

Castlemaine Naturalist

June 2015

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Eastern Spinebill on Salvia - Damian Kelly. See p2

An update on Hugh Leach, the Castlemaine Bird Club and the mysterious fountain.

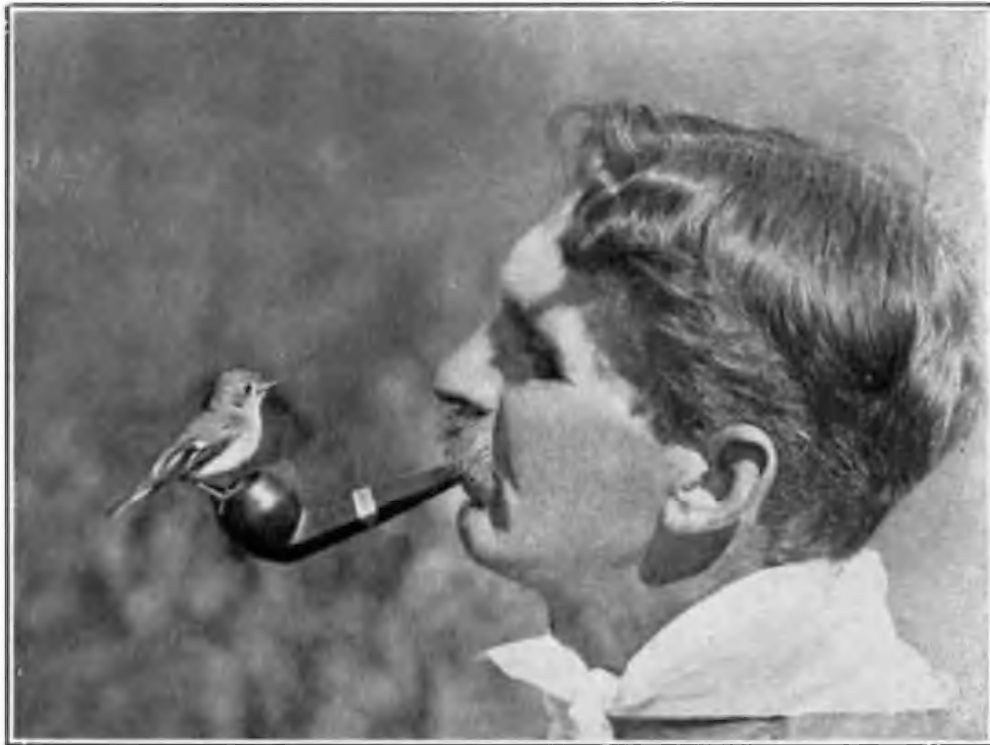
Chris Timewell

In the August 2013 edition of the Castlemaine Naturalist newsletter, Max Schlachter and I wrote about the mystery of the Hugh Leach Fountain at Kalimna Park, erected by the Castlemaine Bird Club in 1929. Who was Hugh Leach? What was the Castlemaine Bird Club? And how did they manage to get water to the fountain? Our quest for further information went mostly, but not entirely, unanswered.

In April 2014, I was contacted by a descendent of Hugh Leach (a great, great granddaughter). Through the magic of the internet, she had found a copy of our article on the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club website. She alerted me to two articles that Hugh had written in 'Emu' – the journal of the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union (the precursor to the organization now known as Birdlife Australia).

One article was about the behaviour of a large flock of White-winged Choughs seen in and around the Barkers Creek School where he was a teacher (Volume 29, pages 130-132, Emu, 1929 – 'Notes on the White-winged Chough'), and had some photos of choughs foraging from a feeding tray. Does anyone know where this school was located?

The other article was about some of his observations of local robins in Castlemaine and elsewhere around central Victoria (Volume 29, pages 45-47, Emu, 1929 – 'Robins'). It includes an interesting story about the efforts of some of his students to save a Scarlet Robin trapped in a hollow fencepost. It also has more of his photos, including a female Red-capped Robin that he managed to entice onto his pipe.



Hugh Leach and Robin © *Emu*. 1929. *Journal of the RAOU*.

Let me know if you'd like a copy of these articles, and I can email them through.

