



The Whistler

Newsletter of the Ringwood Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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From the Editor's couch

Preparing the April newsletter reminds me that Easter is just around the corner which means two things: lots of Easter eggs on the menu, and that summer has passed for another year. It also means that we're already 1/3 of the way through 2017! Time does not slow down.

While summer didn't have the extreme heat we are all used to – Melbourne didn't record one day above 40° – per the BOM website, summer was in fact hotter than average. I think we all struggled on some of the hotter nights, with one night in December only dropping to 27°. The lack of extreme temperatures also gave us higher humidity, which we experienced recently on the autumn camp-out to Alexandra, which felt more like it was in the tropics!

Alas it was a dry summer, with rain only coming in short, infrequent spells. It will be interesting to see how the fungi season fares this year – will the ground be warm and moist enough; will it be an early or short season? Upper Yarra Reservoir is a favourite location for the Club for fungi foraging and we'll be heading there in May – previous visits have totalled over 80 species.

It will be spring before we know it and the Club is hosting a special event this year – the SEANA spring camp-out at the Little Desert. It's a wonderful area and our sub-committee is in full swing to make this a great event. You can check out a report on the SEANA autumn camp on page 12.

Jack Airey
Editor



In January, we enjoyed our "Breakfast with the Birds" at O'Donohue Picnic Ground in the Dandenongs. We were lucky to find something special that morning. Find out what it was on Page 10.

Contents	
From the Editor's couch	1
Member News	2
Life Members	3
Out and About	5
Member's Articles	14
Appendix - sighting lists	17



"... to further the study of Natural History in all its branches"

Member News

Welcome to our new members - **Rob Dunlop** and **Pam Baragwanath**.

Vale - Doug & Ella Thomas

In November 2016, we lost two truly valued Club and Honorary Life Members in Doug and Ella Thomas.

Doug and Ella joined the Ringwood Field Naturalists Club in 1966. At our 50th Anniversary of the Club both Doug and Ella mentioned that they joined the Club as they "thought they might learn more about ferns". This they did, extending their knowledge and understanding of ferns to become our local experts. Their interest in nature also extended to birds and native plants especially orchids - something they passed to their children. Graham has a keen interest in birds and is currently a member of the Club.



In the early years, Ella and Doug started to grow native plants and ferns in their garden. Ella would bring a small bunch of native flowers to each meeting. She would also often display various ferns from their garden or from field excursions, imparting knowledge about them to members. Some of her reports at our meetings involved Pardalotes or Scrub-wrens nesting in the fernery or garden shed.

By applying observation skills learned on field excursions, in the early 80's Ella achieved a plant sighting which the National Herbarium acknowledged as "very important". This was an extremely rare and threatened filmy fern most often found in far east Victoria. In The Atlas of Living Australia there are 12 recorded observations of the fern found from Labertouche through Gembrook, Warburton to Healesville. Ella accounts for 5 of these - an impressive record.

Doug was a great contributor to the Club. He spent 8 years on the Committee with 4 of those as President; helped the Junior Club until 1982; and for many years was responsible for the audio-visual equipment on meeting nights. Both Doug and Ella provided talks to the Club, assisted with the various Nature Shows and Wildflower Shows and together lead numerous excursions.

Both were awarded Honorary Life Membership, Doug in 1999 and Ella in 2007.



1972 - Ella Thomas with display at Camberwell

The Club was an important part of their lives, making many good and firm friends (both young and old) over the years. We will miss seeing Ella and Doug walking together along a ferny track, stick in one hand, holding hands with the other, always looking after each other. We will all miss them very much.

By Peter Rogers



"... to further the study of Natural History in all its branches"

Life Members

Honorary Life Membership is recognition by the Club of a member who exemplifies what could be considered the "best" qualities of being a Ringwood Field Naturalist. These include:

- **Commitment** to the Club over a long period of time,
- **Dedication** to the study or knowledge of Natural History, and the passing on of that knowledge,
- **Positive Representation** within the Club and in the wider community, among Field Naturalists and the general public,
- **Contribution** to the success of the Club - participation in activities and displaying leadership qualities.

Over the past 3 years the Club has awarded 5 Honorary Life Memberships to long-standing members who are wonderful field naturalists, with skills and expertise in multiple areas, and who have contributed to the success of the Club over many years.

Cecily Falkingham joined the Club in 1978. Cecily's first love of nature was fungi but she has become an accomplished naturalist across all fields. Cecily has led over 20 Club excursions and while not as active in the field nowadays, was a stalwart for the Club for over 30 years from the 1980's to the 2000's. Cecily was also instrumental in organising field care days – almost one a year – over this period. Cecily has led many new members to the Club and takes great joy in sharing knowledge with members – new and old alike. Cecily regularly contributes articles to the newsletter and photos and discussions at meetings.

