

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



DECEMBER 1989 #152

PROSTANTHERA SAXICOLA AT MANDURANG

A pale flowered mint seen on the excursion to Mandurang caused some discussion. Was it a westringia, or a mint?

An easily observable difference between the two is in the shape of the sepals (the green part of the flower, just below the petals).

Mints (the prostantheras) have two-lipped sepals, and westringia 5 toothed sepals, as shown in the sketch



Westringia sepals



Mint sepals

The specimen found had two-lipped sepals, and so was a prostanthera rather than a westringia.

Westringias also have whorled leaves, with the leaves of the Whipstick Westringia being usually in threes. Prostantheras on the other hand, have leaves alternately arranged along the stem

Using Willis as a guide, the mint at Mandurang were identified as *Prostanthera saxicola*, also known as the Slender Mint-bush.

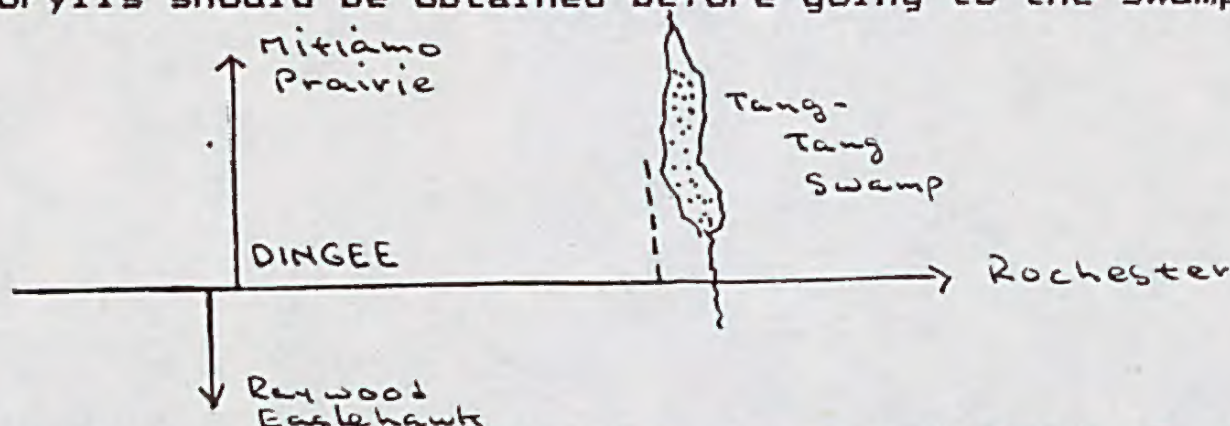
From the "Wirrakee", June 1989 - Urban Nature Conservation in Bendigo.

Areas of uncommitted Crown Land are being identified and investigated by Kerry Scott of C.F. & L. in Bendigo. There are approximately 400 sites under investigation.

TANG TANG EXCURSION

Club members joined members of the Bendigo, Maryborough and St Arnaud Clubs at Tang Tang Swamp on November 12th.

Tang Tang is 7.5 km east of Dingee, on the Dingee - Rochester Road. The swamp is leased, and permission from Mr John Grylls should be obtained before going to the swamp.



The swamp is perhaps a kilometre across and about 5 km long. It is not very deep, and, it is said, can be waded across. The outer part of the water was liberally covered by floating fern, and the best way of reaching the central part is by kyak.

I made a list of 34 birds seen at the swamp. The total would be more than this if all observations were pooled.

Notable birds seen were Nankeen Night Herons, White-headed Stilts,*and Little Friar Birds.

Some cattle disturbed a kangaroo. On meeting some groups of people, it decided to hop across the swamp. Kangaroos may be efficient movers when crossing open countryside, but hopping across a swamp is very noisy, and must be very tiring.

TREE FERN AT FOREST CREEK

Dr. Keith Cole, in his recently published book "Men of Faith and Vision - Archdeacon Archibald Crawford and Dean John Christian MacCullagh", quotes Canon Goodman's account of an early church service at Castlemaine.

"...a Minister of the Church of England [the Revd D. Wood] was to preach near Heap's Store, at the Lever Point, adjoining Moonlight Flat. The time for the service having arrived, the reverend gentleman took his stand under a large fern tree, and commenced our beautiful and impressive service."