Then a couple of weeks ago, largely by accident, I found some more interesting information. This paragraph was in the 'Stray Feathers' section of the *Emu* journal (1931, Volume 30, page 251).

"Appreciation of the good work successfully carried out by our member, Hugh Leach, is indicated in the naming after him of a bird fountain recently erected in Castlemaine by the Castlemaine Bird Club. Mr. Leach's enthusiasm and zeal were responsible for the formation of the Club, and its members are now taking advantage of an opportunity of indicating a well-merited recognition."

And so it seems that the Castlemaine Bird Club was operational at least until 1931.

When I described this latest find to members of the Friends of Kalimna Park, a couple of them pointed out that there is an old dam not far from the fountain, which may well have been the source of the fountain's water. It was also plausibly suggested that this 'well-merited recognition' to Mr Leach probably acted more like a bird bath than a fountain.

Chris Timewell c_timewell@hotmail.com

Bird observation in the garden by Damian Kelly

Roaming out in the bush does provide lots of fun when looking for birds, but in reality you can observe many species at home if you make some adjustments to your surroundings to provide suitable resources preferred by a range of birds. Some improvements such as extra vegetation takes time, but other changes such as water points and nest boxes can be added quickly.

When aiming to attract birds to your garden the main things to remember are:

Water is essential

Birds will utilize all plants – native and others

Importance of cover cannot be over-emphasized

Nesting sites - consider adding some nest boxes

All the photos for this article have been taken in our garden – I have carefully located watering sites close to windows so that the house is really my bird hide. As I sit at my desk writing this I am watching a Crimson Rosella splashing in the water – very distracting when work needs to be done! In time, though, with a little patience you will see quite a range of birds, even if you live in an urban area. Birds are not fussy as long as you provide suitable resources that they need.

Although native plant species are often recommended, in reality birds will utilize a range of introduced species. In our garden the Eastern Spinebills love the Correas, but also spend a lot of time on Salvias and even the Tree Lucerne in flowering season. Silvereyes can often be seen around my fruit trees as well as foraging for insects amongst the roses. The neighbors' butterfly bush that hangs over our fence attracts a lot of insects as well as a range of honeyeaters.

Although it may be controversial to the purists, I prefer a mixed garden. In fact, some native gardens with a preponderance of heavy nectar plants can become over-run with aggressive species such as the Red Wattlebird that tends to drive smaller species away. Besides, I like to grow my own food, as well as bird food, so I will never have a purely native garden.

On the vexed question of feeding birds there is a lot of controversy. Some take the hard line of “never”, which I feel will only alienate people. If you have ever visited RSPB reserves in the UK you will see a lot of bird feeders – in fact it is very common for people to feed birds in their gardens. In my view, it is important to have people interacting with wildlife and the home garden is a great place to start. We need to encourage engagement, not put people off with rigid rules.

Clearly there are bad practices and disease risks but on balance, limited provision of resources can be a plus for both people and the birds. If you are interested in recent research on supplementary feeding of Australian birds have a look at the work of Professor Daryl Jones of Griffith University. See:

http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/sites/www.birdsinbackyards.net/files/page/attachments/doc_13_guidelines_review.pdf

In summary, Daryl Jones recommends:

Ensure that the feeding station is cleaned daily and is located out of reach of potential predators such as cats.

- Provide high quality food. Do not provide bread, fatty meat or honey and watermixes. Instead use nectar mixes, good quality seed or meat with a low fat content.
- Vary the type of food provided and when it is available. Alternate between nectar mixes and seed for example. Set it out at different times and not every day.

- Monitor the types of birds using the feeder. If introduced birds are becoming more common or populations that are visiting the feeder are becoming very large, then take a break from feeding for a while and then recommence with a different food type.

- Provide a bird bath

The single best thing to encourage birds is a supply of water. A simple flat, shallow bowl kept topped-up with fresh water will attract a range of birds. Make sure that the water bowls are sited near some cover, as smaller birds are often reluctant to approach open water sites – they prefer places where they can quickly dive back into cover. The image below shows a Rufous Whistler and a White-naped Honeyeater sharing the same bowl. It is interesting to watch different species sharing the same water source at times, particularly in hot weather.



Above left: a Rufous Whistler shows his pink tongue while cooling off.