Alison and Peter Rogers joined the Club in the 1970's as junior members, but it was from 1995 that they began to take pivotal roles in shaping the Club.

Peter joined the Committee in 1996 and the following year became Secretary and Program Manager. Alison joined the Committee in 2003, taking over the Program Manager role, which she has held for the last 14 years. Peter became President in 2003 and is the Club's longest-serving President, having served in the role 8 years out of the last 14. He is also the longest-serving Secretary. Peter has been our main speaker on 9 occasions and travels widely giving talks for other clubs and groups. Alison organises our field care days and regularly writes articles for the local newspaper to raise awareness of the Club.



Cecily Falkingham and Peter & Alison Rogers with their Honorary Life Membership certificates. October 2014



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Together they have led over 30 excursions, sometimes running 4 excursions in one year. Alison and Peter have led over 10 camp-outs. They have taken key roles in other operations of the Club, especially the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Anniversary celebrations, the 2008 SEANA camp-out, organising library displays and working on the Maroondah Festival, when the Club was involved with that. Peter works on Club history and records, documenting past events and happenings, so this information is not lost. He also played a key role in creation of the RFNC history DVD, sorting and labelling hundreds of photos.

Hazel and Alan Veevers joined the Club in 1992. They are well-known throughout the Club for their positivity and enthusiasm which they bring to meetings, excursions and camp-outs. Hazel and Alan have introduced many new members to the Club and often bring visitors on meeting nights. They are especially mindful of new members and beginners, always encouraging and helping.

Alan joined the Committee in 2002 and his first pioneering initiative was to setup the Club website, which he managed for 10 years. Hazel joined the Committee in 2005, by which time Alan was serving as President. Hazel became Secretary in 2007, and then became President in 2009. Alan has been Vice President for a number of years. Hazel and Alan are exemplary speakers at meetings, and always share their own photos from their many travels both in Australia and overseas. Together they have lead over 20 excursions and camp-outs. They are expert birders and lead the monthly beginner's excursions for BirdLife, raising the profile of our Club in that community.

Cecily, Alison, Peter, Hazel and Alan have contributed to the leadership, growth, success and high standard of the Club over many years, and continue to do so today. We are very lucky and tremendously grateful for having them.



Alan & Hazel Veevers being presented with their Life Membership certificates by President Peter Rogers. October 2016



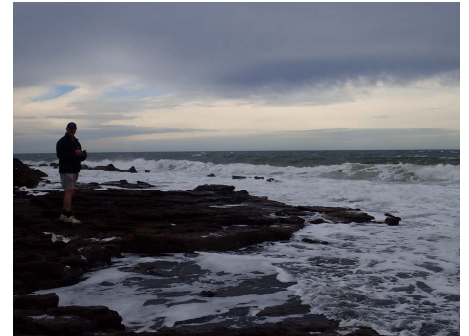
Out and About

Royal Beach, Mornington & Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve

Sunday 16th October 2016

Leader: Jack Airey

13 of our most hardy members headed to Mornington for what was planned as a pleasant rock-pooling excursion. The weather had other ideas, however, forecasting grey skies, high winds and 90% chance of rain! This potentially persuaded a few excursion regulars to opt for a sleep-in.



Challenging conditions for rock-pooling

Meeting at Royal Beach, the good news was that it was reasonably mild. Unfortunately, the strong onshore westerly had turned our perfect low tide into a high tide - most of the rock-pools were underwater with waves crashing over them! Nevertheless, we headed out onto the rocks finding a few cushion stars, chitons, anemones and a crab which was delicately coaxed from its hiding spot (and then carefully returned).

After having morning tea sheltering above the beach amongst the casuarinas, we decided to head to the Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve, which was only 15 minutes away, for an afternoon walk.

Arriving at the reserve, we walked the grassy areas on the western side and were overwhelmed by the number of Sun Orchids. The majority were only buds but some were open enough for identification and included *Thelymitra flexuosa* (Twisted Sun Orchid), *Thelymitra ixioides* (Spotted Sun Orchid) and *Thelymitra rubra* (Salmon Sun Orchid).



Thelymitra flexuosa



Thelymitra ixioides



Thelymitra rubra

Adding to the mix were several *Microtis* sp. (Onion Orchid), *Caleana major* (Large Duck Orchid) and *Diuris punctata* (Purple Diuris/Donkey Orchid), which is now severely restricted and a Langwarrin specialty. We visited Langwarrin in October 2015 to see the Purple Diuris and we noted that there were more individual plants in flower the previous year. Native orchid flowering can vary from year to year, and even location to location, depending on a range of factors - such is the intricacies of these beautiful natural gems.

