CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

FEBRUARY 1986

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109

This Month: BIRDS OF THE KIMBERLEYS

with Maggie Oliver

Friday, February 14th at the High School, Lawson Parade

Outing, Saturday Feb 15. Pond Life and Water Birds att att Barkers Ck Reservoir, Nth Harcourt

Leave S.E.C.. Mostyn St at 1.30 p.m.

NOTES FROM THE "CREEK"

by Terry Collins

DearFriends,

it is with a great deal of sorrow that I have to inform you that this is the last report from "The Creek". Reluctantly we have sold our retreat to move in closer, leaving behind a legacy of nature from ants, lizards, birds, hares, foxes, and occasional echidnas and kangaroos. All these creatures seemed to gather around us for the occasional feed and perhaps the sanctuary we brought to them. No dogs or cats to worry them. But we are assured that the new owners will carry on where we left off and that is a measure of relief.

The White-eared Honeyeaters built another nest with one egg on Dec 7th but alas with the young one hatched a fox or large cat smashed the nest and took mother and chick. The male stayed with us and became more friendly than ever. A couple of whistles when the feeding bottle was being replenished would bring him right to arms length. Also late December, a Golden Whistler flew into the shed and stayed some hours. The colony of Bronze Winged Pigeons has multiplied to seven, feeding mainly on the seeds of the wattles. The gums have fully recovered from the Cup Moths and appear to have taken no harm.

A new predator has arrived on the natives in the form of a large brown caterpillar. They prefer the smaller Grevilleas and so are easily controlled. Mid January our Yellow Thornbills, Silver Eyes and Blue Wrens appeared; all knew where the bird bath was located so I guess that they were not strangers. We will miss our "friends", but at least we know of a little spot that will stay close to nature and survive.

(This may have been the last epistle from Campbells Creek, but we certainly hope it will not be the last from T.C. Many thanks Terry for your regular contribution which has always been most interesting . All our readers will agree, I am sure. Ed.)

BIRD LIST EDITION 2

The new edition of the Castlemaine Bird List has been prepared, and is on sale at $1. Many additional records have been entered, and brief notes about the occurrence of each bird has been added.

