

Castlemaine Naturalist

November 2015

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Red-browed Finch gathering nest material
- photo by Joy Weatherill

Little Desert national park

Joy Weatherill

I went with a group of friends from the Bellarine section of Birdlife Australia, and visited the Little Desert over 9 - 12 October. We stayed at the Little Desert Lodge - 20 kilometers south of Nhill, and bird and flower observations were in a radius of 20 to 30 kilometers from the Lodge. This visit was during a very hot spell (35 degrees) and a lot of the time we were in heathland with little or no tree cover.

The Little Desert is in the Wimmera region of central western Victoria. The Park is approximately 95 kilometers in length and varies between 10 and 24 kilometers in width. The first European settlers referred to this area as 'the scrub', and it remained relatively undisturbed by human activity, because it was not considered to be very good for farming.

Today we appreciate the diversity of plant and bird life. The area is actually quite heavily vegetated. So, despite the hot weather reducing the number of visible birds, we still saw about 100 different kinds, several of which I hadn't seen before - like the Splendid and Variegated Fairy-wrens, Regent Parrot, Hooded Robin and Tree Martin. We were also lucky to watch a male Red-capped Robin feeding young in a nest.

I had camped in this area 30 years ago, so I was somewhat disappointed to only see the Malleefowl in a large breeding enclosure, not out in the open bushland, although some do exist; and with more time, I might have been able to satisfy my desire to see them again free in the wild.

A large variety of plants were in flower; and when I took photos I tried to record a close-up photo and a general photo of the whole plant in its natural setting.

This is indeed a beautiful and interesting area.



The LITTLE DESERT

Clockwise from top left:

- Brown Treecreeper
- Variegated Wren
- Splendid Wren
- Scented Sun-orchid
- Fringe-myrtle
- Flame Heath
- Hooded Robin

Joy Weatherill photos



CFNC October 2015 Field Trip to Sinclair Lane Reserve

Geraldine Harris

Plants I listed on Saturday were -

Philotheca verrucosa	Fairy Wax-flower
Leucopogon virgatus	Common Beard-heath
Grevillea alpina	Downy Grevillea
Arthropodium strictum	Chocolate lily
Calochilus robertsonii	Purplish Beard-orchid
Acacia acinacea	Gold-dust Wattle
Dianella admixta	Black-anther Flax-lily
Leptospermum myrsinoides	Heath Tea-tree
Pimelea linifolia	Slender Rice-flower
Daviesia ulicifolia	Gorse Bitter-pea
Burchardia umbellata	Milkmaids
Chrysocephalum semipapposum	Clustered Everlasting
Ozothamnus obcordatus	Grey Everlasting
Lomandra multiflora	Many-flowered Mat-rush
Dillwynia cinerascens	Grey Parrot-pea
Cassytha sp.	Dodder-laurel
Xerochrysum viscosum	Sticky Everlasting

- closer to railway line:

Pultenaea pedunculata	Matted Bush-pea
Pultenaea laxiflora	Loose-flowered Bush-pea
Thelymitra ixioides	Spotted Sun-orchid
Chamaescilla corymbosa	Blue Stars
Acacia aspera	Rough Wattle

- and on return visit Monday evening after some rain 12/10/15

Brachyloma daphnoides	Daphne Heath
Calytrix tetragona	Common Fringe-myrtle
Chrysocephalum apiculatum	Common Everlasting
Dillwynia sericea	Showy Parrot-pea
Grevillea micrantha	Small-flowered Grevillea
Hibbertia exutiacies	Tangled guinea-flower
Leptorhynchos tenuifolius	Wiry Buttons
Microseris aff lanceolate	Yam-daisy
Rhytidosporum procumbens	White Marianth
Tetradlea ciliata	Pink Bells

Members please note

The November General Meeting will be held in the Chapel of the Church due to VCE exams being held in our usual room.

Alaska – the frozen north (?) – Part 2

Nigel Harland

At the end of the cruise we landed in Seward and met our friends Laurel and Ken. Suddenly our lack of bird knowledge in this part of the world was dramatically fixed. They knew more about Alaskan birds than seemed possible. They also had great knowledge of the mammals. Our first day birding around Seward greatly increased our trip list. The next day, we had booked a boat trip around the coast to the West of Seward. The boat was due to travel along the coast, but the winds were such that cruising too close to the coast was a dangerous proposition. Our main objective was to see and photograph Puffins. I put this in the plural since there are two varieties of Puffin in the region, the Horned Puffin and the Tufted Puffin. In very rough seas we got as close to the shore as possible and found both birds flying across the water, but it was much too rough to try and photograph them. We headed off, but on the way back things were a little calmer and I did manage to get a photograph of the Horned Puffin.



We got back to land a bit earlier than expected and had plenty of time for land birding. In fact we had as much time as we liked. In summer at this latitude, the day ends at 2am and the day starts at 2am – there is no night time! Conversely the Alaskans have several months when they don't see the sun at all. One of the more attractive land birds is the American Robin, much larger than the Australian Robins, but with a similar red colouring on the underparts. They are often found on the ground in domestic situations.

