

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

APRIL 1989

#144



RED-CAPPED DOTTEREL

MUD ISLANDS

One of the major attractions of the recent VFNCA campout at Geelong was a trip to Mud Island (or Islands if the tide is higher). Situated about 8 km east of Queenscliff the Island is a State Faunal Reserve under the control of C.F and L. The Island is the high point of a large system of mud and sand banks which occupy a large part of the southern end of Port Phillip Bay and which restrict shipping in the bay to well defined channels. The Mud Islands are actually ridges of sand resting on dune limestone; they form a series of long curving ridges which enclose a central lagoon which is about 1 km across and which is a haven for wading birds which congregate here before they undertake their annual migration to the Northern Hemisphere. Because the actual islands are but the tip of an extensive sandbank, the surrounding waters are very shallow making approach difficult, and so it is necessary to wade to the shore.

We left Castlemaine early on the Saturday morning after our last meeting, and at that hour there was promise of a fine sunny day. However before we reached Geelong we had encountered thick fog and rain which suggested that we might become even damper than we had expected. However by the time the 60 or so adventurers had collected on the fishing wharf at Queenscliff, all ready to board the two charter fishing boats which had been engaged by the Geelong Club, the weather had decided to be kind, all clouds rolled away and a perfect day ensued.

Shortly after leaving Queenscliff we encountered the Alma Doepel, anchored and with sails furled but a splendid sight. Shortly afterwards we approached the Pope's Eye, an almost closed circle of large basalt boulders placed on the southern tip of the sand-bank. It appears that it was once intended to construct a fort on this foundation, similar to one on South Channel Island. A battery of big guns here it was felt, would be able to deter invaders from entering the bay. The fort did not eventuate but the rocks now form a popular rookery for Gannets and Black-faced Cormorants. Our skipper took us close in to the rocks for a good view of the birds, then slowly circled the whole island. Among the Gannets were observed several fluffy chicks which were nearly as big as their parents. As we circled the rocks we realized how desirable it was to remain upwind of the rookery as the smell was not the most pleasant we had ever encountered.

A little to the North of the Pope's Eye another artificial structure proved to be a favoured roosting spot for Cormorants and Gannets. This was

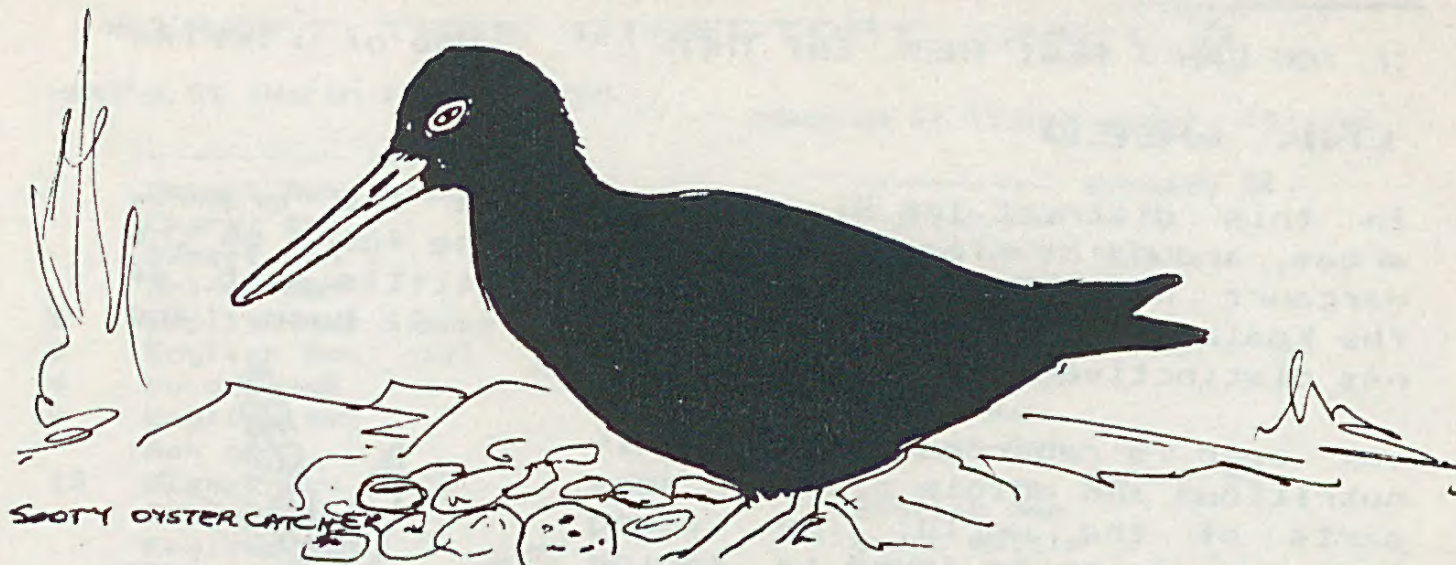
one of the major light structures indicating the presence of the sand-bank to the shipping. This too we circled slowly while all on board had a very good look at the birds. On then to the Chinaman's Hat which lies further to the East and closer to the Sorrento shore. This structure resembles a band rotunda stuck out in the middle of the bay and conjures up visions of Edwardian outings by paddle steamer to Queenscliff, while the band played for the crowd's amusement. At present it is leaning at a rather precarious angle and looks a trifle derelict and unloved. It too was home to birds and to one seal which was observed resting in among the supports.