After lunch, members departed to head home after what was a challenging, yet very rewarding day out, illustrating that field naturalists need to be adaptable to the weather and in almost any conditions there can be something special to find in nature.

By Jack Airey

Spring Camp-out to Portland

Friday 28th to Sunday 30th October 2016

Leaders: Alison & Peter Rogers

Over the weekend 28th and 29th October, twenty-two members enjoyed a weekend away based at Narrawong (15 minutes east of Portland). Those that arrived early on Friday afternoon enjoyed a walk to the Sawpit Picnic Area in Mt Clay State Forest. A leisurely stroll through the stringybarks (recovering from bushfires) ended up at a lookout which looked out over the Portland Bay with views of the islands. Although not a lot was in flower, *Bossiaea prostrata*, *Pratia pedunculata*, *Dillwynia sericea*, *Stackhousia monogyna* and *Acacia verticillata* all provided some colour in the bushland. We couldn't locate many orchids, but the best find was *Caladenia clarkiae* (Clark's Caladenia). A few birds kept us company with Grey Currawongs, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Gang-gang Cockatoos to name a few. Just prior to leaving we found a few Hyacinth Orchids (*Dipodium* sp.) starting to sprout.

On a beautiful sunny Saturday morning, we started our day with a quick trip to the Cape Nelson Lighthouse. Two interesting plants around the lighthouse were *Exocarpus syrticola* (Coast Ballart) and *Lasiopetalum schultenii* (Drooping Velvet-bush). Just prior to leaving most members were fortunate to see a Rufous Bristlebird which inhabit the area.

Our next stop was at Cape Bridgewater to look at the Blowhole and the Petrified Forest (see photo). The Petrified Forest is only a short walk from the car park and members were amazed at the crusty sandstone that had formed tree trunk-like structures. The main plant covering the harsh ground was *Leucophyta brownii* (Cushion Bush). Lunch was held at the pleasant Bridgewater Lakes. Some of the members then walked through the sand hills and were lucky to find a lone specimen of *Pterostylis cucullata* (Leafy Greenhood).



Heading back towards Portland, we had a short stop at Bats Ridge Reserve where we found Onion orchids (*Microtis* sp.), *Thelymitra pauciflora* (Slender Sun-orchid), *Scaevola albida* (Coast Fan-flower) and *Pimelea serpyllifolia* (Thyme Rice-flower). A lone Koala was also seen in a Eucalypt.



Our last stop was to the Point Danger gannet rookery. We were fortunate to have a Portland FNC member (Robert) meet us there and using his key, we could pass through the external gate and into the Gannet rookery enclosure, allowing us to get quite close to the nesting birds without disturbing them. Staying back behind a wire fence, we were able to get good close-up looks at these beautiful birds and take lots and lots of photographs.

Saturday night our traditional BBQ was held, with all sharing salads and desserts. It's a time to talk about the day and what we had seen. A good social event enjoyed by all.

The weather for Sunday took a dramatic turn - instead of sunshine we were met with overcast skies and strong winds. This forced a change of plans from our proposed itinerary. Members of the Portland FNC offered to show us around for the day. Meeting in Portland, we headed to Mt Richmond where we spent some time on the Ocean View Walk. A good find was a few *Leporella fimbriata* (Hare Orchids).



". . . to further the study of Natural History in all its branches"

Our next stop was at Swan Lake, having viewed along the way "moving" sand dunes from a distance. The highlight here was the antics of some members jumping away when a copperhead snake suddenly moved out from a prostrate bush of *Kunzea pomifera* they were all studying.

We headed to Nelson as our designated lunch spot but the weather flared up and we were subjected to wild and wet conditions. We approached the local information centre to let us lunch in their building, which they said was OK, and we were all very grateful for the respite.

Before heading back towards Portland, we had a very breezy stop at the Beach Road Car park overlooking Livingstone Island and Mud Lake. There were a few birds on the water along with kangaroos sheltering from the wind in the surrounding lakeside vegetation.

Our return trip took us through the Cobboboonee National Park. Here we had a couple of quick stops including the dam at the Ink Pot where two unusual plants, *Ixodia achillaeoides* (Sand Ixodia) and *Conospermum mitchellii* (Victorian smokebush) are found.

To finish our weekend, we dined together at the Portland Bowling Club/RSL on Sunday evening. By the amount of comments and thankyou's we received, we think that although it was a long way to travel for a weekend, it was well worth the trip. An area that many had not been to before.

