



CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

FEBRUARY 1989

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Mountains in Summer - again!

This year I had the opportunity to stay at Hotham for the first week in January with the Bendigo Field Naturalists and the Victorian Nature Photography Group. We stayed in two neighbouring lodges, Jalanga and Kalyma. Kalyma had the best accommodation, but Jalanga had the resident Burramys, or Mountain Pygmy Possum. It was seen when Peter Starr opened the food cupboard to get breakfast things - and we now know that, beside Mountain Plum Pine, the Burramys likes Weetbix!



On Monday evening the Ranger had given us a talk on the area, and then taken us up to the place where a tunnel has been constructed under the road, so that the male Burramys can return to their own level after mating. An artificial scree slope has been made, continuing into the large pipe under the road. The Burramys lives in the scree slopes, and happily uses the "subway", as proved by photoes taken by cameras set up in the tunnel.

Tuesday, our first full day, was spent in a walk to Mt Loch, and some detoured down to the nearby Derrick Hut, built a few years ago as a memorial to a cross country skier, who perished not far from Mt Loch.

The flowers were lovely. The daisy family was the most obvious, including Silver, Snow and Coarse daisies, and the endemic Oliaria. There were few orchids, only Mountain Caledenia (*C. lyallii*) and Alpine Leek Orchids were seen, but there were thousands of bright pink Grass Trigger plants, lots of Snow Aciphyll, Alpine Mint Bush, Alpine Boronia, Alpine Oxylobium, Richea, Marsh Marigolds, Brown Eidelweiss, Showy Violets, Mountain Eyebright - should I go on?

Most of the walk was over snow-grass plain, though some was through stunted Snow Gums. Not many bird species were seen, but there were lots of Flame Robins nesting. The photographers had a wonderful time. One or two pairs tolerated photographers sitting for hours at a time only two or three feet from the nest.

Next day was wet, but I still enjoyed a walk in the rain in the afternoon around the village area. Dripping trees, trunks of Snow Gums taking on colour because they are wet, and plumes of clouds on the slopes are all part of the mountains, anyway.

On Wednesday I decided to climb Little Higginbotham, which is an easy climb ten minutes walk from the Lodges at the east end of the Village, but I changed my mind and headed off, pack on back, up to the Mt Loch car park and the area near it. However, as I walked up the road past the Store two women whom I had met earlier, called out and invited me to go with them for a walk to the Twins, so I hurried back and added lunch to my pack, and headed off with them for a most enjoyable walk in the taller forest - it was that sort of week. Highlight of that day was very colourful star-fish fungi. The photographers spent a long time over them while I walked on a bit further and bird-watched. It worked out very well!

Friday was the day of the Razorback walk, and the second semi-organized day. As with Mt Loch we set off in groups at times and pace which suited us. Some set out about 8 am in lovely weather and walked at a smart pace and gained the top of Feathertop, others, like us, took our time, enjoyed the flowers - still lots of daisies of all kinds, including two different species of Billy Button - and the magnificent views. Part of the walk was over snow-grass plain and through low shrubs, part through snow-gum woodland. We only got as far as the saddle at the base of the first high peak, but we were well satisfied. Again there wasn't many different species of birds, but pipits on the grassland were very common, and Flame Robins, White-browed Scrub Wrens, Grey and Pied Currawongs and Little Ravens were fairly numerous. We saw three more Nankeen Kestrels, one of which I watched hover, drop, take a Pipit, and fly off with it to a rock to have its lunch. I felt rather sad, but I guess that's nature.

After 8½ hours, which included lunch, morning and afternoon teas, and a mild adventure convincing a Copperhead snake to move off the narrow track so we could pass, we arrived back at the car-park at ¼ to 6.

I went down to Omeo with Peter and Linda Starr on Saturday morning. We came back to the picnic spot at Victoria River for a lovely loafing afternoon, birdwatching and doing puzzles, while Peter tried (not very hard though - he'd walked to the top of Feathertop with the fast group!) to catch some elusive trout. That evening I finally climbed Little Higginbotham, and was rewarded with some lovely views.

On Sunday I got a ride down to Wire Plain, and saw the Sky Lilies and found a large patch of Alpine Leek Orchids. There is quite an extensive sphagnum bog there, so it was quite different from anything I'd seen on previous days.

