

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

AUGUST 1989 #148



MOIRA WATERBIRD OBSERVATORY

Moira Forest Walkway and Waterbird Observatory was an Australian Bicentennial Project.

We reached it by turning east along the Picnic Point road, half a kilometre south of Mathoura (which is about half-way between Deniliquin and Echuca). The tourist information centres (e.g. at Echuca) have brochures.

Many years ago, earth movements blocked the Murray River, and it split into two. One branch went north to Deniliquin (the Edward River), and the other branch to Echuca (the Murray). Picnic Point is at the junction of the two rivers. It has a large caravan park, and, not surprisingly, picnic tables. Barmah forest is on the other side of the river.

The Edward River branches some kilometres to the north, the branch being called Gulpa Creek.

The track to the bird hide starts from the Mathoura-Picnic Point road, and follows the Gulpa Creek. We went without the benefit of a map, and I expected the bird hide to be perhaps several hundred metres along the track; it turned out to be about 50 minutes walk. The Gulpa Creek was full, and being in many places at a higher level than the surrounding red gum forest, was overflowing into the track and then into the forest. Gum boots are thus an essential piece of equipment for the walk in wet weather.

Near the hide, the country side opens to a large reed bed. A notable plant in the reed bed is *Juncus ingens*, which has the distinction of being the largest rush in the world. When growing by itself along the creek it is not much taller than some of the Castlemaine rushes, but when amongst the reeds it grows as tall as they do.

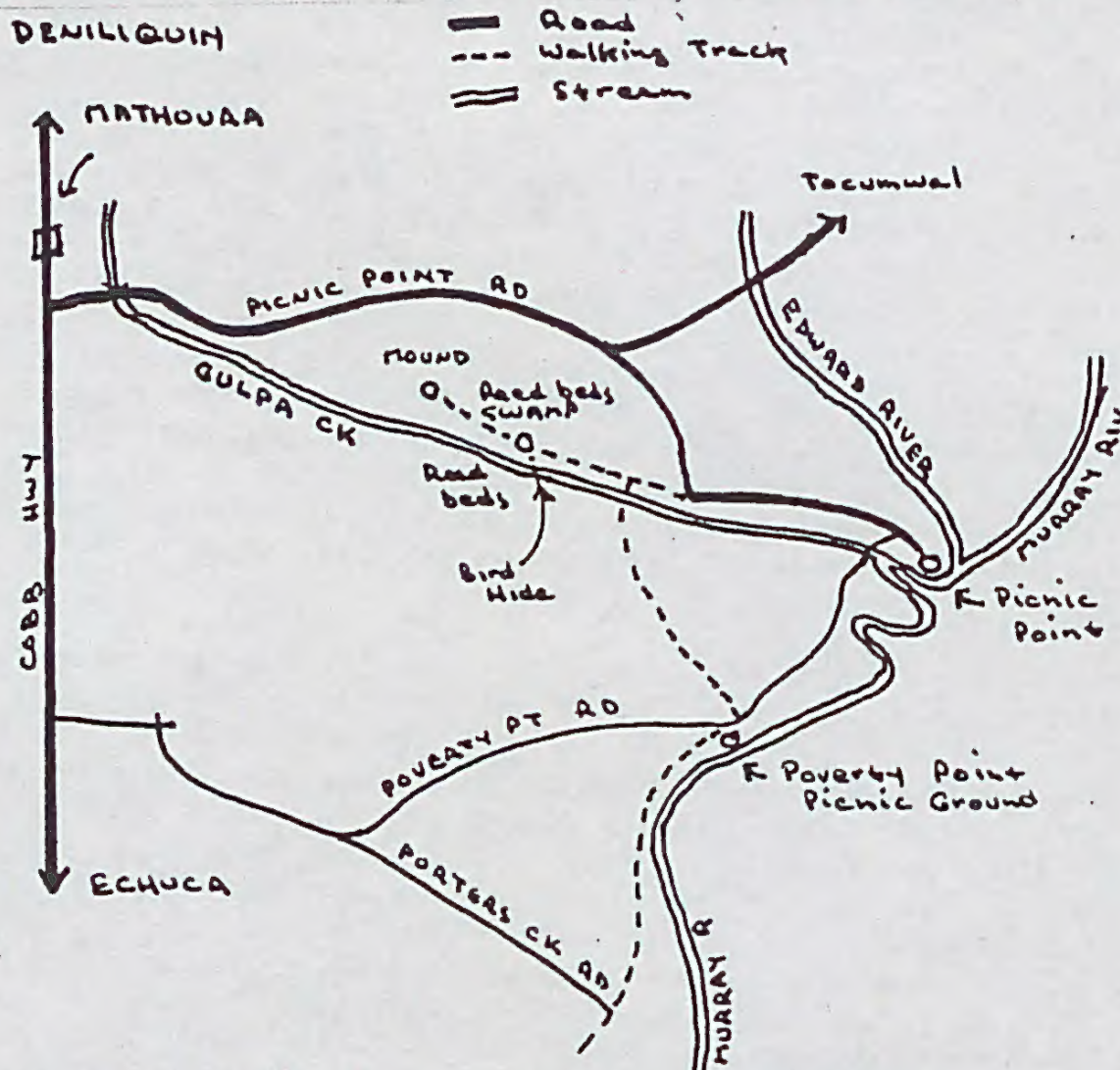
The hide gives a view over the reed beds. There is not much open water to be seen. A further 15 minutes walk along the creek leads to a mound, which again gives views over the reed beds.