SPRINGTAILS

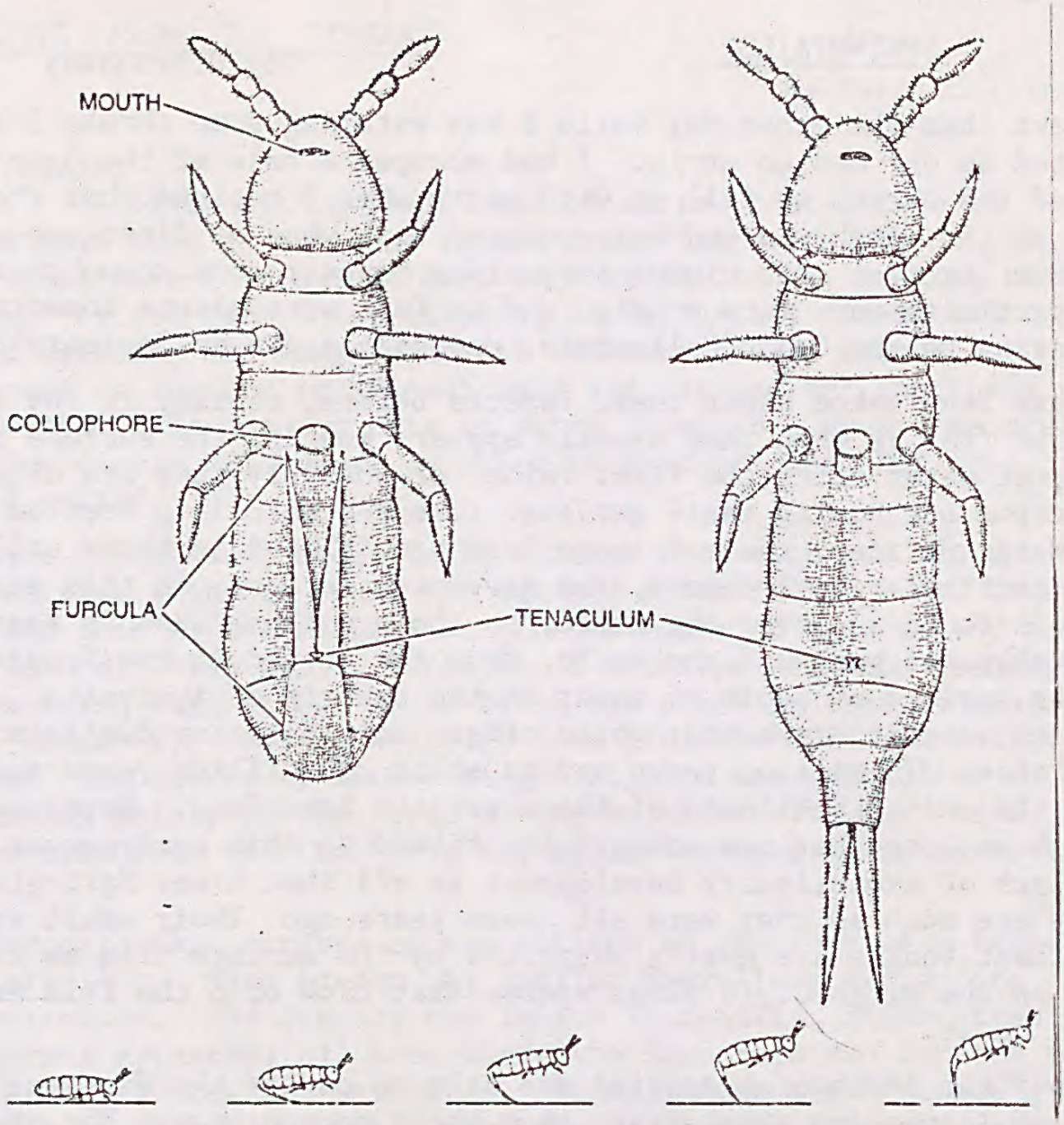
by G.Broadway

I met them the other day while I was watering some shrubs I have planted on our median strip. I had scooped a hole at the base of one of the shrubs to fill it with water when I noticed that the surface of the water was suddenly covered with what at first appeared to be a layer of ash; closer inspection however soon showed that the ash particles were very mobile, and in fact were minute insects belonging to the Order Collembola, commonly known as Springtails.

I have been asked about these insects before, usually in the Autumn, becuase that is when they usually appear, coating the surface of pools of water after the first rains, or possibly they are observed by people out hosing their gardens. Like the Whirligig Beetles and the Water Strider, these insects have specialised in their utilisation of a particular environment, the air-water surface. As this environment is found all over the world, so too are these insects found in virtually all parts of the world, from the Arctic to the Tropics,and on the surface of pools of water in the deserts of Australia. Some species inhabit freshwater while others are saltwater dwellers. From about 375 million years ago to about 250 million years ago, they were the only inhabitants of the water-air interface. Never more than 9 mm long they are wonderfully fitted to this environment, hence the lack of evolutionary development in all that time, Springtails today are much as they were all those years ago. Their small water-repellent bodies are easily supported by the surface film as they feed on the microscopic plant spores that blow onto the film and float about on it.

Only the freshwater species are able to employ the distinctive mode of locomotion which gives them their common name. The abdominal tip of the body is broadened, almost like that of a beaver's tail. The insect can slap this "springtail" against the surface film to zap itself away from potential danger. The springing mechanism works as follows. The abdominal tip is curled forward and held in place under the body by a special structure rather like a mousetrap. The tip is held tensed against the catch so that when released it whacks against the water tossing the owner into the air. Such a spring may fling the springtail as far as 15 body lengths.

The springtail can live as it does on the water surface because it is light and its body is almost entirely non-wettable. But there is one part of the anatomy which is wettable and serves an important function. This is a stumpy organ called the collophore which is located on the abdomen near the hind legs. The insect presses this organ to the water surface and because it is wettable it serves as an anchor, preventing the insect from being blown about by the wind. Another function of the collophore may be as a means of taking in water and the discharge of waste products.



The abdominal tip of the body of a Springtail is widened into an appendage, usually forked, which is called a furcula. This is coiled under the body and held in place under tension by a structure called the tenacutum. When the tenacutum is released the furcula slaps against the water surface, hurling the animal forwards like a miniature flea.

A century ago a Swedish naturalist, Charles de Geer, observed the behaviour of some springtails which he had confined in a deep dish of water. He reported that several times a day the animals would crawl down to the bottom of the aquarium where they appeared to suck juices from the submerged plants there. However to this day it is not yet known just how they penetrate the water surface or whether they do so each year to hibernate in the mud or soil at the bottom of their pond.