And so we set out at last for Mud Island. An occasional patrolling Short-tailed Shearwater was seen at this stage, along with the Gannets. As we neared Mud Island it seemed that a picket fence stretched out in each direction from it, but what it was was difficult to tell at a distance through the shimmering haze. Eventually the black "pickets" resolved themselves into black swans resting out on the extensive mudflats. Our boat nosed carefully into the shallows and dropped anchor where the water was about 60-70 cm deep. At this point it was necessary for most of the passengers to transfer from the boat to the small dinghy which took them closer to the island and to a sandbank on which it was easy to wade the remaining distance to shore. As the two boats held about 60 passengers and the dinghy held only 6, this process took quite a while. Like several other passengers I decided to risk wading all the way; my shorts got a bit wet but in the warm sun they soon dried.

The mud flats around the island were alive with hundreds of waders, more than I had ever seen, and most of them species I had never seen before. The first priority therefore was to seek out someone who appeared knowledgeable and to stick very close. Fortunately the Geelong people had seen to that. I soon learned that the large waders with the long, slightly down-curved beaks were Bar-tailed Godwits, while the tiny birds busily darting all over the place were Red-necked Stints. Also obvious were Crested Terns, Silver Gulls and Pelicans. Other birds new to me turned out to be Red Knots and Great Knots. When the whole party had landed we headed along the outside of the island between the sand/mud flats and the low vegetation of mainly saltbush until we came to a break in the shrubbery which led to the interior of the island. Here we were able to view the large interior lagoon at low tide and I for one was amazed at the numbers of birds which had congregated in the place. Some time was spent here with binoculars and telescopes. Here is the list which resulted:-

Red-necked Stint	Bar-tailed Godwit
White-faced Heron	Chestnut Teal
Great Knot	Red Knot
Sooty Oystercatcher	Greenshank
Turnstone	Curlew Sandpiper
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Mongolian Plover (with red breast)
Grey Plover	Golden Plover
Red-capped Dotterel	Royal Spoonbill
Little Tern	Crested Tern
Pied Cormorant	

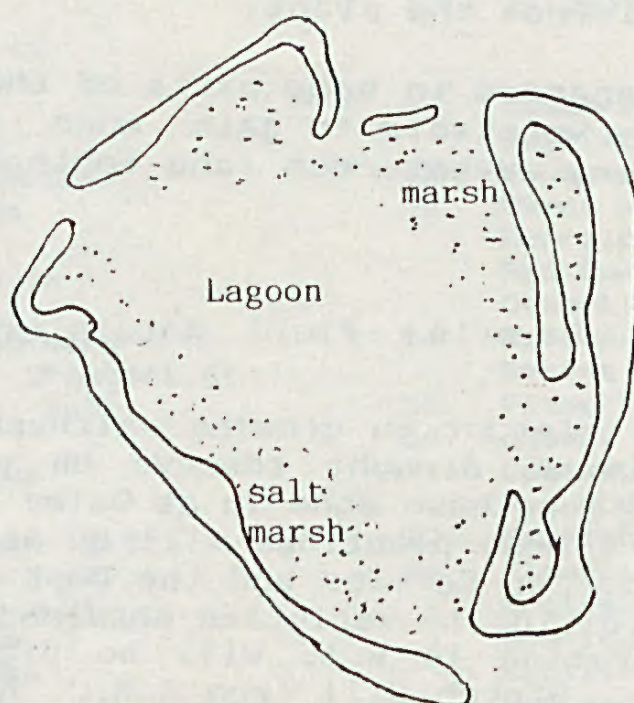
While we watched the birds the sun was hot on our backs, and there was little breeze to cool us down. It was tempting to stay too long, and difficult to tear ourselves away. However when we did it was to find that during our absence the tide had risen and our boats were now some distance from the shore. Looking like the British army at Dunkirk we waded out as