As the hide is a good way from the car park, it is recommended that waterproof clothing be carried, in case the weather turn inclement, with continuous rain.

There are a number of other drives in the vicinity, as can be found on the brochures.

The water birds listed in the brochure are Cormorants, Ibis, Spoonbills, Darter, Pelican, Purple Swamp-hen, Bittern, Moorhen, Little Grass-bird, Reed Warbler, Kingfisher, Nakeen Night Heron and Ducks.

This is an interesting area, and worth visiting. E.P.



ANGAIR WILDFLOWER SHOW

The show will be held in the Anglesea Hall, McMillan St on 23-24 September, 1989. Entry fee is \$2.00 (\$1.00 for pensioners, 20c children). Time: 10 am - 5.30 pm (Sat) and 10.00 am - 5.00 pm (Sun).

A special feature will be excursions to selected wildflower (including orchid) locations in Anglesea's renowned heathland and woodland. Other features include displays of local and interstate flowers, garden varieties, a special stage presentation (wonders of the insect world), natural history books, paintings by Australian artists, advice on attracting native birds to gardens, local native plant sales and art and craft sales.

The Maggie season is almost upon us again. There's few of us who haven't been "bombed" by a nesting bird, and I had known, until the SEC cut the branch down, a nest on the next hill, in the same tree, on the same branch, for over forty years. As school children we rode up that hill as fast as we could, waving something over our heads. We knew we were ok before the creek, and after we got almost to the top of the hill - but in between! "Our" maggie only ever "got" one of the locals, and he happened to be the one who was inclined to throw sticks and stones at the birds. New neighbours a few years ago really stirred them up by throwing stones at the nest, too, but the birds gradually settled down again over a couple of seasons after those neighbours had moved away.

I know of a couple of nests where the birds have been nesting undisturbed by humans, and the birds have never attempted to swoop. Could be the nature of the birds, of course, and this does vary. A few years ago we had problems with one particularly vicious dominant male which would not leave our bantams alone all year round, and even picked up one hen by the comb, and carted her, running tippy-toes, for about 40 feet, dropping her and leaving her very bloodied and sore. A neighbour illegally put an end to his days with a bullet, but at least the bird who took over the leadership of the flock was a less aggressive natured bird, and the local hens had a quieter life.

There seems to be only two nesting sites in the territory of the local flock. The dominant pair still seems to have the site on the hill in the old tree on a new branch, and there is another site about 300m away in a paddock. Magpies seem to live in family groups with a dominant male as head of the flock, and a head female. The rest of the flock, adults and juveniles, help defend the territory, but from my observation, only the nesting pair defend a nesting territory, which seems to be about 50m - 100m from the nesting tree. There is often another pair nesting at the same time, but they do not seem to be as successful as the dominant birds.

Most magpies in this area seem to be the slightly larger White-backed Magpies, but the flock down near the High School had a Black-backed dominant male for years, and the flock has quite a varied feather pattern.

This is the flock I once watched at play. They were quite unaware of me for several minutes, and I watched facinated as they lay sprawled out on a heap of grass clippings, teasing each other by pulling toes and feathers, and generally playing the fool.

When walking in nesting territory a hat is quite a good protect-ion, or a bunch of leaves waved over your head - or anything else handy, even a scarf. I find if I watch the bird it won't swoop, but I still have something to wave. Usually tha bird on guard gives a warning call. Its the ones which only announce their presence by a great clatter of beak just above my head that I don't like!

CHICORY (*Cichorium intybus*)

Chicory is easy to recognise. It grows to about a metre high, and has cornflower - blue dandelion-like flowers. The basal leaves usually have wavy or jagged margins, and the upper branches are almost leafless.