Each evening there was a program of slides, some from guests, and on 3 nights members of the group contributed a few. It was a good opportunity for the photographer/naturalists to study techniques, and the naturalist/photographers to enjoy the show!

The week was as busy or as quiet as each individual chose to make it. Bendigo F.N.C. make a plant list of over 75 species, the photographers exposed lots of film, the walkers walked miles, and those who came with them to the camp had a good rest. There was a number of children who mixed in together so well that it was only towards the end of the week that I was finally beginning to sort out who belonged to whom!

It was a most enjoyable week, well organized without being over organized, and a real credit to those responsible for the arrangements.

Rita Mills

GUM TREES AND SCRUB

The Bendigo Native Plants Group has prepared an excellent brochure entitled "Gum Trees & Scrub - A closer look at your new backyard"

It describes some of the plants to be found in the Bendigo bushland, and a few of the animals that depend on these plants. Twenty seven of the plants are illustrated with beautiful line drawings.

The Native Plant Group aims to give a copy of the brochure to new residents, particularly those with bush blocks.

The C.F.N.C. has a copy of the brochure.

If you can't beat them, eat them.

One of a series.

STINGING NETTLE

There are two Nettles found in the district. Both are reputed to be edible. The most common is the Small Nettle. It can be found as a garden weed, and comes up regularly in my vegetable garden. It is fairly common to the west of Castlemaine; near Cairn Curran whole paddocks may be under nettles.



The leaves of Nettles are covered with fine stinging hairs, which makes careless touching of a Nettle an unforgettable experience. It is somewhat surprising for many people to find that Nettles are edible.

Stinging Nettles are said to be one of the best of the wild greens. Young leaves should be selected, and are usually eaten boiled, or added to soups and stews. Fortunately for our tongue and throat, boiling destroys the ability of the plant to sting.

Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary in February 1661 that "We did eat some nettle porridge [which] was very good"

Before the introduction of flax and hemp, the stem fibre of nettles was spun and used to make cloth, sailcloth, sacking and table linen, or used to make rope and fishing nets. The name, Nettle, comes from 'needle', and it is uncertain now whether this refers to the sting or to its use of Nettles in sewing.

Nettle fibre is prepared in the same way as linen. The dried stems are soaked in water, the fibres separated, and then spun into a yarn. Nettles growing in damp areas are best as they tend to be taller and less branched.

Nettles have been used since ancient times in medicine. Gerard wrote "that it is a remedie against the venemous qualitie of Hemlocke, Mushrooms and Quicksilver... and Apollodorus saith that it is a counter-poison for Henbane, Serpents and Scorpions". With the increase in mining in central Victoria, and the likely release of mercury from old mine workings, perhaps there would be a market for Nettles!

A list of the virtues of Nettles makes interesting reading. This is an abbreviated list! "It is good for old rotten, or stinking sores or fistulas, and gangrenes, manginess and itch in any part of the body; for cold and benumbed members; for gout sciatica or joint aches in any part"....and for "diarrhea, dysentery and piles, and haemorrhages, scorbutic and nephritic complaints."

The sting in Nettles is formic acid, the same stinging agent that ants use. It is said that the Romans took Nettles to England to help them endure the cold climate. They would rub their limbs with nettles, to warm up the skin during cold of English weather.

CARRAWAY AT FRYERS RIDGE

The Australian Carraway is a common plant of the alpine areas of Australia. It is sometimes found at lower altitudes. Willis gives its distribution as "widespread through the eastern highlands, but very uncommon and scattered in W. Victoria"

It is a typical member of the parsley family, with rather parsley-like leaves, and the flowers branch from the central stalk (as shown in the sketch).



The Australian Carraway is not new to the Castlemaine Plant List. It has previously been recorded for Coliban Park by Don Franklin. The new locality is on the old Taradale Coach road, between Fryers Ridge wildflower reserve and Taradale.

The Latin name is *Oreomyrrhis eriopoda*, from oreos = mountain, and myrrhis after a fragrant European herb known as myrrh, or Sweet Ciceley. Erio means woolly, and podus means foot, referring to the woolly flower stalks.

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. \$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.

CHEWTON CEMETERY

Cemeteries are often important refuges for wild life, and in some districts they have the only remnants of the original native vegetation in their district.

Chewton Cemetery is now surrounded by bushland. However most of the bushland is privately owned, and the cemetery is one of the very few patches of public land in the triangle bounded by the Pyrenees Highway, Golden Point Road and the Calder Highway.