far as we could without getting wet to await our ferry, the small dinghy. Fortunately the water was incredibly warm as we stood with the water rising above our knees and with the waves getting bigger. By the time the last passenger was hauled on board some of us had become rather damp. Not so the spirits however which remained high. On the return journey we paid another visit to the Pope's Eye which was now quite crowded as several boats were taking advantage of the sheltered waters inside and their occupants were scuba diving or relaxing.

On the final leg of our return trip we again encountered the Alma Doepel, which was now getting under way, sails were being hoisted and the crew was up among the rigging. What made it interesting was the fact that the crew seemed to consist mainly of young girls. We waited around for some time while the sails went up, then watched as the ship sailed off up the bay, a splendid sight in the late afternoon light. I was unable to stay for the rest of the camp, but I was told by Ern and Lesley that the Mud Island trip was undoubtedly the highlight of the weekend. If you ever have the chance to take a trip to Mud Island I would certainly recommend it.

G. BROADWAY.



1 km

INK WEED

In this district Ink Plant is found on the granite areas, around Mt Alexander. A plant can be found on the Harcourt North - Sutton Grange road, a little east of the Koala Park turn off. It grows to a small bush, and has distinctive red or purple berries.

Ink weed is regarded as a highly nutritious and edible plant in some parts of the world. The young leaves and shoots found in spring are eaten. However, as the season progresses, the plant becomes more and more poisonous. The fruit are poisonous, and the roots even more so.



The ripe berries contain a deep purple juice. The juice has been used to dye cloth. The dye is however, not usually fast. The juice was also used by the Portuguese to dye wine and the ruby port for which the country is famous. However, this gave to the port a rather unpleasant taste, and the practice is now unlawful.

The scientific name is *Phytolacca octandra*. *Phytolacca* comes from the Greek, meaning "plant-crimson lake", from its dye. *Octandra* refers to the eight stamens.

The greens are cooked by boiling in successive changes in water. The changes of water will help to remove poisonous material from the plant.

Although highly regarded in some parts of the world, it seems an unlikely vegetable to gain much acceptance, except from the very adventurous (and foolhardy?)

From the Southern Riverina Field Naturalists' Newsletter
June 1988

There is a lot of interest in growing saltbush, particularly Old Man, as an annual drought reserve on pastoral land. Plantings (up to 60 ha.) have gone in at Oxley Station, Oolambeyan and Cooinbil. These plantings will be monitored jointly by the Soil Conservation Service and the Dept of Agriculture. A variety trial involving 15 varieties obtained from Australian Revegetation Corporation in W.A. will be planted on saline irrigation country. Steven Hill from A.R.C. has made several visits to Northern Victoria recently to demonstrate direct seeding of saltbush.

STREET TREE DIRECTORY part 3

HUNTER ST (North side) 1/5/88

----- Kennedy St
 Desert Ash ? (x2)
 Claret Ash
 Desert Ash ?
 Golden Ash
 5 English Ash (x2)
 7 English Ash (x2)
 9 Golden Ash
 9 English Ash
 Ash sp
 13 Claret Ash (x3)
 Golden Ash
 English Ash
 Barker St
 23 Claret Ash
 25 Apple
 27 English Ash
 29 English Ash
 29 Flowering Ash
 31 Desert Ash ?
 35 English Ash
 35 Liquidambar
 37 English Ash
 Hargraves St
 Claret Ash
 English Ash
 41 Claret and Desert Ash
 41 Desert Ash (dead?)
 43 Claret Ash ?
 45 Claret Ash
 47 Cootamundra Wattle
 47 English Ash (x2)
 49 ?
 51 Claret Ash
 51 Cootamundra Wattle (x2)
 51 Wallangarra Gum
 51 Snow in Summer
 51 Claret Ash
 51 Eucalyptus sp