Ref. Leach.J.A. Australian Nature Studies
Scientific American.

BUFFALO '86

I wasn't too sure what I'd find when we got to Mount Buffalo this year after the fires last year, although a friend from Myrtleford who'd helped fight them said that most of the fire was around the sides of the mountain and over the Horn.

There'd been some fire near the camp, but not in it. One of the results has been the appearance this season of thousands of Grass Trigger Plants, the bright pink flowers making a lovely show under the scorched trees.

The Lyrebird we'd watched four years ago was still there, but, because our camp was further over, we didn't see him this time, but we did see, and photograph, the older bird down near the Lake. The edge of his territory had been burnt, but, as a local from the Chalet , who was camping at Lake Catani with friends, told me, it had actually been a "good fire", more like a cool burn, and though shrubs had been burnt, the trees weren't too badly burnt.

We went on a number of walks , from an hour or so, to five hours when we went over past the Giants Causeway to Wild Dog Plain and down past the reservoir and Crystal Brook. The fire had been through the area from near the Giants Causeway on, and some of the places were unrecognisable as we had walked through thick scrub four years ago between the Causeway and the plain.

However, all the burnt areas seem to be recovering well except the patch of Mountain Ash on the View Point walk. The fire must have been much hotter there, and much of the ground is still bare. Sime of the trees look very sick, though some tops are unburnt, but Mountain Ash has a reputation of not standing up well to fire.

We didn't go right up to the Horn which was the worst affected area, but we did go to nearby Dicksons Falls along the Nature Walk. There were signs of the fire on the snowgrass plain there, and in the snowgums as we got nearer to the Falls. At the Falls themselves there was quite an area burnt, but not too severely - though it looked very different from last time! It was here we were able to watch at quite close range a Pilot Bird and another little bird which I'd identified as a Field Wren, for several minutes as they caught grubs and bashed them to death.

We saw a good number of birds during the week besides these- Striated and Brown and, I think, Yellow Thornbills (they're on the official list), White eared and Yellow faced Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebills, Red Wattlebirds (would you believe?!), Flame Robins, Grey and Pied Currawongs, Little Ravens, Crimson Rosellas, Kookaburras, White-browed Scrub Wrens, Little Black Cormorant, Black Duck, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, White throated Tree-creeper, Striated Pardelote, Grey-backed Silvereye, and a Peregrine Falcon.

As for the flowers, and there were masses, including thousands of Buttercups and Billy Buttons, I think my favourite find was the Summer Greenhoods not far from our tent, which were not even on the plant list, closely followed by the Tasman Lily. I couldn't list them all, but here is a list of those which caught my eye and interest - Yellow Rush Lily, Silver Daisy, Orange and Waddell's Everlastings (neither quite out), Twin Flower Knawel (when I saw its natural habitat I wasn't surprised

mine didn't survive!), Candle Heath (Richea continentis), Leafy Bossea, (a shrub with small, shining, most attractive leaves and small, yellow pea flowers), Long leaf Hovea, Bootlace bush, Mountain Shaggy Pea (lots of it), Alpine Mint Bush, Monkey Mint Bush (endemic, P. walterii), Violet Kunzea, Rosey Baekea (Baekea rammosisima - a most attractive prostrate shrub), Buffalo Sallee (endemic), Burgan - masses in full flower about half way up the mountain-(Leptospermum phylicoides), Small-flower Grevillea, just near the tent, Alpine Boronia, lots of Ivy-leaf and Purple violets (we didn't see the tiny violet this time, but the fire had been through the area where it grew), and two species of Phebalium just near the tent (and elsewhere). The one recorded on the plant list is P. squamulosum sups. alpina, but the other, another yellow one, but paler with different leaves, isn't on the list.

There were many more of course, and many still to come into flower. All those i've mentioned , unless otherwise stated, were in flower at the time

Rita M.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. Inc

Annual statement of receipts and expenditure for the year 1985

RECEIPTS		PAYMENTS		
Balance carried forward	$ 2.26	Bank Charges		$ 1.27
Sale of Newsletters	3.57	Supper supplies		28.29
Raffles	47.10	Printing Newsletter		149.30
Excursion donations	29.50	Petty cash (Sec)		20.00
Subscriptions	187.00	Subscriptions:		
Suppers	53.79	V.F.N.C.A	$2.00	
Sale of seedlings	4.80	W.V.F.N.C.A	20.00	22.00
Sale of Plants	2.14	Australia Post Box		12.81
Sale of beans	.20	Corporate Affairs		20.00
Sale of Bird Lists	6.50	Name Card materials		34.48
Sale of car-stickers	4.40	Car stickers		7.50
	$341.26			$341.26

S. Bruton

Subscriptions 1986

The committee recommends these subscriptions for the 1986 year

Pensioner/student	$3	Single	$5
Family	$8	Supporting	$12

FOUNDATION MEMBERS OF C.F.N.C.

