Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

BULLETIN

Editor: Annie Rushton bul.editor@tasfieldnats.org.au

Quarterly Bulletin **No 338** **April 2010**

The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. People of any age and background are welcome as members.

For more information, visit website **http://www.tasfieldnats.org.au/**; email info@tasfieldnats.org.au; write to GPO Box 68, Hobart, 7001; or phone our secretary on mobile 0418 942 781.

Program

General Meetings start at **7.15pm** for 7.30pm on the first Thursday of the month, in the Life Science Building at the University of Tasmania.

Excursions are usually held the following Saturday or Sunday, meeting at 9.00am outside the Museum in Macquarie St, Hobart. Bring lunch and all-weather outdoor gear.
If you are planning to attend an outing, but have not been to the prior meeting, please confirm the details as late changes are sometimes made.

Thu 6 May	**Meeting** 7.15pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tasmania. **Lisa Gershwin** will talk to us about *Jellyfish.* Lisa is Curator of Physical Sciences at Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston and previously studied marine biology at James Cook University.
Sat 8 May evening	**Excursion:** evening trip to Peter Murrell Reserve to do bat trapping with Lisa Cawthen (speaker for April). This will start **5pm**; but if the weather forecast looks unsuitable, we may change it to Friday night. Check the website or at Thursday's meeting for the final decision and arrangements.
Thu 3 June	**Meeting** at 7.15pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tas. **Barbara Wienecke** will be our guest, speaking on '*Emperor Penguins*'. Dr Wienecke is a scientist with the Australian Antarctic Division and has been to Antarctica many times to study penguins, as well as trips to Macquarie Is, Heard Is, and South America.
Sat 5 orSun 6 June	**Excursion**: likely to the Uni of Tas to use microscopes to review the invertebrates collected from our previous fieldwork at Peter Murrell Reserve. Day and time to be decided. Final details at the Thursday meeting or check on the website.
Thurs 1 July	**Meeting** at 7.15pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tas. Our guest speaker will be **Eleanor Cave**, a postgraduate historian from the university, presenting '*Flora Tasmaniae: How amateur botanists shaped the first Darwinist case study*'
Sat 3 or Sun 4 July	**Excursion:** to Tasmanian Herbarium to view the collection. Final details to be announced. Find out at the Thursday meeting or check on the website.

Sat 27 Nov	**Pelagic bird observing boat-trip** from Eaglehawk Neck. Privately organised by Bill Wakefield. See website program for booking details.

From the President—Michael Driessen

At the AGM in March 2010, a committee was elected with one change of personnel from the previous committee. Nell Hilliard replaced Jane Catchpole, who decided not to stand this year, as a general committee member. I thank Jane for her work on the committee for the past year and welcome Nell on board. There was a role change with Annie Rushton taking on the position of Bulletin Editor and Geoff Fenton filling a general committee position so that he can focus on the club's website. Geoff has been Bulletin Editor for the past three years and has done an excellent job —thanks very much Geoff.

The past 12 months

Last year, in the April Bulletin, I indicated there were two things I would like to try and make happen for the club. The first was to capture observations made by members on excursions or presented at meetings and to put them onto the Natural Values Atlas. Some progress has been made with many records added to the Natural Values Atlas; however we still need to develop a reliable process to ensure this continues. It may be that this becomes one of the responsibilities of a committee member or we create a committee position with this responsibility. Alternatively a club member may wish to take on this role—if you are interested please contact me.

The second thing I was keen to progress was to establish a monitoring program, using the resources and skill of club members, to assist with the management of natural values of an area. To this end the Peter Murrell Reserve was chosen by the committee and a survey was undertaken in March 2010. A summary of this activity is given elsewhere in this Bulletin. We plan to review how well this went and decide whether to continue this activity. I am particularly interested in feedback from those who attended the event.

Several other actions were undertaken over the past 12 months. The website was reviewed and updated—special thanks to Geoff Fenton for ensuring all the changes occurred to the website.

The committee also decided to distribute the club bulletin by email to those who wish to receive it in that form. As a club with an environmental focus we thought that this was the right thing to do to reduce our use of paper as well as reducing the burden of printing, collation and distribution on committee members. It also allows for colour images to be fully appreciated.

The committee reviewed a draft conservation policy for the club that has been around since about 1993 and decided that we have no need for this policy. Thanks largely to the efforts of Mark Wapstra we now have guidelines to help authors prepare articles for the *Tasmania Naturalist*. Mark is also to be commended for another excellent edition of the *Tasmanian Naturalist*.