Chicory is quite a common weed in the district, and flowers during summer. It may be seen along Campbells Creek near Tingay's Garage, and some fine specimens can be found on the road to North Harcourt.

The roots can be used as a coffee substitute. The roots are roasted, and can be mixed with coffee or used alone. Some years ago, before the arrival of instant coffee, coffee and chicory essence was a common item in grocers' shops.

The roots can be used as a vegetable, and is boiled and eaten by the Arabs.

The tender leaves and shoots may also be eaten, either raw or cooked. Several changes of water are desirable, to help remove the bitterness. They can be served in the same way as spinach.

As with many edible plants, special varieties have been developed for growing in gardens. The Garden Endive (*C. endiva*) is a close relative of Chicory, and it is usually grown for its edible salad leaves, although roots can be used in coffee mixtures.

In times past, Chicory was used for medicinal purposes. For example, Culeper wrote that it was prescribed internally "for swoonings and passions of the heart, loss of appetite, [perhaps these go together!] heat and headaches in children, and for helping the liver and the blood". It is also reputed to be able to cure insomnia.



In some parts of Germany, Chicory is known as "watcher of the road". It is said that a beautiful young blue-eyed maiden who was waiting for her lover to return from the wars, used to go onto the road every morning and watch for him, This went on for months but he failed to return, and she, exhausted with watching and waiting, fell down at the edge of the road and died. A beautiful blue flower sprang up where she lay, opening its petals by day and closing them at night.

TARRENGOWER EXCURSION

The birds seen on the excursion to the west side of Mt Tarrengower on July 14th were

Galah	Wedge-tail Eagle
Brown Falcon?	Kookaburra
Flame Robin	Blue Wren
Willy Wag-tail	Grey Fantail
Scarlet Robin	Speckled Warbler
Buff-tailed Thornbill	Brown Thornbill
Yellow-tailed Thornbill	Weebill
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Spotted Pardalote
Magpie	Raven

Some of the group went on further, to the east side of Cairn Curran. Additional birds seen in this section were

Little Grebe	Long-billed Corella
Crested Pigeon	Eastern Rosella
Scissors Grinder	Grey Thrush
Jacky Winter	Noisy Miner

A hawk was seen in the distance, too far away to be positively identified. A small flock of magpies was seen to join the hawk, roosting on the branches with the hawk.

LAKE EIRE SAFARI.

Kingston Tours (Stawell) is conducting a 10 day tour for naturalists, departing on 2nd September. Cost is \$550, with optional aircraft hire of \$60. Details from Secretary.

COORONG SAFARI

Kingston Tours 1990 safari is to the Coorong and Kangaroo Island. This will be a 15 day tour, departing from Stawell on 13 October, 1990. Cost is \$830.

Localities include Naracoorte Caves, Bool Lagoon, Mt Gambier, Murray Bridge, Adelaide, Hallett Cove, Kangaroo Island, Pelican Lagoon, Dudley Peninsula, Flinders Chase, Cape De Courdic, Seals Bay, Latham Park and Kingscote.

Brochure is available from the Secretary. Kingston Tours Safaris are designed for naturalists, and a commission is paid to the W.V.F.N.C.A.

WESTERN VICTORIA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUBS ASSOCIATION

WEEKEND MEETING Sept 8-10th

Castlemaine F.N.C. is conducting the campout in September.
The provisional program is shown below.

Friday 8 September

8.00 p.m. CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT. Talk/slides by CFNC Club members. Castlemaine High School Canteen. This is the September meeting of Castlemaine F.N.C.

Saturday 9 September

9.00 a.m. HALF DAY EXCURSIONS. Meet Botanic Gardens rose garden car park, Downes Road.
Guildford - bird watching
Kalimna Reserve wildflowers
Barkers Creek Reservoir
Local Geological features

1.30 p.m. HALF DAY EXCURSIONS. Meet Botanic Gardens car park in Downes Road.
Wattle Flat Walk
Glenluce - springs and forest
Fryerstown Tour
Wildflower tour

5.30 p.m. EVENING MEAL. Christ Church Anglican Hall will be open and available with hot water will be available. Enter grounds from the corner of Kennedy Street and Forest St.

7.00 p.m. MEETING OF W.V.F.N.C.A. in Christ Church Anglican Hall.

8.00 p.m. CARING FOR ORPHAN ANIMALS. Talk by Beri Perry, at Anglican Church hall.