Tree ferns used to be found near the Unknown Miner's Grave Gully at Castlemaine North about 14 years ago, and some can be still be found at Barkers Creek. It would be interesting to locate Heap's Store, or Lever Point.

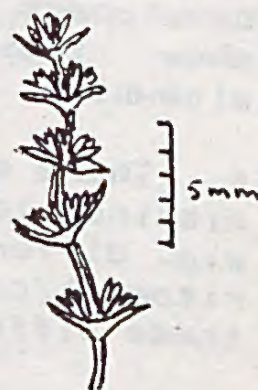
NEW STONECROP FOR DISTRICT

On November 2nd, I walked along the southern track just to the south of the Loddon River between Vaughan and Glenluce, with the intention of crossing the Loddon at Glenluce, and returning through the bushland north of the river. However, the river was too high to cross, and so I returned to Vaughan by taking the steep track up the hill just south of the Glenluce springs.

Along this track, near the crest, I noticed a stonecrop growing that did not seem familiar. On returning home, I identified it, using Willis, as *Crassula tripartita*. This plant was named by Norman Wakefield in 1957, and found in only three localities (Gorge W., Graytown and Rutherglen).

At the weekend I took Lelsey to see it, and to collect a sample to send to the Herbarium. To save the long walk, I suggested that we cross the Loddon. Gum boots would keep our feet dry. Unfortunately the water level was well above gum boot height, but to see a plant like this some discomforts are sometimes necessary.

On returning home, I checked the identification, this time using the Flora of South Australia. According to this, the name is no longer *Crassula tripartita*, but *C. alata*, introduced from South America.



That evening, after an evening walk, I noticed the same plant growing at the edge of our front footpath. On the Monday, I took an excursion to Maldon, and noticed it growing plentifully along the footpaths at the North British Mine. Later on the same day, it was seen growing in a crack of the paving between our back door and garage. The specimen from which the illustration has been made came from here.

Crassulas are common in the district. There are two common species, the Spreading Stonecrop and Sieber Stonecrop. They are tiny succulents, usually growing only a few centimetres high. They are usually a reddish colour. *Crassula alata* is even smaller, with even smaller leaves. Unlike the others, its flower parts are in threes.

There is probably a moral in this. If so, I will leave the reader to supply it.

E. Perkins.

CAPE YORK SAFARI

Some members of Geelong F.N.C. are planning such a trip for 1990. If you wish to take part, contact our Secretary or Geelong direct. Take your own vehicle.

CSIRO LYREBIRD PROJECT

The Club has received a response form CSIRO about their proposal to examine the genetics of Lyrebird populations. This is a summary of the response.

1. The central objective of the project is the better protection, conservation and management of lyrebirds.

2. Lyrebirds are not rare or facing extinction in the areas where sampling is proposed; with in excess of a million of the Superb Lyrebird and thousands of the Albert Lyrebird.

3. Despite their present abundance, Lyrebirds occur alongside the most densely populated parts of Australia, and face loss of habitat. This is the most serious threat to their survival. If the lyrebird species recognised at present include a number of localised genetically distinct populations, any of these populations could be threatened at any time, without our knowing it. No case could be presented for their special protection because developers could rightly claim there was no evidence to show them to be different from lyrebirds common elsewhere.

4. There evidence that there is a number of genetically distinct local populations but the evidence is anecdotal e.g. different shaped and coloured lyres, different territorial/contact calls, and different voice types. Are these different subspecies or even species?

5. To conserve and manage wild lyrebirds effectively, we must know what the genetically distinct populations are, and where they occur. We must be ahead of "development", not behind it as we so often are.

6. The only reliable source of this information is from a systematic sampling of all regional populations. 3-5 specimens from each site would be needed (giving a total of 38 for the Superb, and 6 for the Albert).

7. Specimens would be preserved and would provide a standard reference for future studies. [Alternative sources of information are discussed, such as blood samples, photographs etc, and reasons why these are not satisfactory alternatives are explained.]

8. Specimen sampling would have negligible effect on local populations. Many more chicks are hatched than survive. Survival is limited by habitat, so that sampling in each area would provide living space for a further 3-5 young birds that would otherwise have to die.

