

Fruit Fly *Spathulina acroleuca*
resting on an Early Nancy.

Photo: Noel Young



Macrophotography – Lost in a tiny wonderland

We started our 50th Anniversary year with a bang. Our February meeting which included the launch of our new “Butterflies of the Mount Alexander Region” brochure had around 55 people in attendance.

Our drawcard speaker was Patrick Kavanagh who started by launching the butterflies brochure and outlining how important it will be for providing information and raising awareness of our local fauna. Several people have told me how this brochure featuring our 50 local species makes identifying a local butterfly so much more feasible than using the field guides which may contain 100s of species.

Patrick then went on to his main presentation “Macrophotography – Lost in a tiny wonderland” recounting how his journey into the world of small

animals was inspired by the “How and Why Wonder Book of Insects” and years later by David Attenborough’s “Life on Earth”.

The journey was illustrated by Patrick’s wonderful macrophotographs of invertebrates, mainly insects but also spiders and mites. To quote Patrick, “Paying attention to the little things creates intimacy” and “Wandering around the bush with a camera looking for tiny things means I see things I’d otherwise miss, things that can’t be seen easily”.

After a brief look at some native bees (vegetarian wasps) the talk moved on to wasps (carnivorous bees) and to ants (usually flightless wasps), which in turn led to some of the complex relationships between species.

For example, the wingless female

velvet ants are picked up by the male and carried off to somewhere suitable to lay their eggs. This behaviour is taken advantage of by some orchids where the flower mimics the look and pheromones of the female wasp and fools the male into pollinating the flower.

Ants can be farmers and this relationship occurs many times in nature. Aphids, scale bugs and plant hoppers will often be attended by ants. These insects excrete a sugary liquid which the ants feed on. In turn, the ants protect the insects from predation and in many cases will shepherd their livestock to shelter in the ant’s nest when they are not feeding. A similar relationship occurs with the caterpillars of many of the Lycaenidae butterflies (Blues & Coppers) including the Eltham Copper

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung community as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country where we meet and study the natural environment. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

Butterfly and Imperial Hairstreak.

The journey continued with a glimpse of some predatory creatures, carnivorous lacewing larvae (ant lions) that build traps for their prey, feather-legged assassin bugs which suck their prey dry with their tube-like mouth, and ant-mimicking spiders that resemble their ant prey in appearance and smell so as to approach unnoticed by the real ants.

We were shown photos of some spiders, which are not insects. Spiders do not have compound eyes like insects but six or eight large eyes. Looking into the large forward-facing eyes of a net-casting spider or a wolf spider is like looking into the unknown. What is going on behind those large clear eyes?

Patrick went on to discuss some of the troubling trends that he has seen in recent years. This is the sort of knowledge that can only be gained by closely watching your local patch and noting what is changing.

In recent years Patrick has witnessed a noticeable decline in invertebrate

numbers in the vegetation layers of the environment. Insects are fewer in numbers and number of species in the trees and shrubs. This decline has flow-on effects on the insect predators, the birds, small mammals and predatory invertebrates that feed on insects. Interestingly, Patrick has noticed less of a decline in those species that inhabit the litter layers of the forest floor.

Patrick then posed the two questions below and went on to discuss the possible reasons and our response.

First, what is causing these changes which have been observed locally but are not confined to our area? Although our lived impression is that recent years have been dry, the annual total rainfall for the last few years has not been significantly different from normal. One possibility is the timing of the rainfall. It may be that the moisture is not available when the plants need it so the invertebrates in turn lack reliable food sources. Golden Wattle is one important food plant for insects that has not been doing well in recent years. The

warming climate may also be a factor. In warmer weather, plants require more moisture to remain healthy. While rainfall has not declined significantly, our plants may require more of it than in the past.

Second, what can we do about this widespread decline in our ecosystems? At the very least we can stop destroying, either directly or indirectly what habitat we have left and we can try to minimise our personal impact on our environment. We should also make an effort to record those organisms that are all around us. This gives us and others the ability to know and protect what is out there. Get out your camera or phone, take photos and post them on iNaturalist and use iNaturalist, other web-based databases and field guides to identify what you have found.

