

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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#136



IF YOU CANT' BEAT THEM, EAT THEM

ONE OF A SERIES.

CHICKWEED (*Stellaria media*)

Chickweed is a scrambling weed with broad soft opposite leaves, and small white flowers. The petals are deeply divided, to give the plant a starry appearance. A curious feature of the plant is the row of hairs growing along the stems; the row changes sides between each pair of leaves. Another Chickweed in the district, (*Stellaria pallida*) is fairly common in the forests, particularly at the base of trees, or under Native Cherries. This latter plant however, does not have petals.

Chickweed is common throughout the district, and may grow in slightly moist areas, for example, in gardens, on roadsides, or in waste areas. It is supposed to be a sign of a fertile garden, so its presence here should be welcomed



The fresh soft young leaves can be eaten in salads, and have a slightly sour taste. The leaves may also be cooked, and eaten like spinach; it has been used in this way for many thousands of years. Some regard Chickweed as one of the finest of the wild vegetables. The young shoots and tips should be cut off with a pair of scissors. Both the leaves and stems can be eaten

Herbalists also make use of Chickweed. It is reputed to cure inflammations, burns and skin disorders.

The Latin name, *Stellaria*, means "a little star", referring to the star-like flowers. The common name, Chickweed, is given on account of the fondness of the weed to fowls.

LAL LAL BLAST FURNACE

[The Club has an excursion to the Lal Lal Blast furnaces in August. This article is condensed from a Conservation, Forests and Lands leaflet.]

Lal Lal Blast Furnace site has the remnants of Victoria's only venture in the making of pig iron from its own resources, and has been classified by the National Trust as "A" - "To be preserved at all costs".

The origin of the Lal Lal Iron Company was intimately associated with the boom days of Ballarat, 24 km away, as a deep-lead gold mining centre. The mines had generated a virile local engineering industry, comprising makers of mining equipment, railway locomotives and rolling stock, and as well Ballarat was one of the State's leading manufacturers of ornamental cast iron for building decoration.

It had been known from 1857 that a substantial deposit of iron ore existed near Lal Lal on the west bank of the Moorabool River, so it is not surprising that enterprising business men decided to set up their own pig-iron industry, instead of hauling iron from distant sources. If successful, such a venture would almost certainly have gained a virtually captive market.

The Lal Lal company was registered in 1874, and by the following year the deposits had been opened up and an experimental blast furnace built. Over the years 1875-1878 the going proved rough for the infant company as it struggled to find suitable smelter fuels. Charcoal from local timber, brown coal from a nearby Lal Lal deposit and coke from gas works in Geelong and Ballarat were all tried with varying degrees of success and failure. A larger furnace was built in 1878.

The capacity of the second furnace proved too small, and in May 1880 a start was made on a much bigger one, the remains of which can still be seen. It was 17 metres high and 2.5 metres square at the base, and was completed that year. For the period 1881-1884, the furnace produced 2260 tonnes of pig iron from 4429 tonnes of ore. Price recessions however, made the furnace uneconomic, and the furnace closed down in 1884.

At the peak of operations in 1884, some 160 men were employed. There was a general store, and trades such as blacksmithing and carpentry were catered for. The workers had their own homes on the site, varying from well founded timber houses to simple huts.

The works are set out in five hand-hewn terraces on a steeply sloping hill-side. The lowest level is 38 m above the Moorabool River and here was the biggest of the blast furnaces. The casting shed and crane were also

at this level. A stone channel has been carefully cut from the top terrace to the lowest terrace. Its purpose is a mystery, but may be the remnants of a cornish-type chimney.

The next two levels were for machinery, and a pump foundation can still be seen. The large pump was used to pump water from the river, and provide the air blast for the furnace. The second level was for store sheds and stock-piles for coke, charcoal, limestone and ore.

In 1883 a 5 km tramway joined the railway at Lal Lal. Most of its pathway can still be traced.

As well as the iron works, there is much to see in the area. There are scenic views over the valley of the Moorabool River and over the Bungal Dam. There are various gold workings in the area also. Only a short distance from the junction of the Iron Mine road with the road from Lal Lal is the picturesque Lal Lal Falls, where the Lal Lal Creek plunges over 30 metres. The waters of the Bungal Dam almost back up to the foot of the falls.

Wildflowers abound in spring, including pink and white native heath. Large numbers of the Small Grass Tree can be found in the reserve. These are not often found so far east in the State.

Re the twining direction of climbing plants: Going round the various plants here, which include Hardenbergia violacea, Soliya heterifolia, Pandorea Jasminoides, Chorizema diversifolium, Kennedia nigricans, K. rubicunda, and Muellenbeckia, plus "Morning Glory" and Dolichos, all appear to twine in a left-to-right direction exclusively, except the Chorizema and Muellenbeckia, which both form rather tangled growth with a few stems going in the opposite direction.