By Alison & Peter Rogers



Club members at the October Camp-out to Portland



Lake Mountain

Sunday 6th November 2016

Leader: Judith Cooke

Fourteen members found themselves confronted with quite challenging weather conditions prevailing at Gerraty's when we met at 10:00 am, with rain, freezing gale force winds and thick fog, as well as small patches of icy snow along the trails (see photo). Fortunately, the forecast was correct and there was steady improvement during the morning.



Flame Robin (ED)

When we arrived at the Snow Gauge, we were greeted with an expanse of yellow across Echo Flat, as the *Leionema phyllicifolium* was in full flower and looking magnificent. The cold had delayed the flowering of the *Hovea montana*, but we found a few flowers of that as well. The Swamp Heath, *Epacris paludosa* was beginning to flower in the boggy areas. Plants of *Chiloglottis valida* were found at The Camp. Several species of fungi were photographed. Birds were scarce, but the Flame Robin provided a good sighting.

We accomplished the circuit walk along Echo Flat Trail to The Camp and back along Snowgum Trail to the Snow Gauge. From there we took a shortcut on the Snowshoe Trail south to meet Home Trail and returned to the cars in time for lunch at 1:00 pm.



Leionema phyllicifolia



Acacia obliquinervia

After lunch, we inspected the recently opened Leadbeater's Trail between the toboggan runs and noted the remnants of the fires from both 1939 and 2009 as well as *Leucopogon gelidus*, first found in flower there in September 2016.

We relocated to Snowy Hill and negotiated the Bjarne K Dahl Memorial Boardwalk, where a small skink kept an eye on us from his vantage point on a post, before concluding the day with afternoon tea.

By Judith Cooke (additional photo by Eleanor Dilley)





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Outdoor Meeting - Bellbird Picnic Area, Yarra Bend

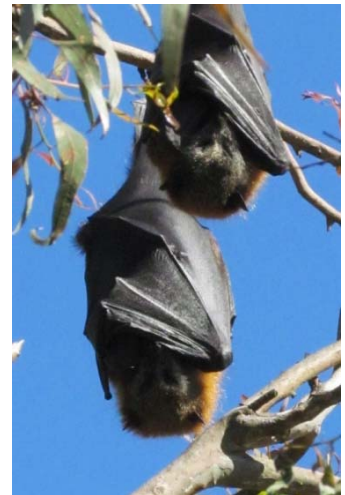
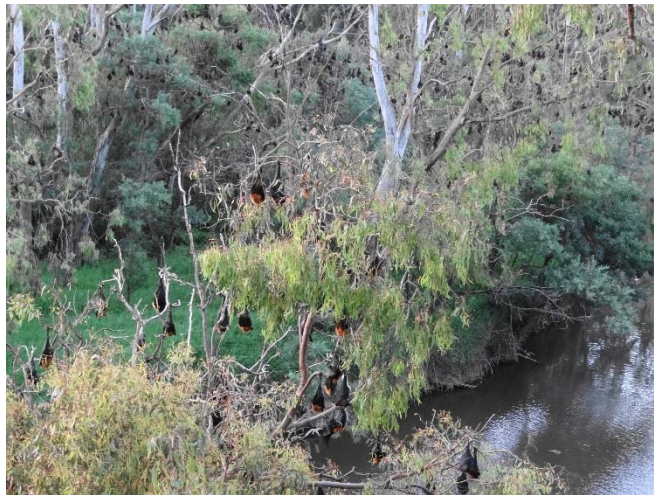
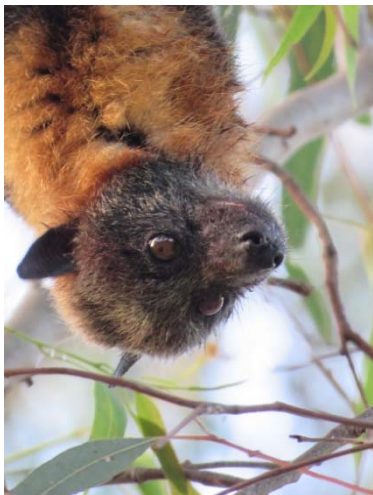
Wednesday 11th January 2017

Leaders: Alison & Peter Rogers

The Club's first meeting of the New Year was our traditional outdoor meeting, this year held at the Bellbird Picnic Area at Yarra Bend. We met firstly for a picnic tea, catching up with each other after the Christmas break. A short general meeting was held in the picnic area to the sounds of the local birds and of course the flying foxes.



With the conclusion of the meeting, members moved to the lookout area to get a good vantage point. We could overlook the colony of Grey headed flying foxes in the trees on both sides of the river. As the sun set and the arrival of dusk the flying foxes started to become more active and we saw hundreds/thousands leaving the colony and fly upstream. There are over 30,000 in this colony. The grey-headed flying fox is the largest bat in Australia. They have a dark-grey body with a light-grey head and a reddish-brown neck collar of fur.