As in many cemeteries, the open grassy area has a profusion of native grasses. These include perhaps the best area of Kangaroo Grass in the district, as well as Common Wheat Grass and several species of Spear Grass and Wallaby Grass. Provided the area is not ploughed or sprayed, most of these should continue to grow in the cemetery.

Native grasslands are significant because everywhere they are becoming degraded and depleted.

Some aggressive weeds are present, such as Blue Periwinkle, Blackberry and Briar Rose. Some control measures to reduce these weeds is probably desirable. There are also a number of introduced grasses, such as Fog Grass.

Trees have been ring-barked near the eastern and western boundaries of the reserve. This is apparently an on-going process, and many tree stumps can be seen. Over the past few years, it would appear that many trees have been cut out. The ring-barked specimens are more obvious, because they are so visible. Ring barked specimens are mostly Yellow Box. Red Box and Grey Box have also been killed. Less recently, Candlebark were ringbarked near the southern boundary.

The removal of trees from the cemetery is of concern for several reasons.

In the gold mining days, almost all of the trees in the district were cut out, and in much of the forest the trees have grown from suckers. The removal of the mature trees, with hollow limbs used as nesting sites by many birds (such as parrots) and mammals (such as possums), had a devastating effect on the dependent wildlife. Some of the trees killed in the cemetery are quite old, and have hollow limbs. If trees are to be cut out of the cemetery, it would be much better to remove the younger trees.

Nine species of eucalypt native to the area occur in the reserve. This is exceptionally high for such a small area.

There are also some planted trees, such as Sugar Gum (near the old bridge), Sydney Blue Gum (near the entrance), and a Tasmanian Blue Gum (outside, opposite the entrance). These are large trees and must have been planted many years ago.

Grey Box, Red Box, Long-leaf Box, Red Stringybark and Yellow Box can be found, mostly on the northern side. These are the common trees of much of the local bushland (such as Kalimna, and the Chewton Bushland Settlement).

River Red Gum is also in the reserve, particularly in the south-west portion. Red Gum is common along rivers and streams (e.g. Barkers Creek) but much less common in a bush situation such as this.

There are some fine specimens of Candlebark, particularly in the south-eastern portion. A single sapling of Swamp Gum is also growing. These gums grow in a similar habitat to Red Gums, but in colder and wetter locations, such as the gully flats to the south. It is unusual to find Candlebark and Swamp gum this close to Castlemaine, or growing with Red Gum.

In addition to all of these, White Box is also growing in the reserve. There are saplings as well as some fine mature trees. White Box is one of the rarer species of eucalypt, and has been recorded in only a few localities in the district. This is the only known occurrence of White Box in any reserve anywhere in the North Central area.

Thus, as far as eucalypts are concerned, the Chewton Cemetery Reserve is of significance for

- the number of old and mature trees to be found
- the meeting of three plant associations, the mixed box/stringybark forest, the River Red Gum forest, and Candlebark/Swamp Gum forest. I know of no other such area, anywhere.
- the occurrence of White Box.

In any management plan, these values should be preserved. In particular, the single Swamp Gum should be preserved, and a watch kept for regeneration.

E. Perkins.

NOTE - The "Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment" booklet is available from the Club.

REVIEW OF THE MINES ACT 1958

The Green Paper, "Options for Change, Dec 1958" has been received by the Club. Closing date for submissions on Options in the paper close on March 31st, 1989. A list of the issues is given below. The Green Paper includes a list of options for each issue, and arguments for and against each option.

- * Who should own the minerals?
- * Compensation to be paid for mining on crown land?
- * Compensation to be paid for mining on private land?
- * How are improvements on private land to be protected?
- * Marking out of private land and of crown land.
- * Should resources be let at an economic rent?
- * Should planning apply to mining?
- * When should a planning permit be required?
- * How are environmental controls to be applied to mining?
- * Who should be responsible for setting and monitoring rehabilitation requirements for mining?
- * Environmental monitoring
- * Who is appropriate approval body for determining planning permits?
- * How should public consultation take place on title conditions and environmental controls?
- * How are title conditions and environmental controls to be monitored?
- * How should mineral resources be allocated
- * Which titles should be subject to the ministers discretion?
- * How could the types of title under the mines act be rationalised?
- * Should the miner's right be retained
- * Should tailings be managed or regulated
- * Should eductor licences continue to exist [govt. policy is to phase out over 2 years]
- * How can existing titles be rationalised
- * What does an exploration or mining title authorise
- * Will titles give the holder exclusive rights?
- * Occupational health and safety
- * When and how should tenements be forfeited or cancelled
- * How can the practice of real estating be stopped?
- * Is there a role for a mining warden?