Thank you, Patrick for an excellent talk and your call to action to protect our precious natural environment, especially those creatures of the "tiny wonderland"!

Euan Moore



Feather-legged Assassin Bug, *Ptilocnemus* sp.

Net-casting Spider, Family Deinopidae.

Above photos: Patrick Kavanagh



Left: Patrick with the Butterfly brochure team: Lou, Kerrie and Rosemary.
Right: Patrick giving his presentation.
Photos: Lou Citroën



Baringhup by the Loddon, appreciating Nature.

The CFNC excursion, February. Reporter Lou Citroën

Sir David Attenborough once said "The bush is not merely a place, but a state of mind. It teaches us patience, resilience and an appreciation for the simple things in life."

I could think of no more fitting words

to describe our excursion to Baringhup by the Loddon on Saturday 14 February. The weather was warm and friendly, though the bush there provided some welcome shade.

After the customary introductions

and briefing by our President, Euan Moore, the posse of the 13 members and welcome friends spent a leisurely time sauntering to the spillway and back, appreciating the serenity and beauty there (refer images).

Sue Luke and Cathrine Harboe-Ree identified the trees tabled below:

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>	River Red Gum
<i>Eucalyptus cladocalyx</i>	Sugar Gum
<i>Corymbia citriodora</i>	Lemon-scented Gum
<i>Corymbia maculata</i>	Spotted Gum
<i>Acacia dealbata</i>	Silver Wattle
<i>Acacia provincialis</i>	Wirilda
<i>Solanum laciniatum</i>	Kangaroo Apple (with fruit)



Sugar gums near the spillway - photo Noel Young

Sue also spotted a mystery tree that resembled a Small-leaved Peppermint (*Eucalyptus radiata*) but which had a strong weeping habit and lacked the distinctive Peppermint scent to its foliage.

Many of the trees, though quite mature, appeared to have been introduced as an arboretum dating from when the dam was constructed

Euan, Noel and Kerrie attended to documenting the bird count tabled

below.

Apart from taking a few photos and making a modest contribution to the bird count, your correspondent did his best to exercise those virtues cited by Sir David, of patience (in learning), resilience (in continuing to learn), and enjoying the company of others savouring what Nature offered in this lovely location.

On returning to our start point, one of the picnic tables was put to good

use as we spread ourselves out, sharing nibbles and chatting over a welcome cuppa, whilst consolidating our observations. Notwithstanding the worryingly dry conditions, we were happy with flora identified and a fauna list of 40 birds, 2 mammals and one butterfly.

It had truly been an idyllic way to spend a leisurely hour-and-a-half of *appreciating the simple things in life* at Baringhup.



The Loddon River at Baringhup. Photo: Noel Young



An old log on the river bank sprouts healthy trunks – and a convenient seat. Photo: Noel Young