 53 English Ash
 53 Prickly paperbark
 55 Willow Hakea
 55 Golden Ash
 55 Callistemon sp
 Claret Ash
 Prickly paperbark
 Urquhart St
 English Ash (x3)
 59 Desert Ash
 61 Dwarf She-oak
 61 She-oak sp
 61 Dwarf She-oak (x2)
 65 English Ash (x2)
 67 Claret Ash (x2)
 69 American Ash ?
 Flowering Ash
 English Ash
 ----- Fletcher St

DOVETON ST (South side) 15/4/88

----- Kennedy St
 English Ash
 2 Claret Ash (x2)
 4 English Ash
 4a Claret Ash
 6 Flowering Ash (x2)
 8 English Ash
 10 Claret Ash
 12 English Ash (x4)
 Barker St
 English Ash
 Ovens Wattle
 Prickly Paperbark
 Claret Ash
 16 English Ash
 18 Flowering Ash
 Golden Ash
 20 Prunus sp
 22 Purple-leaf Cherry Plum
 Snow in Summer
 24 English Ash
 Yellow Gum
 Claret Ash (x2)
 Yellow Gum
 American Ash ?
 Hargraves St
 32 English Ash
 34 Golden Ash
 Claret Ash (x3)
 38 Sallow Wattle
 Golden Ash
 40 Claret Ash
 Yellow Gum
 Urquhart St
 Red Gum seedlings (x2)
 Cootamundra Wattle
 Sallow Wattle

 Casuarina sp
 English Ash
 52 Flowering Ash (x2)
 54 Ovens Wattle
 Kurrajong
 Red Gum (x2)
 Desert Ash
 56 Cootamundra Wattle
 Desert Ash
 58 Flowering Ash
 60 Desert Ash sucker
 Cootamundra wattle copse
 Red Gum copse
 62 English Ash (x2)
 64 Flowering Ash
 English Ash
 American Ash ?
 English Ash
 Cootamundra Wattle seedlings
 Fletcher St
 Blue Gum

C.F.N.C. PUBLICATIONS

The Club has the following booklets for sale

A Tour of Castlemaine City. 30c.
Birds of the Castlemaine District. 20 c.
Botanic Gardens Castlemaine - Tree List. 20c.
Castlemaine Bird List. \$1
Castlemaine Plant List (Edition 6) \$1
Common Orchids of the Castlemaine District. 30c.
Eucalypts of the Castlemaine Area. 30c.
Fryerstown Tour. 30c.
Geological Features of the Castlemaine Area. 30c.
Orchids of the Castlemaine District. \$1
Street Trees of Castlemaine. 20c.
Wattles of the Castlemaine District. 30c.
Wildflowers of the Castlemaine Goldfields. 20c.

OUR COMMON PLANTS

Which are the commonest plants of the Castlemaine District? An answer can be found by looking at the area records of the new 6th edition of the Castlemaine Plant List.

Joint winners are Coffee Bush and Flax Lily, both of which have been recorded in 43 blocks.

The runners-up are

Chocolate Lily and Red Stringybark (42)
Yellow Box (41)
Long-leaf Box, Red Box, Shell Grass, Native Cherry (40)
Magenta Storks Bill and Purple Coral Pea (39).

Only five species have been recorded from all nine grids. These are Cape Weed, Coffee Bush, Flax Lily, Bracken Fern and Onion Grass.

There is a larger number of plants with eight grid records. These are Sharp Rush, Toad Rush, Bulbine Lily, Chocolate Lily, Yellow Star, Waxlip Orchid, Yorkshire Fog Grass, Kangaroo Grass, Spreading Stonecrop, Sieber Stonecrop, Cranberry Heath, Wedge Pea, Yellow Box, Long-leaf Box, Red Box and Common Raspwort.

The Club has very few records for the grid in the north-east corner. An excursion or two to some of the blocks here later in the year should add considerably to the total number of locality records.