The Club's business meeting at 38 Campbell St on 23rd Feb, at 7.30, will begin to prepare a response from this Club. Further details can be obtained from the Secretary.

Material for a display board to be used at the WVFNCA campout is required. Nature photos, specimens etc. showing something of the district can be left with Ern Perkins before Mar 10.

NEW EDITION OF PLANT LIST

Edition 6 of the Castlemaine Plant List is now being prepared for printing.

The plant lists have appeared almost yearly. Since November, 32 new species have been added to the list, and there are 721 new locality records.

The new list is different in a number of respects.

The National Herbarium keeps plant records on a grid system. The main divisions are in a rectangle 1.5 degrees of longitude wide, and 1 degree of latitude deep. These primary regions are labelled A,B, C etc. Castlemaine is in region N and the corner of H, M, J and N is about a kilometre west of Maldon. The regions are further subdivided into 54 ten minute blocks, which measure about 14 km by 17 km. Castlemaine is almost in the centre of block N2. The surrounding blocks are, from the N.W. corner, M46, M47, M48, N3, N12, N11, N10 and N1. The new Castlemaine plant list will give distributions in these blocks, as well as in areas such as Smiths Reef, Muckleford etc.

Thus, the new list is no longer a list of plants within a 25 km radius, and some new areas are included. These include Shepherds Flat/Basalt, some of the Wombat forest south of Glenlyon, Mt Franklin, Black Hill, the forest near Pilchers Bridge, the Mandurang Forest, some of the forest near Big Hill, and some of the Lockwood Forest. The Club does not have records for most of these areas. Excursions to them will be needed, to compile lists for inclusion in the Plant List.

To make room for some of these new areas, some areas have been removed or amalgamated. For example, area L, B and j (Golden Point/Castlemaine North/Barkers Ck have been joined together as one unit, and area h has been made part of area 4. Areas P and R (Porcupine Ridge) have also been combined.

Some minor modifications to area boundaries have also been made, to make the areas more easily identifiable.

Any records for any of the old areas, or the new ones would be welcomed. A copy of the new map can be obtained from E. Perkins.

DISCOUNT AT N. P. A. .

Discounts are available to Club Members at The National Parks Association shop. See the Secretary for details

DAWN AT GLENLUCE

Glenluce Springs is usually a good spot to birdwatch, and a pre-dawn trip to the springs on Jan 28th of January proved to be no exception. The birds seen were

Blackbird	Willy Wag-tail
Magpie	Grey Currawong
Blue Wren	Red-browed Firetail
Yellow Robin	Strub-wren
Crimson Rosella	Yellow-tailed Honeyeater
Grey Fantail	Crested Shrike-tit
Striated pardalote	Spotted pardalote
Raven	Goldfinch
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	White-throated Treecreeper
Striated Thornbill	White Cockatoo
Jacky Winter	White-naped Honeyeater
Brown Treecreeper	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Brown Goshawk.	Koohaburra

AUSTRALIA DAY BIRD COUNT

This has been conducted for several years now at Doveton Street. The birds seen in the house block between 7.00 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. are noted. The corresponding records are from last year's count is shown in brackets.

Sparrows: Both male and females seen, from time to time. (A single female only seen flying over several times).

Starlings: Several observations. Some small flocks flying over, and some in the block. (Seen in nearby blocks only).

Blackbirds: Several females and one male, present for most of the time. (One female only seen).

Indian Turtledoves: Three perched in neighbouring tree, but inside the house block, and then flew over house to SEC wires. (Seven seen nearby, but not in block).

Silvereyes: Numerous. Many flying over to neighbours' cypress, but also roosting in the block. (A group seen next door, and on overhanging branch).

Red Wattlebird: Feeding on overhanging eucalypt. (One seen, mostly next door).

Goldfinch: Two seen, one perched and the other feeding.

Total species seen: 7 (9 in 1988).

Birds not seen this year were Little Lorikeets, New Holland Honeyeaters and Large Black Cormorants.

White Cockatoos and Magpies were heard but not seen.