Attendances at talks and field excursions have increased over the past 12 months and I thank Amanda Thomson for putting together an excellent program.

The next 12 months

In addition to following up on the Peter Murrell Reserve monitoring and capturing TFNC observation onto the Natural Values Atlas, the committee will progress other matters over the next 12 months. The club now has sufficient resources to allow us to develop our next conservation project. At this stage we are considering producing a new field guide. The committee welcomes suggestions from members on how best to use these funds.

We plan to review the rules of the club to see if they are up to date and relevant. I don't expect there will be any significant changes and of course if there were to be any changes they must be ratified by members.

The library has an amazing treasure trove of books which I suspect many members are not aware of. I would like to have a list of club books made available to members in both paper form and on the website. The library is also bursting at the seams and we need to look at other storage options.

Mark Wapstra will continue to work on developing an index for the *Tasmanian Naturalist*.

We will, of course, continue to develop an interesting and varied program of walks and talks, and we encourage club members to make suggestions for walks and talks.

As always, please feel free to contact me or one of the committee if you have any thoughts or advice in relation to these or other matters.

Biodiversity Monitoring in Peter Murrell Reserve

Fieldwork project for 6 & 7 Mar 2010

March 2010 Excursion

Michael Driessen

Over the March long-weekend the TFNC conducted a survey of birds, mammals, invertebrates and vegetation in the Peter Murrell Reserve. The aims of the survey were to: (1) provide the land manager (Parks and Wildlife Service) with information that would assist with their planned burns and (2) provide members with opportunities to undertake and observe monitoring activities.

On the previous Sunday a small but hardy group of members spent a longer than expected day setting up and marking survey lines in four fire management blocks in the reserve. One block is scheduled for a planned burned this autumn and we chose an adjacent unburned block to use for comparison. A third block was burnt in 2008 and we also chose an adjacent unburnt block for comparison. Two lines of trap stations were established in each block for 10 cage traps and 20 box (Elliott) traps to catch and release small mammals, and two flight intercept traps (designed by Lynne Forester) and 10 pitfall traps for invertebrates. The lines also formed the basis for bird and vegetation surveys. The pitfall traps and flight intercept traps were set with the aim of collecting the following weekend.

The weather was kind to us on the Saturday and Sunday and there was a good turnout of members (22) especially given that it was a long-weekend. We met at 9.30am each day to organise the morning's activities. Fiona Hume led the bird survey by walking the length of each trap line recording all birds seen and heard and repeated the survey in reverse order the following day.

Lynne Forster and Abbey Throssell led the clearing of the invertebrate traps. The flight intercept traps were cleared on Saturday and the pitfall traps were cleared on Sunday. Mammal traps were cleared on both Saturday and Sunday.

Anna McEldowny and Mark Wapstra made a start on recording the vegetation for each of the trapping lines.

Many invertebrates were collected in the flight intercept and pitfall traps and these will require sorting before we can get an understanding of the catch and the distribution of taxa across the blocks.

We are planning to provide an opportunity for members to help sort the material and gain a basic understanding of invertebrate groups. Early observations on the invertebrates from Lynne suggest that some of the commonly encountered species found in the traps feed on dung (*Anotylus sp.*), carcasses (*Omorgus tasmanicus*) and fungi (*Cnecosa insueta*). Interestingly, the diversity of species appears higher in the area burnt in 2008.

Some mammal survey data is now available. We caught 86 animals (including recaptures) comprising six species of mammal and a reptile (Table 1).

The most commonly caught animal was the long-nosed potoroo followed by the swamp rat and house mouse. There were very few recaptures indicating that more trapping effort is required to account for most of the animals in the areas surveyed.

The swamp rat, house mouse, brown rat and white's skink are the first confirmed records of these species for the reserve (based on a list provided in the Peter Murrell Reserve Interim Management Plan). The long-nosed potoroo and house mouse were caught in all blocks surveyed including the block burnt in 2008 (Figs 1-2). The swamp rat was caught in all blocks except the block that was burnt in 2008 (Fig. 3), consistent previous research indicating that this species requires cover close to the ground.

The other species were caught in too few numbers for further comment although four of

the seven southern brown bandicoots were caught in the block burnt in 2008.

Most of the female long-nosed potoroos were carrying pouch young ranging in size and furriness from tiny and unfurred through to large and furred; consistent with their capacity to breed all year round. Only one of the female bandicoots had pouch young; consistent with their breeding ceasing towards the end of summer.