[Should we reverse our opposition to the project, and so inform CSIRO?
E. Perkins]

I was taken to see a hillside just recently where dozens of Red Spider Orchids are growing, but on the agreement that I don't show anyone where they are. I'd love to, ~~of~~ ^{of} course, but the woman who took me and her friend ~~have~~ ^{have} found that all too often when they have shared a special find ~~with~~ ^{with} someone else there have been plants dug up next time they have gone out, and they no longer feel they can indiscriminately share their pleasure. I think it a great pity, but can't say I blame them.

Near that same spot they showed me a patch where dozens of Slatey Helmet Orchids have just finished flowering, although I did see two or three still in flower.

My friend's greatest wish is to find another hillside of the Red Spider Orchids. It would give them a better chance of surviving. I know of only three other small colonies in the district, certainly nothing like the one I saw when I went out with her; in fact the last time I saw spider orchids in those numbers - and more - was when I was about eight or nine, and had gone out to my Grandfather's bush paddock up at Axedale. I was allowed pick a fist full (usually frowned upon in our family) and there were still dozens left.

Rita Mills

From the "Wirrakee", April 1989.

In Praise of Coffee Bush

(Barbara Salter Notes from Inglewood)

"...Finally, the Grey Boxes burst out, but this blossom attracts mainly the small birds. At the same time the lowly and abundant *Cassinia arcuata*, the Chinese scrub, has produced cascades of tiny brownish flowers. I have eaten these flowers and have detected no trace of sweetness, yet, in spite of the abundance of other blossoms, these shrubs are extraordinarily attractive to birds. I have seen Eastern Rosellas, Red-rumped Parrots, Musk and Little Lorikeets, Red Wattlebirds, Brown-headed, Fuscous and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters poking at the flowers and can only assume that the birds are able to obtain a particularly nutritious pollen therefrom. I have heard some naturalists dismiss the *Cassinia* as a 'pest', but this is not so! As well as providing food, it is used as a nesting site by species such as Gilbert's and Rufous Whistlers, Willy Wagtail, Honeyeaters, Blue Wren, Silvereye and even White-browed Babbler; as well, it is generally the first species to regenerate in places cleared by gold miners in our forest, providing some shelter for bare ground shelter for later regenerating species and retarding dust blowing and soil erosion."

LITTLE RAVENS

There have been dozens, perhaps hundreds of Little Ravens around the bush at North Castlemaine over the last 2 or 3 weeks of November. They arrive early in the morning and are there until evening, mainly in the trees.

They were to the south of here to start with, but have gradually worked their way north towards Barkers Creek.

I suspect they are after the cup moth larvae, as these are numerous this year and both magpies and ravens will eat them. The ravens have been teetering on thin branches amongst the leaves gathering something, and there must be lots of that "something" to interest such numbers for so long. There have been so many cup moth larvae that they are even liberally spattered on the road under the trees in some places.

When the birds first arrived they were feeding on the ground in the paddocks. They reminded me of a time years ago when I was a child. We had flocks of hundreds of Little Ravens coming over from the west each morning and returning each night for what seemed like weeks. They were feeding on cut worms, or army worms, which were in their thousands on a paddock nearby which was being irrigated from the old race.

So Little Ravens can be quite useful birds, but the caw-cawing all day long, and the Pallid Cuckoo calling into the bargain, have been a bit much at times!

Rita Mills.

Barkers Creek Birds

Wyn Palmer reports that the area of Gorse that was burnt last year is proving to be a popular spot with the local birds. She says that they have found that they actually have fewer birds in their own yard compared with the burnt area on the opposite side of the road.

She also reports seeing a Yellow (Little) Thornbill feeding a young cuckoo; Red Wattlebirds nesting in a Pincushion Hakea; a Brown-headed Honeyeater collecting wool - second time around!; and three Tawny Frogmouths, and adult pair and one juvenile, were observed perched in separate close-by trees.

GEELONG CAMPOUT- BOOKINGS

Geelong F.N.C. are offering the following activities (as well as many others) during the long weekend in March. Provisional booking is required by Christmas. Either notify our Secretary, or contact Geelong F.N.C. direct.

- Mud Island boat trip \$10
- Snorkel with the seals \$25
- Snorkel with the Fish \$20
- Bay cruise - seals, gannets, Channel Forts, Corsair Rock etc - \$10

COAST TEA-TREE AT SANDON! A small plant, about 30 cm tall at the edge of the main road through Sandon Forest was thought to be Coast Tea-tree. It appeared to have not yet flowered. Sandon Forest is well out of its range - it is usually found on the coast. However, a smaller leaved form is found growing on the Mallee sandhills.