Baringhup Bird List

Bird Species: 39 - Subspecies: 0 - Forms: 40 **Total Records: 40**

<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>	Maned Duck	2	<i>Smicronis brevirostris</i>	Weebill	1
<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	Pacific Black Duck	1	<i>Entomyzon cyanotis</i>	Blue-faced Honeyeater	1
<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	Spotted Dove	1	<i>Melithreptus gularis</i>	Black-chinned Honeyeater	1
<i>Geopelia placida</i>	Peaceful Dove	2	<i>Ptilotula penicillata</i>	White-plumed Honeyeater	5
<i>Ocyphaps lophotes</i>	Crested Pigeon	2	<i>Manorina melanocephala</i>	Noisy Miner	1
<i>Gallinula tenebrosa</i>	Dusky Moorhen	2	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	Black-faced Cuckooshrike	1
<i>Fulica atra</i>	Eurasian Coot	1	<i>Artamus cyanopterus</i>	Dusky Woodswallow	4
<i>Thinornis melanops</i>	Black-fronted Dotterel	1	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	Australian Magpie	6
<i>Haliastur sphenurus</i>	Whistling Kite	2	<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>	Grey Shrikethrush	2
<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	Laughing Kookaburra	1	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>	Willie Wagtail	2
<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	Sacred Kingfisher	1	<i>Rhipidura albiscapa</i>	Grey Fantail	1
<i>Eolophus roseicapilla</i>	Galah	4	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	Magpie-Lark	3
<i>Cacatua tenuirostris</i>	Long-billed Corella	2	<i>Corvus</i>	Crow/Raven Species	1
<i>Cacatua galerita</i>	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	5	<i>Acrocephalus australis</i>	Australian Reed Warbler	3
<i>Platycercus elegans</i>	Crimson Rosella	6	<i>Cincloramphus mathewsi</i>	Rufous Songlark	2
<i>Platycercus eximius</i>	Eastern Rosella	4	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	Welcome Swallow	3
<i>Psephotus haematonotus</i>	Red-rumped Parrot	8	<i>Petrochelidon ariel</i>	Fairy Martin	1
<i>Climacteris picumnus</i>	Brown Treecreeper	5	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Common Blackbird	3
<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>	Superb Fairywren	2	<i>Neochmia temporalis</i>	Red-browed Finch	1
<i>Pardalotus striatus</i>	Striated Pardalote	1	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	1

Butterflies: *Heteronympha merope* Common Brown 2

Fauna: *Macropus giganteus* Eastern Grey Kangaroo 1, *Oryctolagus cuniculus* European Rabbit 1



Peaceful Dove Photo: Noel Young



Brown Treecreeper
Photo: Lou Citroën



A pleasant afternoon tea. Photo: Noel Young

Roadside clean-up

Our first Roadside Cleanup for 2026 was held on Monday 16th February. On a beautiful day our team of ten collected about 450 litres of rubbish and were finished by 10:30. We picked up 45 cans/bottles/cartons for recycling under the 10c container deposit scheme, the grand proceeds of \$4.50 being donated to YIMBY (the local community group doing great work diverting organics from landfill and recycling them into good soil by composting).

Flowers were scarce but we did see some nice Lemon Beauty-heads (*Calocephalus citreus*). [Photo right]

Thanks to Nigel, Helen, Peter, Alison, Jan, Helen, Lisa, Gen & Lisa.

Geoff Harris.



Eltham Copper Butterfly Project – you can help!

The North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA) is running a project that aims to secure the future of the endangered Eltham Copper Butterfly (ECB). The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club is represented on the Project Reference Group. The ECBs have peaks of activity in both December and March so this is a good time to look for them. You can help this project by recording sightings of this butterfly and any other butterflies that you may come across in our local area. [Sweet Bursaria](#) is an important food plant for the butterflies and their caterpillars so concentrate your efforts where this shrub occurs.

The best way to record sightings is to take a photograph of the butterfly with your phone or camera, record the date, time and location (this happens automatically on phones and some cameras) and post your sighting on the [iNaturalist](#) website. If you have not used iNaturalist, please refer to our website page "[Recording Observations](#)" where there is information about using iNaturalist and a link to a video that explains how to use the site. If you are not sure what the ECB or other butterflies look like, visit our [butterflies page](#) on our website or come along to our monthly meeting and get a copy of our new brochure, "Butterflies of the Mount Alexander Region". The brochures may also be purchased from the Castlemaine Information Centre and other outlets around town.

Part of the NCCMA project includes targeted weed control in significant habitat so if you find the ECB in an area where there are lots of weeds (Gorse, blackberry, invasive grasses, etc) please let us know at castlemainefnc@hotmail.com

Euan Moore



ECB on Bursaria. Above and underwing views.
Photos: Euan Moore



Help find the Bibron's Toadlet

A citizen scientist survey with the Friends of the Box Ironbark Forests

FOBIF is launching a community survey to help locate and record the elusive Bibron's Toadlet *Pseudophryne bibronii*, endangered in Victoria and listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

This small but remarkable frog is rarely seen, but its distinctive call gives it away. By collecting accurate records, we can better understand its distribution and help protect key habitat from potentially damaging activities such as inappropriate planned burning.