Bird results will be reported in more detail in a later Bulletin but 28 species were observed with brown thornbills, yellow-throated honeyeaters and dusky woodswallows being the most commonly recorded species.

The survey of Peter Murrell Reserve was undertaken as a trial by the TFNC. To be most useful for management, the survey should be repeated annually to monitor changes in the plant and animal communities.

The committee will review how well the activity went and how useful the information is before deciding whether it should be repeated next year. We would appreciate any feedback from members about what worked well and what could be improved. We will also be seeking feedback from the Parks and Wildlife Service and the Friends of Peter Murrell Reserve.

The full information from this survey will be written up for the *Tasmanian Naturalist* and provided to the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Table 1. Animals caught during mammal trapping survey

Common Name	Scientific Name	First Captures	Recaptures	Total Captures
Long-nosed potoroo	*Potorous tridactylus*	25	6	31
Southern brown bandicoot	*Isoodon obesulus*	7	0	7
Eastern barred bandicoot	*Perameles gunnii*	2	0	2
Swamp rat	*Rattus lutreolus*	21	1	22
House mouse*	*Mus musculus*	-	-	22
Brown rat*	*Rattus norvegicvus*	1	0	1
White's skink	*Egernia whitii*	1	0	1
Total				**86**

*introduced species

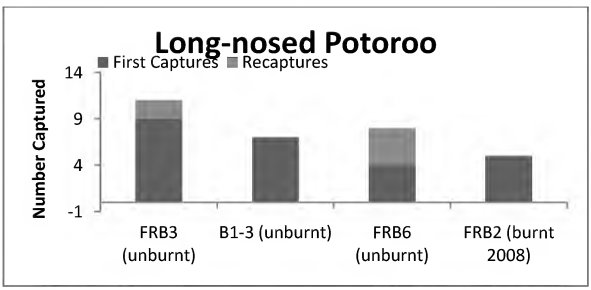

Fig. 1 Number of long-nosed potoroos captured in Peter Murrell Reserve

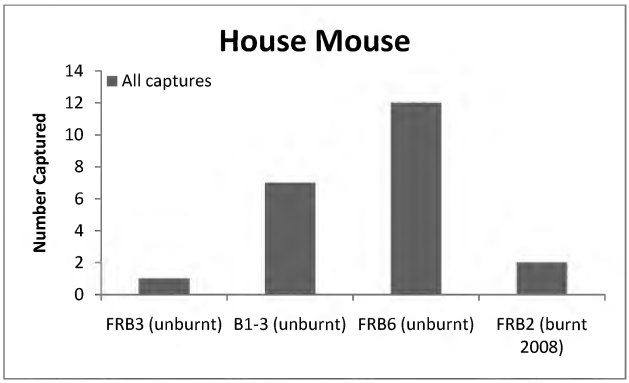

Fig. 2 Number of house mice captured in Peter Murrell Reserve (note: recaptures were not recorded).

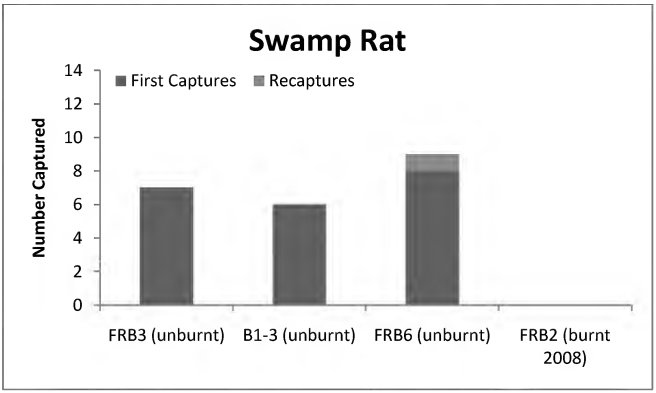

Fig. 3 Number of swamp rats captured in Peter Murrell Reserve

Pest or Guest?

Excursion Sunday 7 February

Den Robin

The role of insects in an ecosystem isn't readily apparent. But, thanks to our inspiring February guest speaker, Dr Elizabeth Daley, and some hands-and-knees investigations on an idyllic summer's day, we now have a deeper insight into the importance of these small creatures to biodiversity.

Elizabeth, a riparian ecologist by training and a Research Associate at the School of Geography and Environmental Studies at UTAS, is the author of Wings—an introduction to Tasmania's winged insects. She used her book as the basis of her talk "Pest or Guest? —Learning from Nature" at our February meeting and invited the members to her Buckland farm, to scour the various ecosystems and to add to the family's own observations.