This February the Castlemaine Field Naturalist's Club celebrates its seventh anniversary, following a meeting called by Mr R. Bradfield. Those at the meeting, according to the attendance record were

Mr R. Bradfield
Mr G. Broadway
Mr G. Sitch
Mr R. Renn
Mr E. Perkins
Mrs C. McDougall
Mr D. J. Walker
Mr B. Golding
Mrs C. Baldwin
Miss F. McIver
Mr J. Bradfield
Mr L. Bransgrove
Mr J. M. Winterbottom
Mrs R. Mills
Mr H. Parnaby
Miss J. Chapman
Mr F. Aulich
Mr C. Every
Mrs D. Bransgrove
Mrs J. Buntine
Mr A. Carr
Mr J. Winterbottom

Apologies were received from

Mrs E. Cattock
Miss D. Bond
Mrs Carr
Mr J. Llewelyn
MrsF. Jenkin
Mrs Manuel
Mr F. Meyer
Dr& Mrs Peters
Mr F. Blake

During the first twelve months the financial members of the Club were, as listed in the Treasurer's records

Miss Joyce Chapman
Max & Ruth Winterbottom
Joan Buntine
D. Walker
J. & C. McCarty
Dr & Mrs Peters
Rita Mills
Chris Every
Ruth & Sam Warne
G. Sitch
Mr & Mrs B. Singleton & Family
Mr & Mrs F. Blake
Jim Newell
Merlyn & Rosemary Bond
Jim Williams
Mr & Mrs Grant
Frank Meyer
Lloyd & Dot Bransgrove
E. Cattach
Miss F.McIver
Ronald Renn
A. Carr
Ern Perkins
J. Llewelyn
G. Broadway
Mrs DorisBoyer
Mrs Barbara Whitley
John Anderson
Mrs Evans
Geoff & Geraldine Harris
Vera McMeiken

These membership figures include family members, so in a number of cases husbands or wives, or members of the family are not given here. Only about 20% of the 1976 members are still to be found as regualar attenders at meetings

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Excursions leave promptly at the times shown.

Fri 14 Feb THE KIMBERLEYS. Maggie Oliver will tell us about her visit to the top half of Western Australia with the Bird Observers' Club, and show some of the BOC slides taken on the trip. This is also the annual meeting. 8p.m. at the High School. This is the Annual Meeting.

Sat 15 Feb 1986. POND LIFE AND WATER BIRDS at the North Harcourt Reservoir. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30.

Fri 14 Mar WESTERN AUSTRALIA. George Broadway will tell us about his visit to the bottom half of the West, and show some of his slides.

Sat 15 Mar BELLS SWAMP & LAANACOORIE. A summer excursion to look at birds. Leave SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 p.m.

Fri 11 Apr Speaker to be confirmed

Sun 13 Apr CHEWTON GOLD RELICS with Ken McKimmie. SEC at 1.30 p.m.

Sun 12 Oct SALOMON GULLY & JACKASS FLAT with Bendigo F.N.C. Leave SEC at 9.25, or Saamon Gully at 10.00

The Australia Day Bird Count

We decided to take part in the Australia Day Bird count. In this, residents in cities count the birds seen over their urban block between 7.00 and 8.00 a.m. We were away on the Monday, so decided to count on the Saturday instead.

It was harder to do than expected. Apart from the early rising on a holiday, there were lots of birds flying over the block, fairly low at speeds far to great for me to identify them. As well, there was a constant movement to and fro of our resident sparrows, turtle doves and blackbirds. However, this is the list

Feral Pigeon 3
Greenfinch 2
Silver Eye 2
Starling 8,1
Red Wattlebird
Blackbird 1,1,2,1,1,1,5,1
House Sparrow 1,1,1,1,2,1,1,3,1
Musk Lorikeet 1,1,2,2,2,4,4,4,1,4,2,4,2
Indian Turtle-dove 1,1,3

E.P.