

The Ballarat Naturalist

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July 2020



Fungi Time

These were found on the La Gerche trail, Creswick in early June. Though many fungi were then deteriorating, this region is a prolific fungi spot.

Peppery coral fungus *Clavicornia piperata*.

This variety grows on logs and apparently has a hot peppery taste. It is also differentiated from the other coral fungi (which I saw elsewhere) by its distinctive branching pattern. Val Hocking



2 varieties of leathery fungi, *Stereum* on the same log



Fungi Time

This time of year is traditionally focussed on fungi, but 2020 has turned out to be a bumper year for possibly one of the most mysterious lifeforms we have.

The range of fungi is amazing and they provide the opportunity for a lifetime of study and enjoyment as they change in form and colour as they grow, and vary with the seasons and the environment generally. Here are some examples from our iNaturalist page. In fact, of the last 24 observations (as as 22/6), 21 of them are of fungi!



Green Skinhead

Cortinarius austrovenetus

Creswick

Elf Cups
Genus *Sarcoscypha*
Korweinguboora



Flame Fungus

Clavulinopsis sulcata

Korweinguboora

Images from last month—identified.

Thanks to our own fungi expert, Les Hanrahan, the fungi featured in last month's "Postcard from isolation", photographed by Carol Hall, have been identified.



Pholiota communis
(Family Strophariaceae)

Lactarius deliciosus
Saffron Milk Cap
(Family Russulaceae)



Cortinarius sinapicolor

Lal Lal

(All images by Les H.)

For more beautiful fungi,
visit the FNCB iNaturalist
page:

[https://www.inaturalist.org/
projects/](https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/)

How to do iNaturalist! (part 5) “Collection” Projects

iNaturalist offers a project type which makes the job of gathering observations data from observers easier than ever.

A “Collection” project is one that automatically draws in observations from any iNaturalist user who has joined the Project. As an observer uploads a new record, that record is automatically added to the Collection Project, if it fits the project’s criteria. So, for FNCB we have created a number of Collection Projects designed to capture your observations on Birds, Insects, Fungi, Plants and Native Orchids.

To find them, login to iNaturalist and go to “Community”, then “Projects” on the main menu. Go to the search panel and type in ‘FNCB’, then select the project that interests you. Click on “Join” in the top right hand corner of the banner.

You’ll notice that the Collection Projects are for Victoria only. I’m sure many of you might like to capture observations from around Australia, and we can certainly widen the criteria later.

« Projects

Search Projects

FNCB 1 - 5 Of 5 results

-  FNCB iNaturalist
This project has been created to allow members of Field Naturalists' Club c community. While the COVID-19 crisis is affecting the Club's ability to mee
-  FNCB - Birds of Victoria
A record of birds observed by members of the Field Naturalists' Club of Vic
-  FNCB - Plants of Victoria
A record of observations by members of the Field Naturalists' Club of Balla
-  FNCB - Insects of Victoria
A collection of insects observed by members of the Field Naturalists' Club
-  FNCB - Fungi of Victoria
A record of observations of fungi by members of the Field Naturalists' Club

The Rat Nats—Juniors Group

Another month rolls by and we seem to be closer to gathering outdoors in small groups. Our plans are to resume the Juniors group on Sunday July 19th.

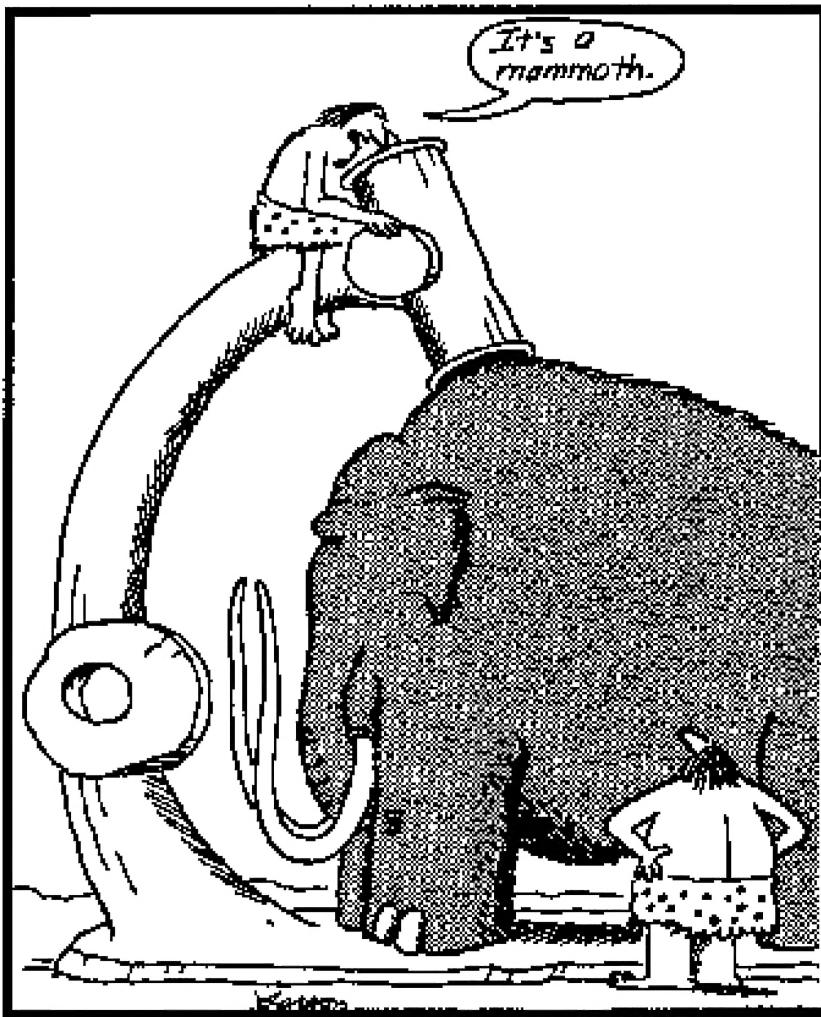
We want to make events as safe as possible, so Rat Nats are asked to please register for the session - via the Facebook page