For more information on participation: info@fobif.org.au



New Books to note

Explore the Hidden World of Fungi at Paradise Bookshop with Ecologist Alison Pouliot at Daylesford

Paradise Bookshop is thrilled to host the local launch of Mushroom Day, the latest book from celebrated ecologist and author Alison Pouliot. Join us for an evening of fascinating conversation, discovery, and celebration on Thursday, 26 March 2026, from 5:00PM to 6:00PM.

This free event will feature Alison Pouliot in conversation with Paradise Bookshop's own Devon Taylor, delving into the adventures and scientific discoveries that shaped the creation of her new book, Mushroom Day. Attendees will be treated to tales from the fungal kingdom, exploring the vital and often overlooked role of fungi in our ecosystems.

Following the discussion, there will be an audience Q&A and an opportunity to have copies of Mushroom Day and Alison's other books personally signed. All books will be available for purchase at the event

More Information: alisonpouliot.com

About the Author:

Alison Pouliot is an ecologist and professional environmental photographer with a deep focus on fungi. Her work spans both hemispheres, where she is actively involved in fungal research, education, and conservation. Her writing and imagery feature in both academic and popular literature, and she is the author of seven books.



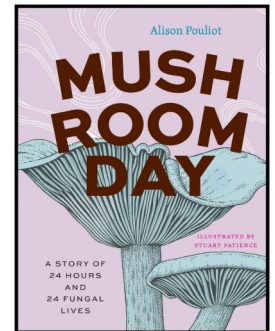
Explore the Hidden World of Fungi with Alison Pouliot



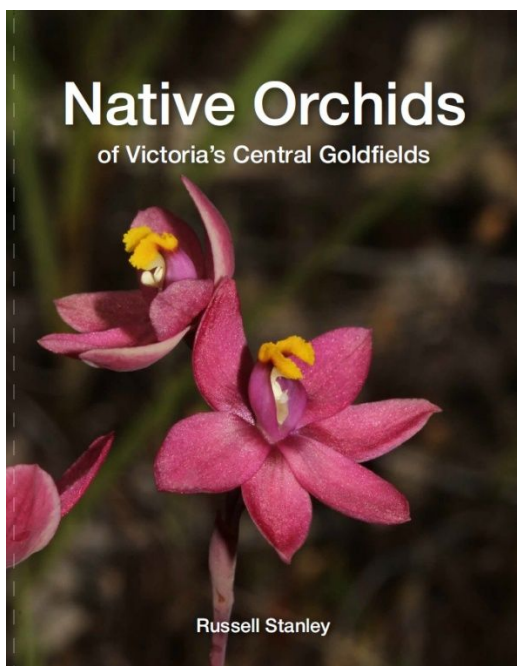
PARADISE BOOKSHOP
THURSDAY, 26 MARCH
5PM TO 6PM
FREE. ALL WELCOME

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE
THE LAUNCH OF HER
NEW BOOK
MUSHROOM DAY
WITH A FASCINATING
TALK, AUDIENCE Q&A,
AND BOOK SIGNING

paradisebookshop



Russell Stanley's new book



Native Orchids of Victoria's Central Goldfields – Coming Soon

I visited the printer in Bendigo a few days ago and was able to pick up a copy of my new book relating to the orchids found in our Goldfields area. I think it looks pretty good! (A completely unbiased opinion). The books are boxed up and ready to go. I'm hoping they'll be available to CFNC members in a couple of weeks.