NOTES FOR MARCH

SACRED KINGFISHER has been seen in a home garden at the north end of Urquhart Street. This is the first record for the township. Sacred kingfishers are moderately common in the local bushland, and have been seen in Kalimna.

HUMID WEATHER AND BUSH PLANTS. At a recent meeting of the Bendigo Native Plants Group, it was reported that some of the bush plants, particularly grevilleas and some of the peas, have died. This has apparently been caused by the hot, humid weather. The plants affected are those that are likely to die in a garden when given summer watering.

ALBINO NOISY MINER has been reported by golfers on the Castlemaine Golf Course.

GALAHS AND COCKATOOS. Galahs are now frequent visitors to the town area, and over the past few years Cockatoos have been seen regularly. Both species are sometimes seen in large flocks. Rita Mills has noticed a considerable change in the numbers of these birds. About 25 years ago, Galahs were rare in the town, and cockatoos only seen occasionally when flying over. Corellas are at present quite uncommon in the town area, and only recently have they been seen at all regularly in the district. Perhaps, in say 10 years or so, they will also be regular members of the town's bird sightings.

BARKERS CREEK RESERVOIR. Great Crested Grebe have been present in some numbers over the past month. Other birds seen include a Blue-billed Duck and three Chestnut Teal.

TAWNY FROGMOUTH. An injured Tawny Frogmouth has been found in Hall Street. Unfortunately, its injuries were too great to allow for its recovery.

PALE RUSH has been found growing at the Castlemaine Sewerage works, in the Mandurang Forest, and along the railway line several kilometres west of the Elphinstone tunnel. Pale rush is a much stouter rush than most. Its stems are about as thick as a pencil, and the flowers are also much larger than the flowers of most local rushes. *Juncus* sp (O) has also been found growing at the large dam a west of the Elphinstone railway tunnel. Previous local records of this rush have been from Cairn Curran and Tullaroop.

EARLY SPRING Some plum trees have lost most leaves for about a month now, and have commenced flowering. Has any readers similar observations. What causes this to happen?

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Sat 8 April. CROSBIE STATE FOREST, (Heathcote). BOC bus trip. Leader is Pat Bingham. Meet Melbourne group at Heathcote township, approx 10.00 - 10.30 a.m.

Fri 14 April. ORCHIDS with Gary Cheers. Gary is President of Maryborough F.N.C. High School at 8 p.m.

Sat 15 April. Bird watching east of Elphinstone. See the snow gums, and have afternoon tea at Cascade Falls. Meet S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp.

Thur 27 Apr. Business meeting. 7.30; 38 Campbell St

Fri 12 May. FIVE REGIONS OF AUSTRALIA with Rob Watkins. Bendigo F.N.C and Vic Nature Photography Group. High School at 8.00 p.m.

Sat 13 May. MT FRANKLIN AND HEPBURN SPRINGS. Lunch at Mt Franklin and then at Hepburn Forest. Meet cr Yandell and Gaulton St at 10.30 a.m. sharp, or Pound Lane corner, Guildford at 10.45.

Sun 28 May. BLACK HILL, KYNETON. Bird Observers Club outing. Meet 11.00 a.m. sharp at S.E.C., Mostyn St.

Fri 9 June. ROADSIDE CONSERVATION. Speaker is Graeme Hill, of Bendigo F.N.C. High School at 8.00 p.m.

Sept 8-9 W.V.F.N.C.A. campout at Castlemaine

Sat 14 Oct. SANDON. Joint excursion, led by Ballarat F.N.C. Meet Black Duck hotel at 10.30 a.m. Take lunch.

Oct 21-23 CRESWICK CAMPOUT. W.V.F.N.C.A. campout at Creswick. Stay at Adekate camp, Dean. Tours of Creswick forest and Mt Beckworth.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. Inc. P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450.
Committee: George Broadway (Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec),
Maggie Oliver (VP), Rita Mills (Newsletter), Kaye Turner
(Program Sec), Ern Perkins (Treas), Margaret Dunne,
Elma Kelly, Ian Higgins, Lesley Perkins (Librarian).

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1989

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

SUPPER ROSTER

Apr 14: I Duffin, M Oliver May 12: M Downie, K Meehan