Sunday 10 Sept

9.00 a.m. HALF DAY EXCURSIONS. Meet Botanic Gardens car park, Downes Road.
Gower and Muckleford - bird watching
Mt Alexander tour
Wildflower tour

12.30 p.m. LUNCH in Castlemaine Botanic Gardens. Barbecue materials (sausages, bread, sauce etc) are available if ordered. Cost is \$2.00 per person. Orders by Sept 2nd.

Excursion locations are subject to revision.
Members - please keep this weekend free.

NOTES FOR JULY

SHARP GREENHOOD (*Pterostylis robusta*). A single plant was found growing on Nuggetty (near Maldon) on July 14th. This is a large striped greenhood, and is quite rare in the district. The Club plant list has only a couple of earlier records. The greenhood was growing under trees on the metamorphic area. Nuggetty has a very large rabbit population, so it is perhaps surprising to find a greenhood orchid there. Sharp Greenhood is much more common to the north, and hundreds were seen growing in the Bendigo Whipstick early in July, by two Club members.

BOOBOOK OWL was seen in Kalimna (east of the High School) on July 15th.

LITTLE EAGLE was seen on Nuggetty on July 14th.

SILVEREYES. Twenty five were seen feeding on a few square metres of ground in Doveton Street.

PARDALOTES. A flock of at least 65, and perhaps about 100, were seen feeding on the ground at Shadbolt Reserve, in the Bendigo Whipstick on July 19th. Pardalotes are usually seen in the treetops, but occasionally can be seen on the ground. Most of the pardalotes were Striated Pardalotes, but a few Spotted Pardalotes were also in the flock.

BRUSH BRONZEWINGS. Four Brush Bronzewing Pigeons were seen at Campbells Creek on July 22nd. They were feeding on the ground, in the company of a rabbit, near the corner of Moscript Street and the Campbells Creek - Monk track. Brush Bronzewings are rare in the district. The previous Club records have come from the Palmers at Barkers Creek. Brush Bronzewings are similar in appearance to the Common Bronzewing. One of the distinguishing marks is the chestnut throat of the Brush Bronzewing.

DUSTY MILLER is reported to be making a fine showing in the Wattle Flat Forest.

GREY FANTAIL is resident in Campbell Street for the third year in succession.

NODDING GREENHOODS were seen near the Garfield Wheel on July 29th.

Barkers Creek Report

About four weeks ago Wyn Palmer found a "Witchetty" grub in a wattle. She brought it in, still in the piece of branch, which had split in half and she sticky-taped it together! The grub is about 4 or 5 inches long. It has sealed up the ends of the branch, though it can still be seen through the web as white and moving. Apparently it is still feeding, because dark brown deposits have been gathering in the bottom of the web. Wyn is interested to see if it will pupate, and what will emerge if it does.

She also reports that a Fantail Cuckoo was seen on Aug 1.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Fri 11 Aug. EARLY AUSTRALIAN BOTANISTS by Friends of Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. 8.00 pm at High School. Supper.

Sat 12 Aug. WHIPSTICK - SHADBOLT RESERVE Meet 27 Devon St at 10.00 am or Eaglehawk Town Hall at 10.30

Sun 27 Aug. WHIPSTICK & WHIRRAKEE WATTLE. Bendigo F.N.C. excursion to see the Whirrakee Wattle. Meet Ministry of Education car park, Havlin St, Bendigo at 1.30 pm

Sept 8-9 W.V.F.N.C.A. campout at Castlemaine. See separate notice in this issue.

Fri: Normal meeting night: Castlemaine District. High School at 8.00 p.m. Address by Club members.

Sat: 9.00 excursions. Meet Gardens car Park

Sat: 1.30 excursions. Meet Gardens car park

Sat: 7.00 W.V.F.N.C.A. meeting. Anglican Church hall

Sat: 8.00 Beri Perry "Caring for Native Animals"

Sun: 9.00 excursions. Meet Gardens Car Park

12.30 barbecue - Highland Band Hall.

Fri 13 Oct. THE LAST SHANGRI-LA (LADAKH). Speaker is John Zwar. High School at 8.00 p.m.

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

Sun 15 Oct. FRYERSTOWN & FRYERSTOWN GREVILLEA. Bendigo F.N.C. excursion. Leader is Ian Evans, Bendigo Native Plant Group. 10.30 at Market Car Park.

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. See separate program.

Fri 10 Nov. BORNEO with Gretna Weste.

Fri 8 Dec. MEMBERS NIGHT.

Fri 9 Feb. GUNBARREL HWY with Nicolette Hooper.

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.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1989

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

SUPPER ROSTER
 Aug 11 M & M Willis
 Sept 8 G Sitch, J Buntine