Elizabeth and husband, Alan, are passionate about ecological sustainability. They own two parcels of land on the East Coast designated as conservation reserves and run their 39.3 hectares Buckland property as a productive farm. By separately fencing the farm's different ecosystems (grasslands, wetlands, grassy forest, heath and riparian zone, etc) and keen attention to soil types and weed eradication, in just two years they have witnessed a huge improvement in the property's health. They've recorded more than 200 native plants (without yet starting on the grasses and sedges), 67 bird species including

10 of Tasmania's 12 endemic species, most of the state's mammals, a full suite of reptiles, four species of frog and "a massive number of insects."

Encouraged by the prospect of easy and exciting discoveries and armed with field guides, butterfly nets, specimen jars, cameras, magnifying glasses, notepads and other paraphernalia, some 22 intrepid Field Nats wandered off on all points of the compass. As the discoveries were brought back, Elizabeth and her entomologist son Tony helped identify them and stimulated discussion about the role of the particular insect in the environment—whether it was a useful predator, a pollinator, disperser of seed or recycler and whether it was a 'pest' or a 'guest' at this venue.

And it was a Eureka day! The most unusual find was a lantern bug (*Fulgoridae*) hitherto unrecorded in Tasmania. The most exquisite find was a large male blue spotted hawker (*Adversaeschna brevistyla*), its iridescent blue markings dazzling in the sun.

The dragonfly had led young Harry Driessen a merry dance all morning, darting over the dam every time his net approached putting on the rapid bursts of speed that characterises the species.

A curious find was a pseudo-scorpion hitching a ride on a clerid beetle. But to our President, the find-of-the-day was a swamp cricket (*Bobilla sp*) not because it is so unusual, but because it is tiny, fast and just so hard to catch!

Altogether our sorties yielded many different insect species.

A picnic and barbecue lunch in the welcome shade of Elizabeth and Alan's verandah added to our enjoyment. We thank Elizabeth, Alan and Tony for their generous hospitality and for sharing their enthusiasm and wealth of knowledge.

Yellow-striped hunter dragonfly, *Austrogomphus guerini.*

Gum tree shield bug, *Omyta centrolinea*ta

Female native flower wasp, *Thynnus zonatus*

The Tasmanian Naturalist-Call for Contributions!

Mark Wapstra, Editor of The Tasmania Naturalist

Yes, it's that time again when your friendly *Naturalist* editor starts hassling for contributions! It is never too early to make a submission—the earlier the better and the less my levels of panic near publication time!

So I encourage members with observations to contribute short naturalist notes, and people with more substantial data-based information to contribute more scientific papers—all are welcome as the forum has a wide audience and we try to please everybody.

Book-reviews and other contributions (prose/poetry/etc.) are also most welcome.

The last three volumes have seen the introduction of colour pages for several of the articles where illustration in colour enhances the readability. The publication costs in the last few years have been generously supported by sponsorship from agencies such as the Department of Defence, Natural Resource Management and Forestry Tasmania.

I'm hoping that this year's volume (132) will also be printed in colour, but we will rely on sponsorship to achieve this.

Please send draft articles to me by not much later than July (for longer articles that may require peer review) or end of August (for shorter articles,

naturalist notes and book reviews). The edited version goes to the printer in September so you can all have a copy before Christmas (we aim for October delivery).

The easiest way to get an article to me is via email (mark@ecotas.com.au), else mail to me at 28 Suncrest Avenue, Lenah Valley 7008 (or hand to me at a meeting/excursion). If you are wondering if an idea you have may be suitable, drop me a line. I'm happy to help with editing and review—that's my job!

[PS The Club's website now has a link to a *Guidelines for Authors* to assist with style, format and content questions].

The Majestic and the Minuscule

Easter Camp at Blandfordia

Geoff Robin

Nature in its grand and its microscopic dimensions inspired field naturalists at the traditional Easter camp held this year at the World Heritage-listed Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park.

Thanks to Nell Hilliard we stayed at Blandfordia Alpine Lodge, a wonderful rustic retreat set among the trees by Ronny Creek in Cradle Valley. Nell's mother, the well known conservationist and campaigner Patricia Wessing, was a founding member of Blandfordia when it was built in the early 1960s.