GREVILLEA REPENS AT WOMBAT FOREST. Ian Evans (of Bendigo F.N.C.) has reported that this grevillea can be found growing in the Wombat Forest, north-west of Basalt. *G. repens* is a prostrate grevillea, rather similar to the Elphinstone Grevillea. An excursion could perhaps be conducted to look for this grevillea.

BIRD OBSERVATIONS

- Azure Kingfishers. A pair seen at 6.30 a.m. in Gaulton St
- Bronzewing Pigeon - seen 26/10/89 at corner of Hargraves and Lyttleton St
- Mistletoe Birds - a pair, perhaps nesting, in Campbell St.
- Sacred Kingfisher - corpse seen in Botanic Gardens
- Rainbow Birds - flock seen in township in October.
- Kookaburra - nesting in a bird box at Golden Point.
- Dollar Birds. Group seen at Newbridge on 20/11/89
- Tawny Frogmouths - pair roosting at Vaughan Springs, Oct.
- Tawny Frogmouths. Family seen at Castlemaine North, Nov.
- Bush Thicknees. Several seen in a farm paddock at Muckleford, Nov.
- White-breasted Woodswallows seen at Laanacoorie on 20/11/89. They were also seen here in 1987.

BEARDED DRAGON was seen on 10/11/89 at the corner of Doveton Street and the Kalimna Tourist Road.

WHERE HAVE ALL OF THE BIRDS GONE? Discussion between those on the Tang Tang excursion commented on the considerable reduction in bird numbers over the years, and particularly since the drought of a few years ago. Many species that were formerly numerous are now seen in ones or twos. Some species, once common, are now rare, or absent. Is this also true for Castlemaine.

TINY CALADENIA. Ron and Yvonne Bishop (Maryborough F.N.C.) report the finding of a Tiny Caladenia (*Caladenia pusilla*) east of the Wildflower reserve on Fryers Ridge. Tiny Caladenia is like a small Pink Fingers, and was formerly included with this species. Apart from being smaller, it has numerous glandular hairs on the outer segments, and the lateral sepals are often united. This is a new record for the plant list.

LANKY BUTTONS at Chewton. A patch was found at Chewton, south of the railway line and east of the Railway Street bridge. This is an extension of the range of this uncommon daisy. Its scientific name is *Leptorhynchus elongatus*.

EYEBRIGHT AT MUCKLEFORD. Purple Eyebright (*Euphrasia collina*) has been found growing at Muckleford. It has previously been seen in this district at Chewton and along Fryers Ridge Road.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 8 Dec. MEMBERS AND VISITORS NIGHT. High School canteen at 8.00 p.m. Supper.

Sat 9 Dec. TARADALE (1.30 start) or TULLAROO (3.00 pm start, take tea). Decision made at meeting.

Thurs 25 Jan. Business meeting. 38 Campbell St at 7.30.

Fri 9 Feb. GUNBARREL HIGHWAY with Nicolette Hooper. This is the annual meeting.

Fri 9 - Mon 12 Mar. GEELONG/OCEAN GROVE CAMPOUT. Visit Mud Island, Snorkel with the seals and fish, take a Bay cruise and see seals, Gannets, Corsair Rock etc.

Wed 14 Mar. READING THE LAND BY MAJOR MITCHELL'S PARTY. Bendigo F.N.C. meeting, Dept Ag at Epsom. 7.30 pm. Leave 27 Doveton at 7.00 pm sharp.

Sun 18 Mar. MOUNTAIN PEPPER on Mt Alexander. Excursion with Bendigo F.N.C. to look for Mountain Pepper. Koala Park at 10.45

Fri 31 Aug-Sun 2 Sept. WYPERFIELD CAMPOUT. W.V.F.N.C.A. campout at Wyperfield, organised by Maryborough F.N.C.

Mon 17 Sep. DARGILE FOREST. Excursion with Bird Observers Club - weekday excursion.

No general meeting in January.

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
(Prog Sec), Ern Perkins (Treas), Margaret Dunne, Elma
Kelly, Ian Higgins, Lesley Perkins.

Subscriptions for 1989. Pensioner/student: \$3
Single: \$5 Family: \$8 Supporting: \$12
Newsletter posted: membership subscription plus \$5

Supper Roster: Dec 8 P. Shaw and E. Hall