Having lived in Wantirna for a long time we know that they fly out this far to find food, even travelling 50km each way in a night. You may have heard their screechy, squeaky voice outside in the fruit trees feeding and fluttering around. They also feed on the pollen and nectar in the flowering trees.

By Alison & Peter Rogers (additional photos - Eleanor Dilley, Don Redman, Jack Airey)





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"Breakfast with the Birds" at O'Donohue Picnic Ground

Sunday 15th January 2017

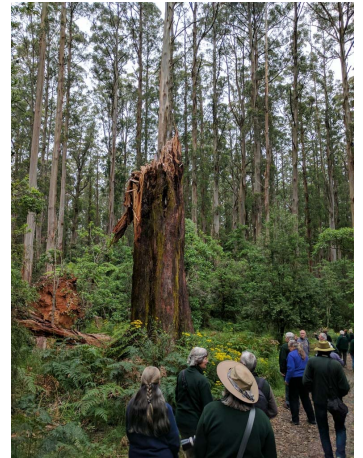
Leaders: Eeva & David Hewitt

We originally scheduled to have breakfast at Badger Weir, however due to storm damage to the facilities there, this excursion had to be re-located. Instead, 22 members and visitors arrived shortly after 7am for a barbecue breakfast at O'Donohue Picnic Ground in Sherbrooke Forest. After some threateningly hot weather early in the week, the day arrived pleasantly cool and overcast.



Rufous Fantails

After breakfast, we set off for a short walk looping past the Sherbrooke Falls. The leaders reported good sightings of Lyrebirds and Rufous Fantails during a visit the previous week. Both birds were elusive today though, but we did finally get good views of two Lyrebirds and a brief glimpse of one Rufous Fantail. The twitchers among the group managed a total of 15 birds.



Storm damage present in Sherbrooke Forest

The final highlight was a single orchid - *Prasophyllum flavum* (Yellow Leek-orchid).



Prasophyllum flavum - Yellow Leek-orchid
The centre of attention of our members
from page 1.

By Eeva & David Hewitt (additional photo by Jack Airey)



Newport Lakes and Jawbones Reserve

Saturday 11th February 2017

Leaders: Hazel & Alan Veevers

Eighteen members enjoyed perfect weather conditions with mild temperatures and light winds for the February excursion. Setting out from the car park to walk around Newport Lakes, it was pleasing to see how well the vegetation had grown since the Club's last visit. Some of the many Eucalyptus species were flowering which, along with numerous Acacia species not in flower, were hard to identify. New Holland Honeyeaters and Willie Wagtails were the most commonly seen birds, whilst an immature Nankeen Night Heron and an Australian Hobby provided the most interest.

The Lakes were quite full and several species of water birds were to be seen, including Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebes and a flock of Little Black Cormorants which flew in gracefully as the members watched. A short walk was then taken to the arboretum where it was challenging trying to identify the non-indigenous trees. Lunch was taken in the picnic area where a Spotted Pardalote provided the entertainment by gathering insects from cobwebs in the rafters.



Australian Hobby (ED)



Little Black Cormorant

The group then drove down Maddox Road to the shore to look out over the Bay. It was approaching high tide and we unwittingly disturbed a mixed flock of Grey Teal and Australian Shovelers as we walked to the hide. A variety of birds were resting on the breakwater, including Pelicans, Crested Terns and Pied Cormorants. A Greenshank was the only wader seen in this location. The members then walked back up Maddox Road and into Jawbones Reserve and were pleased to see more Greenshanks plus Red-kneed Dotterels in the ponds on the saltmarsh.

In the pond adjoining the new housing development there was plenty to see with lots of ducks including Pink-eared and Hardheads. Four Royal Spoonbills were on a small island and young Dusky Moorhens were very noisy in their demands for food. Greenfinches and Australian Reed-Warblers were at the edge of the water. Continuing eastward through the reserve a flock of Black-winged Stilts rested along the edge of the middle pond, with Little Pied and Pied Cormorants and Black Swans. On the return journey, additional sightings were Blue-billed Duck and Peregrine Falcon.



Blue-billed Duck



Pink-eared Duck

A grand total of 59 species was recorded for the day, a remarkable number considering the close proximity of dense housing in both locations.

By Hazel & Alan Veevers (additional photo by Eleanor Dilley)



"... to further the study of Natural History in all its branches"

SEANA autumn camp-out to Sale

Friday 17th to Monday 20th March 2017

Hosted by: Sale & District Field Naturalists Club and Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club

The South East Australian Naturalist Association (SEANA) is a collective body, of which the RFNC is a member, that brings Field Naturalist clubs together twice a year for spring and autumn camp-outs. The camp-outs are hosted by member clubs who organise central facilities, guest speakers and excursions to local bushland areas over the course of a weekend, typically Friday afternoon to Monday morning. The camp-outs are an excellent opportunity to meet field naturalists from other clubs while visiting interesting areas of the state.