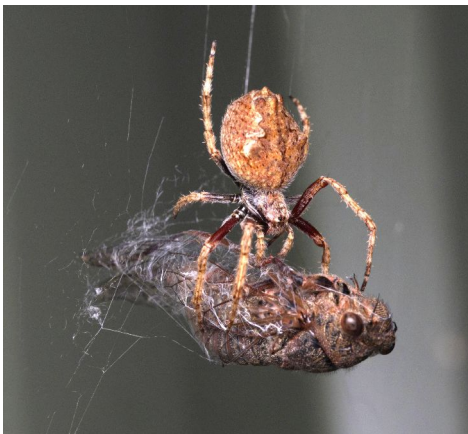
Russell Stanley

Observations



Grey headed Flying Foxes are seasonally resident in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens
Photo: Noel Young

Jill Williams



Orb weaver with Arachnid 'Big Mac'



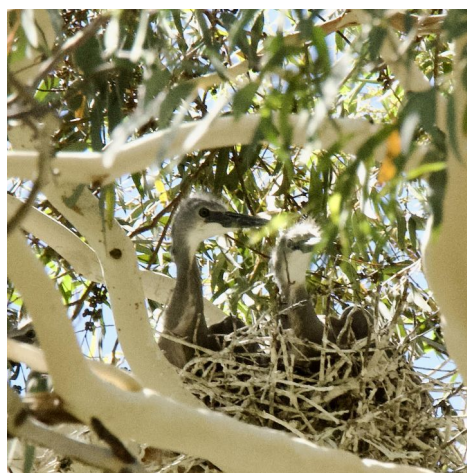
Fungi Snout - *Sandava scitisignata*



Southern Marbled Gecko - *Christinus marmoratus*

Peter Turner

Back in December, the local White-faced Herons who are often seen stalking through Munro Court, built a nest high in a large Brittle Gum at the corner of Dudley St and Munro Ct. In due course two chicks emerged - photos taken on 26th December, 5th January and 22nd January. The last photo includes one of the parents on the right - darker, with fully white face (not visible in this photo). After learning to fly between and around the local trees, the family has moved on.





Spotted Hyacinth Orchid
(*Dipodium pardalinum*)



Rosy Hyacinth Orchid
(*Dipodium roseum*)



Above: 'Christmas Tawnies'

Located in the bush on Christmas day, from finding a dead chick on the ground below. Remaining chick healthy and close to fledging but last seen on nest two days before the 9 January heat and fires. Adult and chick appear to have fled successfully as no casualties found.



Left: "Nolan St Tawnies"

This pair successfully raised two healthy chicks from about 24 September to fledging 4 December (approx. 12 weeks)

Dad standing guard (far left)

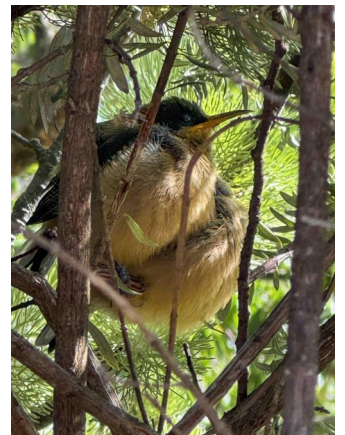


Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Left: Beaked Earth Stars *Geastrum tenuipes*

Mez Woodward

Right: These two Spinebill chicks were successfully reared in difficult circumstances (see article by Mez in last month's Castlemaine Naturalist.)



Noel Young

During January and February, New Holland Honeyeaters congregate in large numbers along the Happy Valley section of Forest Creek to dine on the orange Mistletoe flowers *Amyema preissii* which are generally abundant on Acacias.

Coming events for March

AGM and Monthly General Meeting, Friday 13th March, 7.30pm

Uniting Church Fellowship Room, Lyttleton St.

Annual General Meeting

The 2026 AGM will be held before the usual monthly meeting on 13th March. The [AGM agenda](#) will include the 2025 AGM Minutes, and the [Annual Report and Treasurer's Report for 2025](#) and the election of office bearers and committee members for 2026. All positions on the committee will be open, so you are strongly encouraged to consider joining the committee. Members with a range of skills and interests are very welcome. For more information, please contact the President or one of the current committee members (see back page). Nomination forms are available from the Secretary and completed forms should reach the Secretary (castlemainefnc@hotmail.com) before the meeting.

