black cormorant in appearance, but have a longer, narrower neck and a very much sharper and finer bill. And judging by the one at Mokaon, a very successful fisherman.

**AUSTRALIA DAY BIRD COUNT.** This has become an annual event. The aim is to count the number of birds seen in a suburban block, between the hours of 7.00 a.m and 8.00 a.m, on Australia Day. Once again two members chose a block in Alexandra. The birds seen (and 1986 figures in brackets) are

Blackbird - several resident [about 6 seen]

Silver Eye - 3 seen [0]

Sparrow - several resident [about 5 seen]

Cockatoo - only one over block [1]

Magpie - 1, but several nearby [2]

Yellow Robin - 1 seen [0]

Crimson Rosella - 1 seen, but several nearby [0]

A Galah was seen in 1986, but not this year.

**ADDITIONS TO PLANT LIST.** New locality records, both for Tarrengower are

Shade Pellitory (*Parietaria debilis*), found in rock crevices

Four-leaf Allseed (*Polycarpon tetraphyllum*).



# 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, so if not at the meeting check with a committee member.

Monthly meetings at High School, Lawson Pde. Room 309 at 8.00 p.m.

Fri 13 Feb. BIRDS. Speaker will be Mr Russell Palmer, of Sunraysia N.R.T. This is the annual meeting and is the first general meeting for the year.

Sat 14 Feb. EXCURSION. TULLAROOP RESERVOIR. Take your tea and binoculars. Leave S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp. Leader is K. Turner.

Thurs 26 Feb. Business meeting.

Fri 13 March. G. Leidl will provide the program, and show some more of his beautiful photography.

Sat 14 March. PILCHERS BRIDGE/EPPALOCK. Leave S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30.

5-12 April. HERITAGE WEEK. C.F.N.C. will be conducting tours of the Botanic Gardens.

Frid 14 Aug. EUROPE AND AMERICA with Mr G. Barry.

Frid 9 Oct. CHINA with John Zwar.

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

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CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC. BOX 324 CASTLEMAINE.

COMMITTEE Ern Perkins(Pres), Barabara Maund(Sec), Geoff Sitch(Treas), Maggie Oliver(Vice Pres), Kaye Turner(Exc. sec), George Broadway(Libr), Rita Mills(Newsletter), Gunter Liebl, Margaret Dunne, Elma Kelly, Jack Dare(I/P Pres), Berri Perry.

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Articles for the magazine can be left at Tonks Hardware.

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Recommended subscriptions for 1987 are

Pensioner/student	\$3	Single	\$5
Family	\$8	Supporting	\$12

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