I can recall years ago, when the late Mr Crosbie Morrison gave Nature talks on the radio, the subject of twining direction was spoken of; he suggested that it could well be due to the effect of the sunlight on the plants, drawing the growth from east to west (via the north) in the Southern hemisphere; (and via the south in the Northern hemisphere, causing it to turn in the opposite direction??

Wyn Palmer

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Committee: George Broadway (Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec),
Maggie Oliver (VP), Rita Mills (Newsletter), Kaye Turner
(Program Sec), Ern Perkins (Treas), Margaret Dunne,
Geoff Sitch, Robyn Holden, Gunter Liebl, Elma Kelly.
Librarian: Lesley Perkins.

BROWN STRINGYBARK AT MUCKLEFORD

I have visited the boronia patch in the Muckleford forest many times. The whole area was burned a few years ago, and the boronias are recovering quite well, even though the growth rate is rather slow.

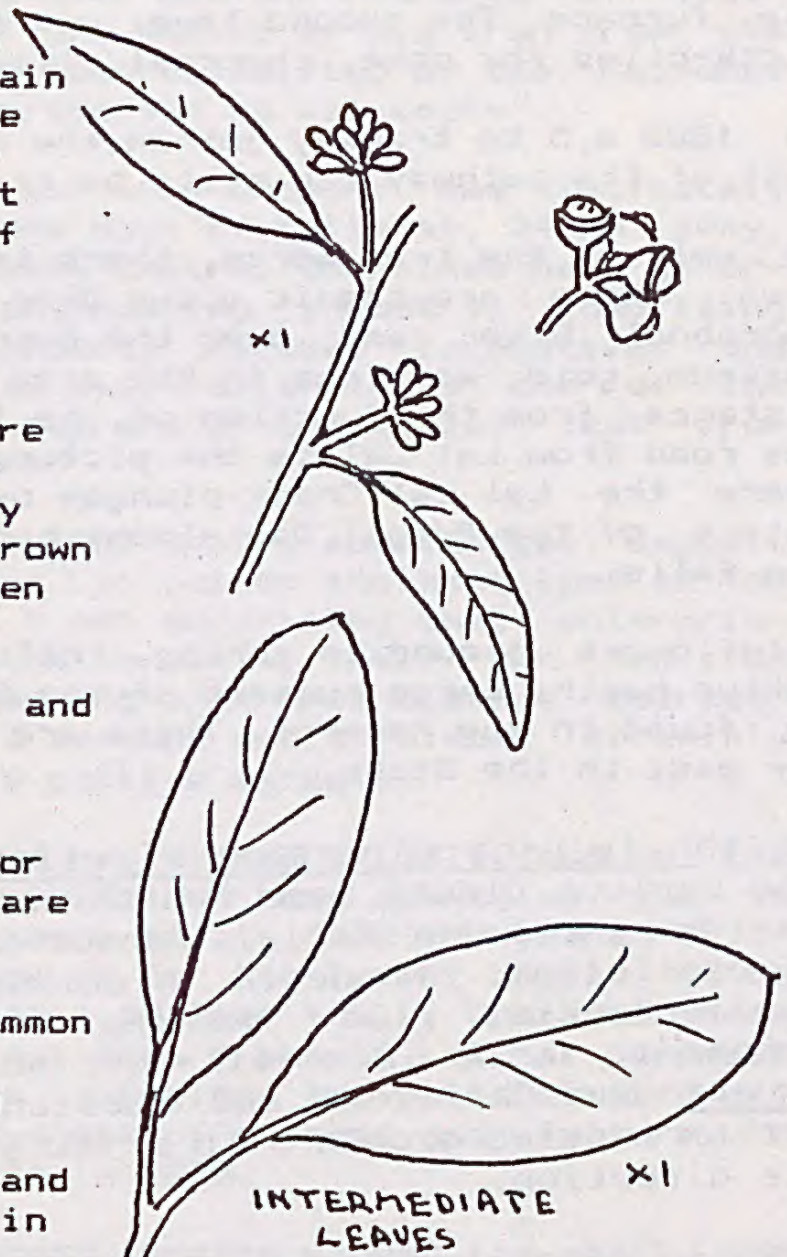
I was surprised when visiting the area again early in June, to see how the boronias are faring to notice that there are a number of Brown Stringybarks growing amongst the Ironbarks.

Brown Stringybarks are rather uncommon near Castlemaine. The only other places where Brown Stringybarks have been recorded for this district are in the Smith's Reef Forest, and along the Porcupine Ridge Road.