Nell and her daughter, Tamsin, welcomed Field Nats with a warm fire, hot soup, quiche and gluewein late Friday afternoon. Participants included Michael and Penny Driessen and their sons Sam, Harry and Ben, Geoff and Janet Fenton, Amanda Thomson, Abby Throssell, Kevin Bonham, and Geoff and Den Robin with grand-daughter Helena.

It quickly became apparent that we humans were not alone at Cradle Mountain. The welcoming party included four yellow-tailed black cockatoos and a wombat, many black currawongs soon to be followed by a Bennetts wallaby and as the sun set, a mother brushtail possum and her almost independent offspring. A note on the door cautioned that a tiger snake had recently been basking on the porch.

The photographers among us were able to get marvelous close-ups of wombats with their joeys, two echnidnas (by the road), a Tassie devil, a wingless moth, orange-winged stoneflies, an unnamed snail (described by Kevin Bonham as *Pasmaditta Sp. "Pepper")* and some rather too friendly leeches, among other life forms. Among the birds were some seriously spoilt currawongs (on the window sills!), striated field wrens, black-faced cuckoo-shrikes, pink robins and some green rosellas.

On Easter Saturday we followed the Overland Track from Ronny Creek past Wombat Peak to Crater Lake before climbing to Marion Lookout where our group of 15 shared with tourists from across the globe extraordinary views of alpine moorlands, tarns, lakes and spectacular dolerite formations. We were, indeed, surrounded by beauty on a magnificent scale.

From the high plateau we left the crowds to travel cross country to the Horse Track. Here the field naturalists were found in more characteristic poses—bums in air, cameras and magnifying glasses to the ground, studying fungus, small vertebrae, chasing grasshoppers and trapping insects and snails and all manner of life while marvelling at the incredible diversity of alpine and sub-alpine vegetation. We explored pools and ponds and marshes and photographed the mountain buzzy, the heart berry, the alpine strawberry and the smallest plants and mosses, including the miniscule green lily. The 'fagus' was beginning to don its autumn cloak and the diminutive mountain plum pine (*Podocarous lawrencei*) attracted considerable attention.

Next morning we discovered that a feral rabbit had broken into the lodge to secrete chocolate eggs. When calm was restored we spent the morning circumnavigating Dove Lake and were impressed by the way the hardened track coped with the large number of visitors at the same time as preserving the naturalness and vegetation of the beautiful lake shore.

In the afternoon most of the group studied natural life in Weindorfer's Forest around Waldheim and the peaceful Julietta Tarn. After dinner a spotlighting expedition preceded a video of the Vale of Belvoir conservation program being

developed in co-operation between property owners and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

The Vale of Belvoir supports diverse sub-alpine grasslands including eight plant species that are rare, vulnerable or threatened. It is the only sub-alpine limestone valley in the state and provides habitat to a dense population of marsupial carnivores including the spotted quoll and the Tasmanian devil.

On Easter Monday we sincerely thanked Nell Hilliard for so generously hosting an unforgettable excursion just as a squadron of black cockatoos marked our departure with a spectacular screeching fly-past.

The group briefly visited the Vale of Belvoir on the return journey, noting lots of wombat holes and little limestone hollows surrounded by old myrtle forest, almost pure stands of myrtle draped with lichen.

Tasmanian Marine Naturalists to Join Field Nats

David O'Brien

The Tasmanian Marine Naturalists have decided that their club is no longer viable due to declining membership. They have approached us with a request to amalgamate with the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club. This would involve transferring their assets and membership to our club and would be achieved through each club passing a special resolution.

The committee believes that amalgamation would be a good outcome for both clubs and will be seeking approval from club members at a future meeting. The proposed amalgamation will not require any changes to the current rules, structure and practices of the club, but we may try to include a few more beach oriented activities in future. .

Subscriptions Reminder

Anna McEldowney (Treasurer)

Have you paid your 2010 subs yet? A reminder that membership subs are due on 1 Jan each year.

Please send a cheque payable to Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc, addressed to the Treasurer TFNC, GPO Box 68, Hobart, 7001; **or**

pay by EFT to BSB 067102 Account number 28000476 in the name of Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc. PLEASE put your surname AND initials in the transfer so I can identify the payments.

If you have joined since October last year your subs will carry over to 2010.

Membership rates are: Adult—$30, Family—$35, Concession—$25.

Photo credits

Gathered around the table at Buckland—Annie Rushton

Yellow-striped hunter dragonfly,*Austrogomphus guerini*—M. Driessen

Gum tree shield bug Omyta centrolineata—Amanda Thompson

Female native flower wasp, *Thynnus zonatus* —Amanda Thompson