In the interests of time, this month there will be no Observations segment. But we would love to see your interesting observations in the April Castlemaine Naturalist. Please forward them, with photos if available (preferably as uncropped jpgs), by email to the newsletter editors at newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com by 27th March.

Monthly Talk

Guest speaker: Brendan Sydes "The importance of community groups and citizen science for protecting and restoring our natural environment"

Following our AGM, we are privileged to have as our guest speaker Brendan Sydes, environmental lawyer and former Executive Director of Environmental Justice Australia. He is the National Biodiversity Policy Adviser to the Australian Conservation Foundation, and a Board of Management member for several environmental not-for-profit organisations. Brendan is a regular contributor to iNaturalist and passionate about biodiversity conservation at landscape scale.

Our evening will conclude with a birthday cake to celebrate our 50th anniversary!

Excursion: Saturday 14th March, 1.30pm

"Newstead Arts Hub and Loddon River"

Leader: Kerrie Jennings

For the start of our March excursion, we will visit the Newstead Arts Hub to enjoy the exhibition of Geoff Park's stunning wildlife photography and John Wolseley's creative landscape artworks, a part of the Castlemaine State Festival.

Meet: for car-pooling and **1.00pm** departure at the northern end of the Car Park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St. Castlemaine, or at **1.30pm** at the Newstead Arts Hub, 8A Tivey St.

At **2.30pm**, we will drive to the start of our Loddon River walk at the old ford down the gravel extension from the end of Panmure St, Newstead (see [Google Maps link](#)). We will walk north along the river bank, enjoying the enormous old River Red Gums, the Newstead Landcare group's revegetation work and rich birdlife, returning to the cars for a picnic afternoon tea.

Bring: water, snacks, **clean** sturdy shoes, chairs, afternoon tea.

Life with Birds – a collaboration with the Newstead Arts Hub and Castlemaine State Festival

Life with Birds is an immersive celebration of the birds and woodland ecosystems of central Victoria. A distinguished collaboration of writers, artists, photographers, sound recordists, field naturalists and scientists will enable participants to enjoy and learn on the path to a deeper appreciation of the richness of our bird life in the face of many challenges, especially that of global climate change.

There will be [six events](#) conducted in collaboration with the [Newstead Arts Hub](#) and the [Castlemaine State Festival](#). For details, follow this link to Geoff Park's Natural Newstead page: <https://geoffpark>.



Brown Thornbill, Forest Creek

Photo: Noel Young

Program

Meetings: 7.30pm, 2nd Friday of the month except for January.
Venue: Uniting Church Hall (UCH), Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine except during winter (June-August) when they are held by Zoom.

Excursions are held on the Saturday following the monthly meeting and leave from the northern end of the car park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St. at 1.30pm unless stated otherwise.

See “Coming Events” page for details on March activities.

Fri 13th March, 7.30pm Meeting (UCH) - AGM

Speaker: Brendan Sydes “The importance of community groups and citizen science for protecting and restoring our natural environment”

Celebrating our 50th anniversary!

Sat 14th March, 1.00pm at the Goods Shed carpark, or 1.30pm at the Newstead Arts Hub

Excursion: “Newstead Arts Hub and Loddon River walk”
Leader: Kerrie Jennings

Fri 10th April, 7.30pm Meeting (UCH) Speaker: Lynda Wilson “Native bees”

Sat 11th April Excursion: TBC

Fri 8th May, 7.30pm Meeting (UCH) Speaker: Bev Lewis “The art of natural history illustration”

Visitors are welcome at club activities

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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Membership

Includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist. (Membership forms on [CFNC website](#))

Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Newsletter: Castlemaine Naturalist

Email items: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

April edition deadline: **March 27**

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Jill Williams	Noel Young

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Jenny Rolland

Newsletter Distributor:
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The Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans* is the emblem of the club. Design by Rita Mills.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.