

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



Trekking Nepal

August 1984 93

JOURNAL OF THE CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Founded 1976

President : Mr John Dare
Ochiltree Farm, Clydesdale
Ph. 76 4227

Secretary: Mrs Berry Perry
Pound Lane, Guildford
Ph. 73 4240

General meetings are held monthly at the Castlemaine High School, Lawson Parade, at 8.00 p.m. each second Friday in the month.

Outings are usually held monthly, on the second Saturday of the month unless decided otherwise.

Outings usually depart from outside the S.E.C building in Mostyn Street at 1.30 p.m.

Visitors and people interested in Natural History are cordially invited to attend club functions

Club Activities

Meeting, Friday Aug 10. Trekking through Nepal
with Dr & Mrs Champion of Maldon. 8 p.m. High School

Outing, Saturday Aug 11. Trekking through Vaughan
1.30 p.m. outside S.E.C. building.

The scene was one of blue skies reflected from mirror-smooth sunlit waters. The only land on this part of the "Farm" consists of miles of levee banks, with vehicle tracks down their centres, and lined with rushes and weeds.

The sweet, high-pitched piping of the seldom seen Little Grass-bird was often heard, in spite of the scores of birdwatchers walking down their narrow strips of territory. This day many were seen flitting from near those pesky human beings, along the banks to disappear beyond the reeds and rushes.

Lake Borrie was only distinguishable from the other areas of water by the large numbers of bid dead trees out towards the middle, decorated with numerous large stick nests and hundreds of Pied Cormorants. Some were seen to be feeding young, although so near to winter time. As we admired the large flock of Chestnut Teal, intermixed with a few Grey Teal, Black Ducks, Small Grebes and Swans, some folks from up the Murray, where such birds are plentiful, tried to point out a few Pink-eared Ducks, way out amongst the stark dead trees.

The owner of a telescope set firmly on a tripod generously invited each of us bystanders to view one of the "prettiest of all ducks" standing on a half submerged log.

We followed the levee bank to the aptly-named Little River, then beside it almost to where it flowed into Port Phillip Bay. There we saw our first family of BlueWrens, and as we turned right to go back to the cars some lucky observers had a good look at a Golden-headed Cisticola, like a tiny wren dressed in Autumn gold and rich brown.

We drove back to the sweet fresh air at the Woolshed, for a fine picnic lunch provided by the Geelong Field Naturalists Club. That was Willie-Wagtail territory, and a flight of about ten Straw necked Ibis Glided down to the green paddocks beside us.

The group who had gone with the man who does research into the activities of Raptors arrived a bit later, as we were about to move further South in the pastured area. They too reported having not sighted any Orange-bellied Parrots, which was not surprising as the Queenscliff Field Nats had not sighted any at Swan Island where 10 to 20 are usually to be seen at this time of the year. All nature lovers hope this is not an indication of further decline in numbers of this rare and endangered species.

Austin's Lagoon is back across the paddocks from the road, but was a beautiful scene, reminiscent of Peter Scott's paintings of waterfowl in the wetlands of England. I counted over 500 Black Swans floating, feeding or flying there, before they were joined by another flight of 3 or 4 hundred! Also there were many Shelducks (Mountain Duck), with Wood Ducks, Musk Ducks, Little Grebes and Pied Stilts.

At the roadside there we heard the sweet song of an unseen Fieldwren as we enjoyed our afternoon cuppas and had pointed out to us by the local enthusiasts some of the interesting features of Hobsons Bay. Not far away the road curved outwards to the munitions pier jutting out into the bay. Also visible with field-glasses of course, was the pretty coastal town, Portarlington on the Bellarine Peninsula opposite us, where a lean grey warship lay at anchor. The Eastern tip, I was told, would be Edwards Point at the entrance to Swan Bay, and an excellent place for bird-watchers.

Next stop was "Serendip" Wildlife Research Station, Lara, which breeds Brolgas, Magpie Geese, Cape Barren Geese, as well as other Ducks and Bustards. There we had a most interesting talk by the director of Serendip, about its origins, purpose and practical uses of the station, followed by a conducted tour and a most enjoyable barbecue in a sheltered enclosure amongst the trees, beautifully located and equipped for the purpose.

Members of the Castlemaine Field Nats who took part in the excursion there a few years ago will be dismayed to hear that the research work, at least is rumoured to be about to suffer "the axe" and the field work of trying to encourage farmers to improve bird habitats on their properties has practically ceased for want of extension staff.

SAFARI TOUR FOR NATURALISTS

A 22 day tour of the Warrumbungle, Carnarvon Gorge and Lamington National Parks, by Kingston Tours of Stawell, Victoria.

Departs Stawell, Sunday, 8 September, 1985.

Cost: \$694 per person, Deposit of \$50 to be paid by 31 July, 1985.

Under the auspices of the Western Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association. Early booking is recommended, forms are available.

F.N.C.V. SPRINGTIME GET - TOGETHER

Saturday, October 6th and Sunday, October 7th, 1984

Meeting at 1.30 p.m. on Saturday, October 6th, at the Ringwood side of Domeney Reserve, off Knees Road, Park Orchards.

Object is to study Orchids, other flora, and birds.

Bring picnic tea, coffee and tea provided.

Business meeting in the the hall on the reserve at 7 p.m. followed by slides and social.

On Sunday there will be an outing to Warrandyte State Park. A bus will leave Batman Ave at 9 a.m.

Arrangements should be made in advance re use of bus or private transport, motel accommodation if required, or with Crystal Brook Caravan Park, Warrandyte. (03 84 4367).

W.V.F.N.C.A. Campout

In the Grampians National Park, October 12/13/14. 1984.

Based on 'Aginda' camp, Halls Gap.

More details next month.

The Month at Campbells Creek

by Terry Collins

Hopping around in a small bush near our shed was a beautiful Spotted Pardalote, Looking up our Bird register, it was way back in March 1981 when the last sighting took place. Also there is no sign of a flock of White Winged Choughs which according to the register come along the rise behind the house every year in May and stay till August.

Foxes are about, one strolled across the paddock at 10 o'clock one morning. Then we often hear the Spur-Winged Plovers who have taken up winter residence near our small dam, give a cry of alarm at night. No doubt a prowling feral cat or fox. Three years ago a predator took two plover chicks late one night in spite of the parents' efforts and our late charge down with a torch. All we saw was two eyes disappearing in the scrub.

Can any member give proven facts regarding various creatures actions in the forecasting of a weather change or rain? We think we have a frog outside the kitchen window who is as good as a barometer, Snail chirps towards nightfall seem to indicate a change within 24 hours. More study is needed. We were told about Kookaburras certain calls but afraid we found them to tell lies.