Bird-watching at Sale Common

The autumn camp-out in March was based at Sale in Gippsland and was a joint venture between the two local clubs of the area - Sale & District Field Naturalists Club and Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club. I took the opportunity to register for the camp-out for two reasons: to spend time in Gippsland to learn more about its natural history, and to get some first-hand notes on how these camp-outs work to better participate in our own SEANA camp-out in October this year (the only other SEANA camp-out I have attended was back in 2009!).



Freckled Duck (in the centre of Sale)

Arriving at the Sale racecourse on Friday afternoon I was quickly registered at the check-in desk, issued my showbag full of local brochures and information, and then perusing the available excursions. There were full-day and half-day excursions on Saturday and Sunday, and morning activities on Monday as well, ranging from historical walks through Sale, boat cruises, bird-watching walks and bug-hunting expeditions.

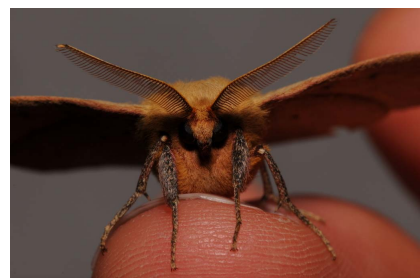
Once enrolled in some excursions, I settled back with a coffee and a biscuit or two, having a chat with some members from other clubs. Each evening, a delicious meal at the racecourse was followed by a guest speaker – birds of the local area, the Burranan dolphin and Citizen Science at Beware Reef. There was also “mothing” taking place each night for those who were interested, and adventurous, in the pitch-black darkness of nearby bushland!



Dindymus versicolor (Harlequin Bug)

I got to spend the full weekend seeing the sights of the area, saw some terrific birds, bugs and creepy-crawlies, and generally had a great time mingling with like-minded people. Our Club is hosting the next SEANA camp-out at the Little Desert on the weekend Friday 13th to Monday 16th October 2017. If you are attending, please remember our Camp-out Committee are looking for helping hands to make this a terrific camp-out.

By Jack Airey



Checking out the mothing sheet; an Ichneumon wasp; possibly *Anthela acuta*



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2017 SEANA Spring Camp-out Little Desert

Friday 13th – Monday 16th October 2017

Hosted by: Ringwood Field Naturalists Club



The Ringwood Field Naturalists Club invites you to join them for the 2017 SEANA Spring Camp-out in the Little Desert. This will be based at the Little Desert Lodge which is 16 km from Nhill. The camp-out will run from the afternoon of Friday 13th October through to the morning of Monday 16th October.

Full and half-day excursions will be provided including:

- Stringybark Walk,
- Nhill Lake,
- Glenlee Flora & Fauna Reserve,
- Kiata Flora Reserve,
- Keith Hateley Nature Walk,
- Harrow Rd,
- Mt Arapiles,
- Snape Reserve.



Evening meals (Friday-Saturday-Sunday) will be held at the Little Desert Lodge restaurant followed by keynote speakers. Accommodation is at Little Desert Lodge or in nearby Nhill. Enquiries can be directed to Ray Wall or Eleanor Dilley.





Member's Articles

Spring in the Mullum Mullum Valley

One of the reasons Reg and I chose to live in Mitcham (now Donvale) was the bushland within walking distance from our home. We could even see it from our lounge windows and I knew immediately this was to be our home. Many years later it was to be a long ten-year struggle for myself and dozens of others to save this lovely area from being destroyed to make way for the Eastern Freeway extension. It was certainly worth the effort, not only for the animals but also the wildflowers.

The Ecological Vegetation Class (E.V.C) is Valley Heathy Forest which is fast disappearing from the Eastern suburbs. A recent two-hour stroll revealed some of the wildflowers just beginning to bloom: Early Nancy, Milkmaids, Chocolate Lily, Love Creeper, Blue Pincushions, Everlastings, Bulbine Lilies, Trigger plants and the ONE remaining Showy Violet (*Viola betonicifolia*), just to name a few. The Yellow Box was a mass of flowers attracting the Honeyeaters and in this area, is the last remaining Red Box. I live in hope that this tree will survive and spread seed.