[See Cast Nat #131, Feb '88 and Cast Nat #120, Feb '87.]

NOTES FOR DEC/JAN

BUDGERIGAR was seen in Doveton Street on Dec 2nd. In the wild these are usually in flocks, so this may have been an escapee.

MUSK LORIKEETS have been plentiful in the town over most of December. Loquats in particular have been favoured. A few Little Lorikeets and Purple-crowned Lorikeets have also been seen in the town, but not on Loquat trees.

IN FLOWER IN THE PINE PLANTATION in early December were Grevillea, Tall and Annual Bluebell, Grey Everlasting, Scaly and Wiry Button, Magenta Stork's-bill, Golden Everlasting and Sweet Bursaria.

MISTLETOE Birds have been seen in Doveton Street and at Newstead.

WILLY WAGTAIL NESTS AT GUILDFORD. A pair of Willy Wagtails have been nesting in a Guildford barn. The one pair has three nests, which are under an iron roof. They are very wary, and do not use the nests when under observation. Perhaps the iron of the roof helps keep the nests warm

SEDGE AT HAMILTON'S CROSSING. A sedge, known as *Carex bichenoviana*, has been seen growing along the Loddon River at Hamilton's Crossing by I Higgins. This is the first Club record for this sedge. It is rather grass-like in appearance. It has one (or a few) green clusters of female flowers. Above these are brown spikes of male flowers.

SLENDER KNOT-WEED. This Knot-weed, as its name suggests, is a rather slender plant. It has pink flowers. It has been found along the Loddon River at Torpeys Crossing, and along the Coliban River at Taradale.. This is also the first Club record of this plant.

SELF-HEAL. Self-heal is a member of the mint family. It has blue flowers crowded in a group at the end of the stalk. It usually grows to a height of about 10 cm. The name refers to its supposed medicinal properties. It is also found at both Torpeys Crossing and along the Coliban River at Taradale, and is a new Club record.

SPOTTED QUAIL THRUSH has been seen in the Tunnel Hill area. This is a new area record.

BULOKE MISTLETOE has been seen growing at Baringhup. Both Harlequin Mistletoe and Buloke Mistletoe were thriving on the tree. Buloke Mistletoe has coarse cylindrical leaves, and beautiful red flowers. It was in full flower during January.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Fri 10 Feb. CENTRAL AUSTRALIA and the NORTH. Speaker is Frank Duffin. High School at 8.00 p.m. Annual meeting.

Sat 11 Feb. TULLAROOP DAM. Leave S.E.C., Mostyn St at 3.00 p.m. sharp, and take a picnic tea and your binoculars. Final details will depend on weather, and will be arranged at the Friday meeting.

Fri 10 March. RECLAMATION OF MINED AREAS.

Speaker is Ian Higgins. Bring items for our display at V.F.N.C.A. campout.

Mar 11-13 OCEAN GROVE CAMPOUT at "Ingermells" Uniting Church camp. \$18 per day (approx) including 3 meals.

Some excursions have costs. See brochure for details.

Frid: 7.30 Slide show - History of Bellarine Peninsula.

Sat 6.00 am. Self conducted beach, bush or estuary walk.

Sat 8.00 am. Depart for excursions,

(a) Rock shore exploration, followed by Mud Island trip (11-5) or

(b) Marine biology cruise, mud-flat and plankton study (or snorkel with seals), bird watch on Sand Is. or

(c) Barwon Heads Bluff area, Mangrove Study (or snorkel with the seals), Breanlea estuary walk

Sat 7.00 pm. WVFNCA general meeting.

Sat 8.30. "Bird migrants to the Bellarine Peninsula"

Sun: similar to Saturday, (a) and (b), plus

(c) Mudflat and plankton study, Mannerim birdwatch, Edwards point walk.

Sun 7.00 VFNCA annual meeting.

Sun 8.30. "Underwater photography"

Mon 9.00 Depart for Queenscliff/Barwon Heads. Excursions to Barwon Heads Bluff area, or Lake Victoria/Clows Swamp or snorkel with the fish. Lunch at Ocean Grove nature reserve. Bird watch at Ocean Grove or at Moolap. Detailed brochure and booking sheets from E. Perkins.

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.

Sat 13 May. Black Hill excursion. 1.30 at S.E.C.

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

Oct 21-23 W.V.F.N.C.A. campout at Creswick

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. Inc. P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450.