We will limit the gathering to 20 at this stage. It will focus on fungi and will be at Stringybark, 61 Skippers Rd Scarsdale, from 10.00 am until lunchtime. Bring your own lunch, thermos, seating, blanket, suitable clothing, coats and boots.

We may be able to organise a campfire if it is not wet.

August's session is scheduled for August 23rd and will be all about leaf litter.

Keep the weekend of September 26/27 free because that is when we plan to have our first Junior Group campout, at Stringybark, all going well. More about that soon.



Early microscope

We regret not hosting a special 'microscopic' Nature Play Week in late March due to COVID-19, but promise to get the microscopes out again soon.

In the meantime, what do you think of this "early microscope" from Gary Larsen?

Field Observations

on a dead Lowland Copperhead Snake *Austrelaps superbus*

Date: Saturday 13 June 2020, 11.45 am

Location: Western perimeter of Flax Mill Swamp Wildlife Reserve, Gregory St West.

GPS data: 37.53922 S, 143.80669 E

Walking around the wetland edge in thick grassy vegetation I found the corpse of mid-sized Lowland Copperhead snake with its ventral surface uppermost (for its undisturbed position see photo below). It was clearly quite dead but had not started to decompose very much as the corpse smelt only slightly.



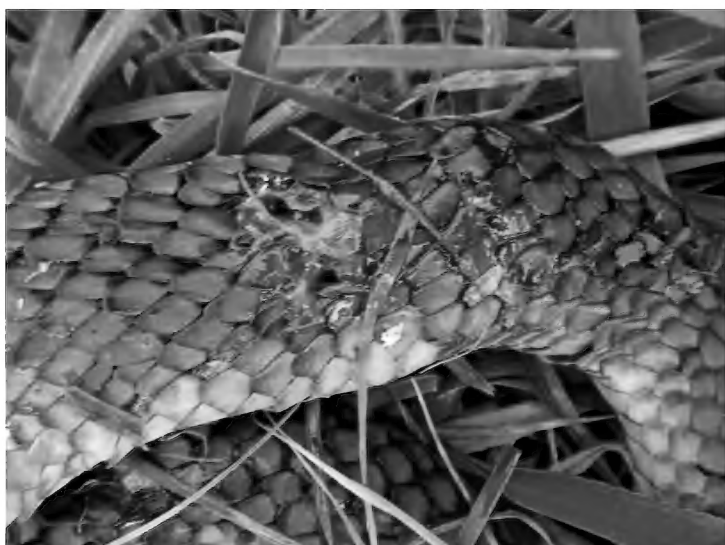
Grass in the immediate area had been obviously flattened but I did not notice any other disturbance. There was no obvious damage to the exposed underside of the snake and I carefully turned the body over and examined the ventral side (see p.7, top).

The back was pale reddish brown, the scales were still slightly glossy, head somewhat pointed but not very distinct from the neck. The orange scales along the lower side of the body is obvious in the photo.

The head was noticeably paler than the body, particularly on the sides. [see p.7, bottom)



There appeared to be holes on the upper body of the corpse about one third the way down from the head.
Note holes between the upper scales of the back, exuding body fluids.



Close up of body damage



Size of the snake in relation to a 10cm long GPS.
(9 GPS units long = 90cm approx.)

Cause of death was unclear but the obvious injury to central body suggested that a predator could be involved. Domestic dog, fox, large bird of prey? Nothing to indicate what might have been the cause.

My guess is that the snake had been dead for not more than 5 to 7 days so it is interesting that this species has been quite active despite the onset of much colder weather in June.