Red Box Eucalypt



Fields of orchids

The orchids seen were: *Glossodia major* (Waxlip Orchid) in large showy patches, *Pterostylis melagramma* (Tall Greenhood), *Pterostylis pedunculata* (Maroonhood), *Pterostylis nutans* (Nodding Greenhood) in carpets in several locations, *Pterostylis curta* (Blunt Greenhood), *Lyperanthus suaveolens* (Brown Beaks), *Caladenia carnea* (Pink Fingers), *Caladenia parva* (Greencomb Spider Orchid), *Diruris pardina* (Donkey Orchid) and *Diuris orientis* (Wallflower Orchid). Ten orchids in our special valley in Spring, with a variety of Sun Orchids yet to bloom, late Spring and Summer will yield more flowers as each season brings its own treasures, a Naturalist's paradise.



Glossodia major – Waxlip Orchid



Diuris orientis – Wallflower Orchid

By Cecily Falkingham

A Trip to Lake Murdeduke

On looking at the website "Birdline" I noticed several entries for Lake Murdeduke. I like knowing where places are in Victoria and so looked up its location. It is another of the lakes near Colac, a place we visited as a group a few years ago, though this is perhaps the eastern most lake in the group. It lies about 11 km north west of Winchelsea, north of the Winchelsea-Cressy Road.

According to the reports there was a very interesting bird at Lake Murdeduke – a Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Being bird nerds and wanting to see something a little more exotic than a Magpie, Inta and I decided to go there for a day trip to try to find and photograph the visiting Sandpiper. This little wader had not been seen in Victoria since 1992. Australia lies thousands of kilometres away from its normal southern summer feeding grounds which are located in the Argentinian Pampas of South America!



Buff-breasted Sandpiper

The bird breeds in northern Alaska and Canada. The young only remain in their nest for one day after hatching and tend to forage for themselves almost immediately, though the mother does remain near protecting and feeding them arctic honeybees. The birds feed by sight pouncing on insects and other invertebrates. They migrate through the Great Plains flyway crossing the Caribbean via the Greater and Lesser Antilles. They are rarely found on the coast but more usually on airfields and golf courses and these days even in ploughed fields. Due to hunting in the late 1800's and early 1900's their numbers were severely depleted and even today their numbers are declining perhaps due to changes in land use along their migration route. Although their main non-breeding destination is Argentina, they are not considered rare in Europe nor the UK. They have been recorded in Australia only on 8 different occasions.

On arriving near Lake Murdeduke we were unsure of how to access the Lake but were directed to the entrance by a carload of other birders. We travelled 3 to 4 kilometres across mostly dry lake bed following wheel marks left by previous visitors. A birdwatcher at the end of the track pointed the bird out. It was easy to find as unlike the Curlew Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints which feed on the water's edge it was feeding in the samphire which was 10-20 meters from the water. Not wanting to disturb the bird, most photos I took of it were from 30 or 40 meters. Other uncommon birds we saw at the lake were a Ruff and a Pectoral Sandpiper and since our visit a Long-toed Stint has also been spotted there. More common waders were there in their thousands as well as other waterfowl. We felt it was a 2-hour journey well worth the effort.



The Buff-breasted Sandpiper with two Red-necked Stints



Morning tea at Lake Murdeduke

By Roger Needham



The Golden Orb Spider

Whilst walking in the Mullum Mullum Valley recently I found the large vertical web of the Golden Orb Spider (*Nephila edulis*). On either side of the web were a maze of strong supporting threads making the full distance of the web approximately one metre between supports. There are various species of *Nephila* and their range in Australia extends from Cape York to Southern Australia. The spider hung head downwards in the web. The 22mm (body length) female produces gold-coloured eggs and wraps them in a fluffy golden egg sac. The tiny 6/7mm male spider is often found on the outer edges of the web or even the edge of the support tree as, like many other spider species, he can end up as supper after mating, which takes place February to May. I have read that he sometimes quickly climbs onto the female's back if she is particularly aggressive.



The prey that had been consumed in the past were wrapped in silk and all lined up in a neat debris trail at the top of the web. This possibly consisted of insects such as: cicadas, bees, flies and moths. Birds such as Silvereyes, Wrens and even Finches have been known to become trapped in the extremely strong web.

Sometimes a number of smaller spiders of different species live on the far outer edges of the web and feed on insects that are overlooked by *Nephila*. It is possible the observer may think the small spiders are the male of the species. What I found very unusual about my find was there appeared to be another female only slightly smaller than the one on the centre of the web and I wondered if anyone else had observed this before. I returned the next day to try and find the male spider with no luck, the bushland in that area being a thick tangle of undergrowth.

I did see four Black-tailed Wallabies which scattered at my approach, meaning the pair I had been watching for some time had bred making my weekly walk in the valley more than worthwhile.

