

Castlemaine Naturalist

April 2014

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Common Greenshank, Lake Victoria, Bellarine Peninsula
Photo – Joy Weatherill

Impacts of aeroplanes on birds – 100 years ago

Chris Timewell

A century ago, aeroplanes were making their first ever flights across central Victoria. The possible effects on birds from these new large aerial competitors was uncertain, although the following story from the *Kyneton Guardian* newspaper (16 June 1914) seemed to me to be a bit of an over-reaction, and had a fair degree of artistic license.

“Judging by the screaming and the frightened twittering of the birds on Tuesday last when they saw Guillaux flying to Ballarat, it is safe to predict that many flew till they dropped dead from fright and exhaustion. At 10.37, just before the buzz of the plane could be heard, magpies by the score could be seen and heard flying away as fast as their wings could carry them from Castlemaine and making east. A little later residents of the Tunnel could plainly hear the buzz of the plane, and many two miles east of Elphinstone said they distinctly heard it passing over Castlemaine, and that it sounded like the whirr of a motor close at hand.”

Barely one week after discovering this little story through the National Library of Australia Trove website (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>), Castlemaine residents were treated to displays of fly-bys by one of the Royal Australian Air Force's fighter jets.

When I first heard these noisy jets on the morning of Saturday 1 March 2014, I rushed out the back door to see what was going on. The jets did a couple of circles around the town (to acknowledge the early role of Castlemaine-born Eric Harrison in the RAAF 100 years ago), before disappearing vertically into the clouds.

How did the resident magpies around my house react to this unusual intrusion to their daily routine? They launched into the air, flew around in random directions, and made what could accurately be described as a variety of screams and frightened twittering. However, from what I could tell, there were no directly attributable magpie fatalities.

Calendar of Events for 2014

The CFNC committee has been busy developing an interesting program of talks and field excursions for 2014.

The general meetings are held on the evening of the second Friday of every month (except January) in the Fellowship Room behind the Uniting Church on Lyttleton St. As has been the case for the past two years, the talks will commence from 7.30pm.

Please bring along your plant specimens, bugs and other items for discussion and identification. Stay around for chat over a coffee and biscuit afterwards. The guest speaker program is provided below.

April 11	Carol Hall	Vikings, Volcanoes & Ice - the making of Iceland
May 9	Les Hanrahan	Fungi of central Victoria
June 13	Geoff Park	Natural Newstead (TBC)
July 11	David Hollands	Shorebirds
August 8	Nigel Harland	Wildlife Watching in India
September 12	Phil Collier & Robin Garnett	Nature Photography in Tasmania
October 10	Tanya Loos	Daylesford Nature Diary (TBC)
November 14	Graeme Watson	Mammals of Australia (TBC)
December 12	Members and Visitors	Show and Tell Evening

The program for excursions and other activities is somewhat reduced compared to recent busy years. However, we've got a great program worked out well in advance, so you can pop all of these into your 2014 diary straight away. Keep an eye on the Castlemaine Newsletter and the website for exact departure times and locations. A couple of other field nat events are also included (SEANA, ANN).

Sat 17 & Sun 18 May – Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater surveys in local bushlands

Sat 7 June – Joint Fungi **excursion** to Blackwood with the Ballarat Field Nats Club
(Leader: Les Hanrahan)

Sat 12 July – **Excursion:** Pudding Bag Lane, Taradale (Leader: Max Schlachter, Chris Timewell)

Sat 2 & Sun 3 August – Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater surveys in local bushlands
(Leader: Chris Timewell)

Sat 9 August – **Roadside Clean-up**, Pyrenees Hwy (meet outside Tait Decorative Iron at 9am)

Wed 20 Aug – Broom Pull, Castlemaine Botanic Gardens (TBC)

Wed 17 Sept – **Wildflower Walk** (Leader: Richard Piesse)

Wed 24 Sept – **Wildflower Walk** (Leader: Denis Hurley – TBC)

(Dates TBC) - South East Australia Naturalists Association (SEANA) Spring Camp
– Portland Field Naturalist Club

Wed 1 Oct – **Wildflower Walk** (Leader: Geraldine Harris)

Wed 8 Oct – **Wildflower Walk** (Leader: Rita Mills)

Sat 11 Oct – Lushington Hill Reserve Biodiversity Blitz with McKenzies Hill
Landcare Group (Leader: Max Schlachter)

17-27 October - Australian Naturalists Network Get-Together, Hobart Tasmania

Early Nov – **Roadside Clean-up**, Pyrenees Hwy (meet outside Tait Decorative Iron
at 9am)

Sat 15 Nov – Mount Macedon **excursion** (Leader: Richard Piesse)

Sat 6 & Sun 7 Dec – Annual Castlemaine district **Bird Count** (Leader: Kit Morris)

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The CFNC committee meetings are now being held on the third Thursday of each  
month, and starting at 6pm.