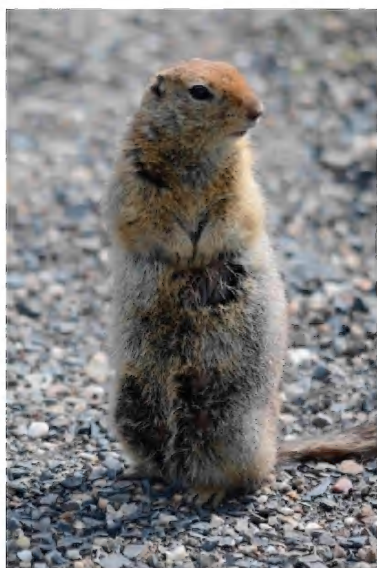


Another target bird in the area was the American Dipper, a bird you find on swift flowing streams looking for prey under water. It took

us several times to find it, but then early one morning, Ken spotted rapid movement on a stream and it eventually emerged – a dark grey bird hopping on rocks in the stream. It would suddenly disappear under the water and emerge with some food. The food was clearly for young as the Dipper flew under a bridge, where the nest was presumably located. One interesting characteristic of the Dipper was that it emerged from under the water seemingly totally dry. I guess it must have some waterproofing mechanism on its feathers.

The next stage of the journey was a two hour drive to Anchorage, where we were to meet up with a guide from the Audubon Society for a two hour trip around the area. As it turned out we spent the whole day except for an hour or so at lunchtime, when she had to give a lecture at the University. The students were delighted when she finished early to continue our birding trip. The main objective of the trip was to find three species of Loon, a duck like bird of open lakes.

We started with many more common species, the highlight of which came on the pavement as we were looking out to sea. The Canada Goose is a very common bird in North America, but this one was walking down the footpath, trying to get back to the sea. The really cute thing was that she had two babies in tow and ignored us completely!



In the brief lunch break I spent some time looking in the grounds for anything which might be there. Walking through some thickish grassland, I managed to flush half a dozen Wilson's Snipe, the only snipe in that part of North America, so I didn't have to look for distinguishing features, which can be extremely difficult for Snipes generally.

A small squirrel presented itself on the path in front of us. I took some long distance photos and gradually approached it, until I was just a few feet from it. It was an Arctic Ground Squirrel. So, we set off on a Loon hunt, but you'll have to wait until next month to discover the outcome.

Photo Observations

Joy Weatherill on the Bellarine Peninsula



Edwards Point Nature Reserve, St. Leonards, on the Bellarine Peninsula:

[cover photo] This little Red-browed Finch was collecting clematis flowers to line the nest it was building in the prickly Hedge Wattle.

Also at Edwards Point - an eclipse form of the Golden Whistler (below)

The Golden-headed Cisticola was seen near the Portarlington Road at Point Lonsdale, singing happily in tall feather-like reeds.



The Blue-winged Parrot flew out of the Boobialla tree, near the boardwalk, off Murray Road, Point Lonsdale.

At Lake Victoria, the migratory birds have begun to arrive (around 1st October) 150+ Banded Stilts, Whiskered Terns, a dozen or so Red-necked Avocets, 100's of Red-necked Stints, Grey Teal, half a dozen Black-winged Stilts. It must be cold up north, because they usually don't begin to return until mid November. The Avocets choose to have their daily rest surrounded by Black Swans.





Award to Richard Piesse

At a special committee meeting of the Great Dividing Trail Association in August, it was decided to award three Life Memberships, one of which was for our own Richard Piesse. The award is "In recognition of his highly valued two decades of commitment and work as a GDTA Committee Member and his track development services for the GDTA Network".

The CFNC would like to congratulate Richard on receiving this well-deserved honour.

Observations

- ◆ George heard Orioles and 'various Cuckoos' at Hepburn Springs
- ◆ There have been several local reports of Barking Owl calls lately
- ◆ Denis remarked on finding only six Chocolate Lilies on his 3.2 Ha. property, which has been carpeted in previous years
- ◆ Richard then commented that much of the bush is as dry as it was in the middle of the long drought ten years ago. He added that on a walk near Tarilta Gorge recently [in the area recovering from a hot control burn of March 2012 *see CN#400 for my article - Ed.] there was shoulder high re-growth (mostly wattles), resulting in perhaps ten times the fuel that existed before the burn was carried out
- ◆ Bird notes from Denis Hurley while paddling his kayak around Expedition Pass Reservoir about 11am 7th October; Darter, Swamp Harrier, Little Pied Cormorant, 22 Coots, 4 Purple Swamphen, 8 Reed Warbler; and on 9th October, 5 Little Black Cormorants, and a female Musk Duck with two immatures in tow.

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 November 13 meeting: Speaker JULIE WHITFIELD: Butterflies

Roadside Cleanup on Saturday, November 21st, 9am

Meet cnr Pyrenees Highway and Willy Milly Rd. (Tait Decorative Iron)

Contact: Geoff or Geraldine Harris

Sat December 5: **Annual Bird Count**

Fri December 11 meeting: Members night

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 2015

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

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

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2015 Committee

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