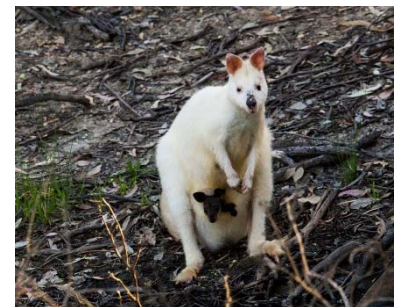
By Cecily Falkingham

A special wallaby

There is a very special female swamp wallaby living in the forest around Chiltern. She is almost completely white, instead of the normal black and brown. While not considered an albino because she shows signs of pigment on her nose and a dark patch on her back, it's not entirely clear why she is so white. It seems that even while being such a stand-out in the bush she can still evade predators in the area such as cats and foxes. She has even raised offspring the past two years – funnily enough both her joeys were brown!



Cecily Falkingham spoke with two locals, Roy and Eileen Collins, who work with a team of volunteers to maintain the forest and support the local Rangers. Eileen writes a newsletter and provided the photos for us to share. Certainly, something to keep an eye out for if visiting the area.



By Cecily Falkingham & Jack Airey

(photos – Neville Bartlett (top) & David Woolcock (bottom))



Appendix

Mornington & Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve bird list – 33 species

Compiled by Jack Airey

Mornington, Royal Beach		
Silver Gull	Great Cormorant	Little Raven
Pacific Gull	Pied Cormorant	Common Blackbird
Crested Tern	Red Wattlebird	Spotted Dove
Australian Pelican	Brown Thornbill	Common Starling
Langwarrin F&F Reserve		
Australian Wood Duck	Sacred Kingfisher	Spotted Pardalote
Pacific Black Duck	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Superb Fairy-wren
Straw-necked Ibis	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	Brown Thornbill
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Common Bronzewing	Grey Fantail
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	Red Wattlebird	Grey Shrike-thrush
Rainbow Lorikeet	White-eared Honeyeater	Australian Magpie
Eastern Rosella	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Grey Butcherbird
Laughing Kookaburra	Noisy Miner	Little Raven

"Breakfast with the Birds" at O'Donohue Picnic Ground bird list – 18 species

Compiled by Eeva & David Hewitt

Crimson Rosella	Grey Fantail	Laughing Kookaburra
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Rufous Fantail	Red Wattlebird
Australian King Parrot	Grey Shrike-thrush	Crescent Honeyeater
Brown Thornbill	Eastern Whipbird	Lewin's Honeyeater
White-browed Scrub-wren	Superb Lyrebird	Yellow-faced Honeyeater

Two of the orchids that can be seen at the Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve



Diuris punctata
Purple Donkey Orchid



Diuris sulphurea
Tiger Orchid



"... to further the study of Natural History in all its branches"

Newport Lakes (N) and Jawbone Reserve (J) bird list – 59 species

Compiled by Hazel & Alan Veevers

Species	N	J	Species	N	J
Black Swan	X	X	Black-winged Stilt		X
Australian Wood Duck	X	X	Red-capped Plover		X
Pink-eared Duck		X	Red-kneed Dotterel		X
Australasian Shoveler		X	Masked Lapwing		X
Grey Teal		X	Common Greenshank		X
Chestnut Teal		X	Crested Tern		X
Northern Mallard	X		Pacific Gull		X
Pacific Black Duck	X	X	Silver Gull	X	X
Hardhead	X	X	Rainbow Lorikeet	X	
Blue-billed Duck		X	Superb Fairy-wren	X	X
Australasian Grebe	X		Brown Thornbill	X	
Hoary-headed Grebe	X		Spotted Pardalote	X	
Rock Dove		X	White-plumed Honeyeater	X	
Spotted Dove	X	X	Little Wattlebird	X	
Crested Pigeon	X		Red Wattlebird	X	X
Little Pied Cormorant		X	New Holland Honeyeater	X	X
Great Cormorant		X	Australian Magpie	X	X
Little Black Cormorant	X	X	Willie Wagtail	X	X
Pied Cormorant		X	Little Raven	X	X
Australian Pelican		X	Magpie-lark	X	X
White-faced Heron		X	Australian Reed-Warbler	X	X
Nankeen Night-Heron	X		Silvereye	X	X
Australian White Ibis		X	Welcome Swallow	X	X
Royal Spoonbill		X	Common Blackbird	X	X
Australian Hobby	X		Common Starling	X	X
Peregrine Falcon		X	Common Myna	X	X
Purple Swamphen	X	X	House Sparrow	X	X
Dusky Moorhen	X	X	European Goldfinch		X
Eurasian Coot	X	X	Common Greenfinch		X
Australian Pied Oystercatcher		X	Totals (Grand Total = 59)	35	48