*Contact Chris Timewell ([castlemainefnc@hotmail.com](mailto:castlemainefnc@hotmail.com)) if you have any  
questions or suggestions regarding the calendar.*

## **Cairns is Different**

Rita Mills

We had an enjoyable afternoon out at Joyces Creek for our monthly field  
trip in February; but here is the sort of thing I hear about when Simon  
Kennedy emails me:

'I'm doing plenty of work at the moment, mainly map-making.  
Here's a list of animals from my walk today; Metallic Starling,  
Rainbow Bird, Sunbird, Rainbow Lorikeet, Crested Tern, Stone  
Curlews, Mynahs, Peaceful Dove, Torres Strait Pigeon, Eastern  
Curlew, Turtledove, White-breasted Wood-swallow, Ulysses  
Butterfly, Spectacled Flying Fox, White-lipped Tree Frog, Marbled  
Frog.

'It's horribly humid, but we had 26 inches of rain this year already -  
when it rains it's nice! The land just seems to soak it all back in,  
with barely any flooding. And lots of mosquitoes to go with it!

'The Spectacled Flying Foxes are common enough around here,'  
(I'd asked if I was right in thinking they are rare) 'but they thin out  
both north and south of here. I do miss the Rosellas (Pale Headed  
are only inland from here) and Chats. Red-tailed Blacks  
Cockatoos came into town today though, and that was good to  
see.'

For those who don't know him, Simon, our grandson, is an Environmental  
Scientist, majoring in ornithology, and working in Cairns at the moment.

# Significant plants at Lake Victoria (Bellarine Peninsula)

Joy Weatherill

Information for these notes is sourced from the Bellarine Catchment Network.



## Prickly Spear-grass

*Austrostipa stipoides*

Coastal dune scrub / coastal dune grassland mosaic.

Grows in distinct zones on higher ridges fringing the salt marsh.

A large, densely tufted tussock with sharp-ended leaves, it provides shelter and protection for many small creatures such as insects, birds, lizards and native rodents.

It is of regional conservation significance



## Coast Wirilda

*Acacia uncifolia*

Coastal alkaline scrub (calcarene dune woodland)

A plant species of State and Regional conservation significance.

It is a suckering plant with phyllodes that have a hooked tip; and is a common host to the Wire-leaf Mistletoe.

The plant was used as a fish poison by the Wada wurrung.

### Wire-leaf Mistletoe

*Amyema preissi*

Coastal alkaline scrub  
Plains grassy woodlands

Mistletoe-birds eat berries and deposit sticky seeds on a high tree. Where few host trees remain, heavier infestations can result in the tree's death. On the Bellarine Peninsula Coast Wirilda, Golden Wattle and Drooping Sheoak are often hosts.

Regional conservation significance, - used as a food and medicinal plant by the Wada wurrung



### Southern Sea-heath

*Frankenia pauciflora*

Coastal salt-marsh

A spreading mat-like shrub with leaves to 7mm long which are hairy on the underside.

It is an important food plant for the endangered **Orange-bellied Parrot** which feeds on the seeds autumn to early winter.

Flowers most of the year (pink flowers) peaking August - February.



### Thick-head Glasswort

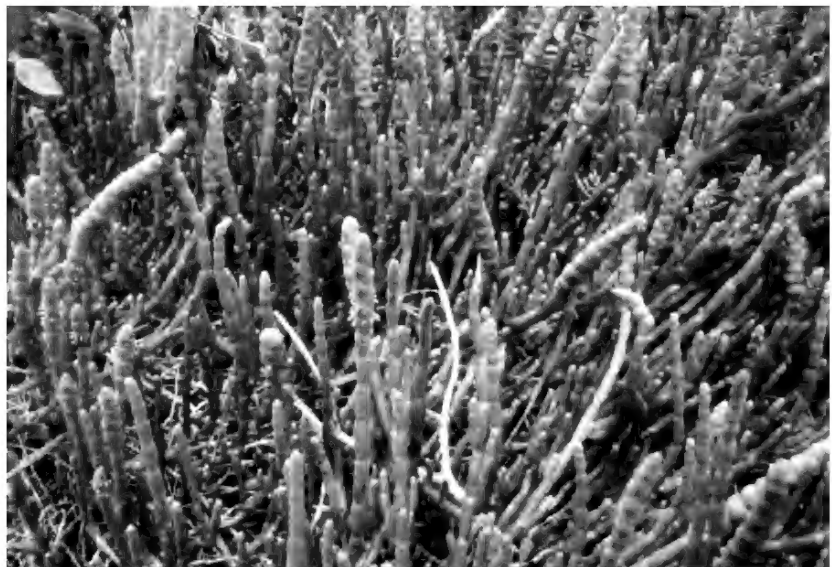
*Sarcocornia blackiana*

Coastal Salt-marsh

An erect and spreading shrub with fleshy stems.