Brown Stringybarks (or *Eucalyptus baxteri*) are rather similar in appearance to the locally much more common Red Stringybark.

However, the caps on Brown Stringybark flowers are rounded and often almost warty, in comparison with the pointed and twisted caps of Red Stringybark. Brown Stringybark also has dark green, very thick leathery juvenile leaves. It is this feature that makes Brown Stringybark easy to recognise. It is surprising that such a tree should be unrecognised in such a frequently visited area.

Although Brown Stringybark is rather uncommon in our district, it is much more common further south. It is widespread through the Grampians and in the Otway area.



SUPPER ROSTER

July: G. and P. Broadway Aug: M. Oliver and K. Turner

EXCURSION TO AXE CREEK

On June 11th the club visited the Axe Creek area, to look at the effects of salinity, and look for any birds that might inhabit the area.

The first stop was at North Harcourt where we stopped to look at a She-oak at the edge of the road. It had three generations of cones growing, ranging from mature cones to small bumps on the branches.

We then drove on to look at the bare hillsides. Here rain is able to penetrate easily, and this water, with salt, eventually reaches lower sections. Here were two varieties of Mistletoe growing, the Drooping Mistletoe, on a Long-leaf Box, and Creeping Mistletoe, on a Red Stringybark. This latter mistletoe has creeping branches that twine around the host tree. Usually these mistletoes grown on red gums.

We then went to some of the flats that are salting. The most obvious sign was the presence of the introduced Spiny Rush. In the nearby paddock was a small flock of Galahs feeding, with Long-billed Corellas and a single cockatoo. A much larger flock of cockatoos, or corellas could be seen in the distance. About six Crested Pigeons and the same number of Red-rump parrots were on a nearby fence, and overhead two wedge-tailed Eagles were flying.

A little further along the road was a flock of at least 100 Little Ravens. Little Ravens differ from the more common (in Castlemaine district) Australian Ravens in that they often flock together in large numbers, and do not have a descending final note to their call.

At our afternoon tea stop there were large numbers of Musk Lorikeets flying about, from tree to tree and in the air. A few Little Lorikeets were also present. Nearby were some White-browed Babblers.

In all, we saw three large flocks of Cockatoos, and in each of these flocks there were numbers of Corellas. A few years ago, Corellas were uncommon in our district, and seem to be seen more and more often.

On the return trip home, we took the road just to the east of Mt Alexander. Along the water race Desert Ash are to be found. This is a beautiful spot and one worth re-visiting.

Bird list for the excursion was

Magpie Willy Wag-tail Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

Blue Wren	Australian Raven	Striated Thornbill
Flame Robin	Crested Pigeon	White-plumed Honeyeater
Mudlark	Eastern Rosella	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Noisy Miner	Red Wattlebird	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Galah	Scissors Grinder	White-winged Chough
Swallow	Red-rump Parrot	Long-billed Corella
Little Raven	White-faced Heron	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Maned Goose	Musk Lorikeet	White-eared Honeyeater
Little Grebe	Little Lorikeet	White-naped Honeyeater
Black Duck	Spotted Pardalote	Little Pied Cormorant
Musk Duck	Scarlet Robin	White-browed Babbler
Shelduck	Grey Currawong	Striated Pardalote

This gives a total of 39 species, to make a very enjoyable afternoon.

NEW BOOK FOR LIBRARY

The Geelong Field Naturalists Club has given the C.F.N.C. a copy of their recent publication "From Buckleys to the break: a history of the Barwon River through Geelong". It was presented by the Geelong F.N.C. president, Dick Southcombe, at the June meeting. It is available for loan to members.

Other Club books which members may like to borrow include:-

"Call of the Kulkyne" by G.B. Eggleton

"The care of sick, injured and orphaned native birds and animals" by Jack Wheeler

"Exploring Maryborough and district" from Maryborough Field Naturalists Club.

"Forest Trees of Tasmania"

"Native Orchids of Australia" by Eileen Gentry and Pat Foreman.

"Vegetation of Wyperfeld National Park" by J. Ros Garnet.

"Wildflower Diary" by Winifred Waddell.

"Wildflowers of Victoria" by Jean Galbraith.

The Land Conservation Council of Victoria reports - The Alpine Area, North Central Study Area, and Melbourne Study Area vol 2, maps, are also available.

Would any member wanting to borrow a Club magazine or book please fill in the borrower's book or let me know before taking a publication.

Lesley Perkins.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1988

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

JUNE OBSERVATIONS

CRESTED PIGEONS Eight were seen by G, Sitch at the Muckleford-Maldon Road intersection. This is a new area record for our bird list.