Cogger says that the species is usually found in or near marshes or swamps where large aggregations may occur. Active both day and night even at very low temperatures when no other reptiles are active. Robertson and Coventry make reference to the species sometimes climbing into low vegetation to bask. I suggest that this may make it obvious and therefore more susceptible to predators in colder conditions. Living mainly in wetter areas its diet consists primarily of frogs, but it will eat a range of small vertebrates. The species is also known to eat grasshoppers and occasionally carrion.

On my previous visit to the swamp in our warmer May weather I made sure I wore heavy boots and gaiters but did not see any snakes. The Lowland or Common Copperhead is however a dangerously venomous snake. They usually calmly slide away when seen. When provoked they will flatten the body and neck and hiss a quiet warning; and while generally docile bites can be fatal. On this occasion I had lighter shoes and no gaiters. Although the fangs of a Lowland Copperhead are relatively short, on any further winter field trips that I plan in the vicinity, I think I'll be wearing boots, gaiters and thick socks.

Andy Arnold

References:

Cogger, HG (1975) Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia

Robertson, P and Coventry, AJ (2019) Reptiles of Victoria

Dudley, A (accessed 13/06/2020) <https://dpiipwe.tas.gov.au/wildlife-management/fauna-of-tasmania/reptiles-and-frogs/tasmanian-snakes/lowland-copperhead-snake>

Cats and Australian wildlife by the numbers

Pet cats:

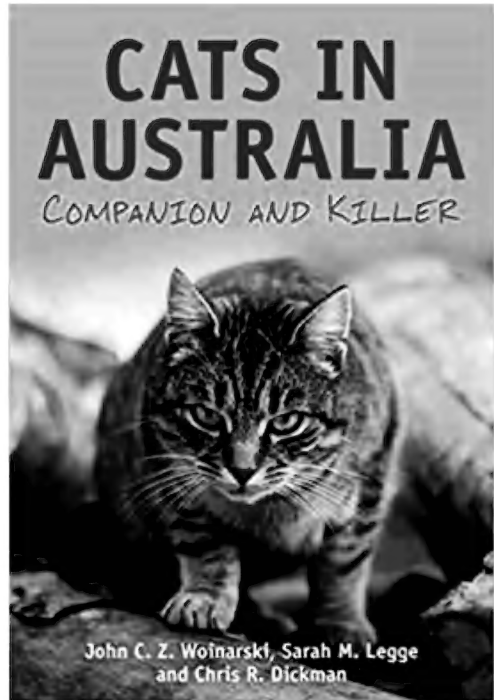
There are 3.8 million pet cats in Australia, of which 1.1 million (29%) are kept inside 24 hours a day, and 2.7 million (71%) are allowed outside to roam and hunt.

Roaming pet cats kill 390 million animals collectively each year in Australia.

An individual roaming pet cat kills 186 reptiles, birds and mammals per year, most of them (59%) native species.

A study found 39% of cats brought in at night suck out for nocturnal roaming and hunting.

Pet cats bring home only 15% of what they hunt.



Feral cats:

The average feral cat kills 748 reptiles, birds and mammals a year. In the bush there is one feral cat per 3 to 4 km² versus 40 70 70 pet cats per km² around towns.

Pet cats kill 30—50 times more animals per km² around towns than feral cats do in the bush.



These disturbing statistics come from the 2019 CSIRO publication, *Cats in Australia: Companion and killer*.

So...
Where is your cat now?

Field Observations

The following is from Carol Hall who always seems to have a camera handy and ready to go!

“On the afternoon of June 20th I wandered into the kitchen at home in Wendouree and happened to glance at the back garden. On the top of the clothesline was a raptor tucking into its meal. I grabbed the camera with the long lens and shot multiple photos through the window. Not knowing what the bird was, I sent photos off to three knowledgeable friends who all responded with the ID “juvenile Sparrowhawk” and told me what the diagnostic features were, such as the pattern of breast feathers and the extra long middle toe. A first for me!”



Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrocephalus*

A recent drive past Lake Goldsmith Wildlife Reserve yielded a couple of Brolga. They tend to be a rare sight these days. And it's good see them practicing good social distancing! There was a Yellow-billed Spoonbill nearby as well.

Bill Elder



Membership grows

In just five or six days in mid-June, the membership of our Junior Group Facebook page (The 'Rat Nats) went up by 40! That's 40 new, local families who have an interest in nature and outdoor activity! We hope to offer more in the way of proper face-to-face outdoor experiences for everyone very soon, but for now, Facebook is a cool way of staying in touch and sharing our love of nature. And membership continues to grow.

The Club's presence online in the form of iNaturalist has also yielded some member interest. There are 109 observations in the Fungi of Victoria project, 184 in Birds of Victoria, 150 in the project called Plants of Victoria, 16 in Native Orchids, and 185 observations of Insects of Victoria. The main FNCB iNaturalist page now has 661 observations made by 11 people!

And a few people who are not (yet) members have joined the page and have been invited to join us.

Both of these virtual methods are very satisfying ventures in more ways than one.

Committee

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Meetings and Excursions are cancelled until further notice owing to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19

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