Succulent segments vary in colour from green to red.

A species of regional conservation significance.



## Stories (and pictures) of Ice and Fire

The topic of the talk at the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club's general meeting on 10 April 2014 is **Vikings, Volcanoes & Ice - the making of Iceland**. The evening starts from 7.30pm at the Uniting Church Hall, Castlemaine.

After studying Geography at the University of Sheffield, UK, a sense of adventure brought Carol to Australia, teaching Field Studies to secondary students in the Snowy Mountains, and eventually moving to Ballarat Grammar School where she taught for 14 years. Her own photographs were always an integral part of her teaching material, and an interest in the glaciated regions of the world has been maintained since studying a specialist course as an undergraduate.

Carol writes, *"In 2010 I was able to tour Iceland, much of it off the beaten track thanks to the adventurous driver of the mini-bus! We saw many of the special geological features in this young (only 20 million years old) country and gained an insight into its Viking heritage, as well as seeing how the population lives today. So the talk will be a mix of physical and human geography."*

Carol is a member of Ballarat Camera Club, The Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat and is currently President of The Victorian Nature Photography Group. She has given many illustrated talks to community groups, including a number of previous talks to the CFNC.

## A 'Not-so' Early Interest in Nature

Chris Timewell

Geraldine Harris's article in the March newsletter ('Losing touch with nature') requested that CFNC members write down a memorable nature experience from their youth. Delving into my memory bank, I was a bit shocked at how little of relevance emerged.

Growing up, my parents regularly took my siblings and me on camping trips to different parts of Victoria. We appreciated being out of the Melbourne suburban boundaries. We went for day walks through the bush, and gathered firewood for the evening's bonfire. It established an on-going appreciation for being outdoors, but it didn't foster any particular interest in natural history. None of us collected wildflowers, feathers, tadpoles or bugs, or any of the other typical things that would characterize a child as 'nature-loving'. And I don't consider that 'going fishing' is indicative of an interest in wildlife. It was not until my late teens when my eyes were opened to the wonders of flora and fauna. It's never too late!

However, my earliest ever memories of wildlife, and possibly my earliest memory of any kind, is that of a St Andrews Cross Spider (*Argiope keyserlingii*). It had established its characteristic X-shaped web on the flat edge of a manicured shrub near the front of our Moorabbin home. Speaking with my parents recently, we estimate that I was probably 5 years old at the time. My mother took me out to look at it every day, and it stayed around for a week or so. I was quite surprised that this oddity had somehow found its own way to our suburban garden, and that its

presence was welcomed by my parents. The fate of most other spiders inside the house was to be to be squashed or sprayed. I haven't seen a St Andrew's Cross Spider in the wild since.

Another very early memory is a trip to the Melbourne Zoo. Back when the gorillas were displayed in an open featureless concrete enclosure, my father beat his chest with his fists and gave a Tarzan-like cry. The male gorilla responded in kind. While this was wondrous and amazing to me at the time, I think we're both embarrassed by this now. Thankfully times have changed.

## **2013 bird challenge count summary**

Kit Morris has reported that the totals submitted for the combined Castlemaine groups are as follows:

Total number of species: 126; Total number of birds counted: 2727

## **Observations**

### **At the March meeting -**

- ◆ Chris Timewell cited an article in the Castlemaine Mail on the occurrence of Masters Snakes at Baringhup, and wondered whether it wasn't confused with a juvenile Brown snake which has similar head markings, and is more highly venomous. It was commented that according to Museum Victoria, the Masters snake is found "only in the Big Desert in Mallee and heath communities"
- ◆ Geraldine Harris produced a number of plant samples for identification recently retrieved along a water race. Ern Perkins was able to name them all and discuss identifying features

### **Later -**

- ◆ Mid-February – a mixed flock moved through, but I didn't get many identified before the Red Wattlebirds spotted them and started chasing them, but there were Varied Sittellas, Silvereyes, a Grey Fantail, Weebills, Striated Pardalote and several unidentified thornbills. I find it very frustrating that the Wattlebirds are so keen to send everything off "their" territory when I want to identify them!
- ◆ I also had a juvenile Grey Shrike-thrush around for several days at the end of February and the beginning of March, and it was back towards the end of March for a day or so, too. I have had only one or two sightings of this species here over the past decade at least - Rita Mills
- ◆ Chris Timewell found the web of a Bird dropping spider on his property, and Swallow-tail caterpillars feeding in a tree
- ◆ An Owlet-nightjar came down the chimney on the night of a storm - Geraldine Harris

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists

## Coming events

**Fri April 11 meeting:** speaker Carol Hall - 'Vikings, Volcanoes & Ice - the making of Iceland'

**Fri May 9 meeting:** speaker Les Hanrahan - fungi of central Victoria

**Sat 17 & Sun 18 May –** Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater surveys

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

**Club website** - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

### Subscriptions for 2014

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2014 Committee

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