GREY FANTAIL has been seen regularly in Campbell St.

BLACK SWANS. A pair were seen flying over Castlemaine, at the conclusion of our excursion to Axe Creek. This is a new locality record for the bird list.

SCISSORS GRINDER has been seen at Wheeler St by G. Broadway. This is also a new locality record.

FROSTS AND AUTUMN TREES. It is often supposed that good autumn frosts are needed for good autumn colouring. This year, with no notable frosts have so far been experienced, and many autumn trees have made a very colourful showing. The effect seems to be variable.

LARGE WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE'S NEST. D. Southcombe told of a large nest in Werribee Gorge. How large can such a nest become?

OTHER NEW BIRD LIST RECORDS

White-naped Honeyeater, Striated Pardalote, Long-billed Corella. All for Mt Alexander (June 11 excursion) Diamond Firetail (1984), Pallid Cuckoo (1985), Tawny Frogmouth (1986), Crested Strike Tit (1986), Restless Flycatcher (1987), Striated Pardalote (1985, 1986); all breeding records for area B (Moonlight Flat) made by G Smith for Colles Road.

Black Fronted Dotterel, White-browed Woodswallow; both for area b (Colles Road, Moonlight Flat) made by G. Smith.

Black-chinned Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Fuscous Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, New Holland Honeyeater, Red Wattlebird, Blue Wren, Long-billed Corella, Grey Thrush, Yellow Robin, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Grey Fantail, Spotted Pardalote, Wood Duck, Little Pied Cormorant, Scarlet Robin, Mudlark, Eastern Rosella, Goldfinch. All for area s (Sandon Forest, June 13th excursion)

WHITE COCKATOOS. Some very large flocks, numbering probably some thousands, have been seen.

HOW MANY BIRDS ON THE MELBOURNE TRIP? One observer saw 19 species coming to Castlemaine from Melbourne. Can anyone beat this? (No stopping, driver not to take part).

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Fri 8th July. FUNGI. Talk by Hilary Weatherhead.

Sat 9th July. FIRTH PARK (Wombat Forest). Fungi. Leader is R Mills. Meet S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp.

Fri 12 Aug. Mr GRAEME HALLETT. VENTURE SCOUTING, including films of trips to Central Australia and canoing along the Murray. Some of the Venture members will also be present, so a plate for supper please.

Sat 13 Aug. FRYERSTOWN AND VAUGHAN TOUR. 1.30 sharp at SEC, Mostyn Street. Leader is E. Perkins.

Fri-Sun 26-28 Aug. BALLARAT CAMPOUT with W.V.F.N.C.A., at Pax Hill Scout camp. Accommodation available at \$5 per night. Corner Fussell St and Spencer St. [From Creswick road, turn left at Sturt St, past the north side of the Mall, turn right around McDonalds into Main Road. Turn left into Clayton St and then turn left into Spencer St. There is a Pax Hill sign at this corner]

Fri 26: Registration from 4.00 p.m. Evening talk by Helen Burgess - "South of Cape Horn". Supper.

Sat 27: 9.00 Depart for Lal Lal, Bungal, Mt Doran

Sat 27: 12.00 BYD lunch at Lal Lal Iron Mine site

Sat 27: 7.15 Meeting of W.V.F.N.C.A.

Sat 27: 8.15 Greg Parker "Reptiles in Western Victoria" followed by supper.

Sun 28: 9.00 Excursion to Lake Wendouree to observe water birds, vegetation and surrounds. Ferryboat trip.

Sun 28: 12.00 Lunch at Pax Hill. BBQ.

Fri 9th Sept. THE GRAMPIANS with Jane Calder.

Sat 10 Sept. BLACK HILL, KYNEDON. 1.30 at SEC.

Sat 17th Sept. TARNAGULLA. Combined excursion with Maryborough and St Arnaud F.N.C. Meet at Tarnagulla at 11.00 a.m.

Sat 1st Oct. BICENTENARY WALK THROUGH KALIMNA
2.00 pm; meet outside high school (Lawson Pde)

Fri 14th Oct. KAKADU with John Zwar

Sat 15th Oct. SANDON FOREST

Fri 21st Oct. WARBY RANGES. W.V.F.N.C.A. campout

8.00 p.m. Fri: Orchids with Roger Briggs.

9.00 a.m. Sat: Excursion to Warby Ranges

6.30 p.m. Sat: Annual meeting of W.V.F.N.C.A.

8.00 p.m. Sat: Booklaunching - Plants of NE Vic.

9.00 a.m. Sun: Excursion to Reef Hills, Benalla

Fri Nov 11. PAT BINGHAM - A CONTRAST IN ISLANDS