Above right: One of the ratbags of the area – a Yellow-faced Honeyeater having a good scratch after a plunge into the water bowl.



Left: The Red-browed Finch is common in our garden and is often to be seen in groups of a dozen or more foraging on the ground in search of seeds.

Below: A tiny Striated Pardalote all fluffed up after a refreshing splash.



Left: The Silvereye is one of the more common birds in our garden, often seen in small flocks of a dozen or so foraging amongst the fruit trees, roses or anywhere else for that matter.

Right:
The Striated Pardalote breeds regularly in our garden – this year inhabiting a hollow in the wall. I must get some proper pardalote-friendly nesting sites ready for next season.





Left: Grey Fantail, and right: the Common Bronzewing with its trademark underwing pattern in full view. Bronzewings prefer a deeper water source than the shallow bowls frequented by our honeyeaters and thornbills.

All of these birds can be seen in our garden near the centre of town – you don't need to be out in the bush to enjoy the birds!

Meeting with DELWP on Control Burns

The CFNC received an invitation from the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning to offer suggestions relating to DELWP's strategic approach to reducing bushfire risk to the community. Richard Piesse arranged a meeting attended by three representatives of the Department, and reports as follows.

I presented copies of results of all Ern Perkins' plant surveys extending back over ten years. These were met with considerable interest and the desire to incorporate some of the findings from the surveys.

"We" strongly suggest that an officer or officers come down to Castlemaine and visit the various forest areas to understand our local problems. All three agreed this would be beneficial and showed some interest in a visit later in the year.

Our comments re the various forest areas – Wattle Flat, Muckleford, Smith's Reef, Fryers Ridge and the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, indicated that **shrub regrowth in the burnt quadrats is not as strong over a period of time as in the unburnt quadrats.**

A large percentage of the Eucalypts in most of the forests are looking stressed due to the Cup Moth caterpillar infestations and our "mini" drought conditions.

Special Comments Related to :-

Kalimna Park: Our wonderful town must be safe from fire, but much of Kalimna Park is a wildflower paradise which should be preserved for the local community and visitors.

Blow Mine Track: The latest burn destroyed good areas of bushland and the vast majority of the eucalypts.

Flame Heath Location on Tatt Town Track: A hot control burn appears to have killed off all the Flame Heath East of the Track.

Fryers Ridge: One of Victoria's best wildflower areas; too many fires close to the ridge will destroy the amazing biodiversity.

Porcupine Ridge Road: The section of the road in the vicinity of Wewak track, Loop Track and The great Dividing Trail is similar to Fryers Ridge track, with a great diversity of plants including threatened species.

Finally Andy suggested that they would be prepared to assist our surveys, probably by helping us to target selected areas of Kalimna

Richard Piesse 15-5-2015

From the business meeting:

Please note that members who have not paid their 2015/16 memberships will no longer receive the Castlemaine Naturalist.

This month's speaker - Lynne Kelly

In this presentation, Lynne Kelly will explain the extraordinary methods used by indigenous cultures to memorise a vast amount of natural history knowledge. And to finish off, she'll explain why this understanding led her to a new theory for the purpose of Stonehenge.

Dr Lynne Kelly's latest book, *Knowledge and Power in Prehistoric Societies*, has just been published in the US and UK by Cambridge University Press and will be released in Australia in August. The book is a result of her PhD thesis on memory systems used by non-literate cultures and the application in archaeology.

Observations

Late May -

- ◆ Geraldine had seen a scarlet Robin, and on the beach at Anglesea, had found a Hooded Plover egg which must have been washed out and re-deposited
- ◆ After Geoff Park's report, George found the Gang Gang Cockatoos at Newstead, in Sugar Gums near the station
- ◆ Richard had seen a Great Egret in Laverton Creek



Visitor photo from the kitchen window by Claire Morgan. [Immature Brown Goshawk? - ED]



Two Tawny's in the back yard in Carol st. for at least two weeks - Max and Emma

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 June 12 meeting: Speaker LYNNE KELLY: Indigenous knowledge. How did they remember so much stuff without a Field Guide ?

Fri July 10 meeting: Speaker JOHN LINDNER: Walking in the Flinders Ranges and understanding the Natural History

Fri August 14 meeting: Speaker ROD ORR: Orchids

Fri Sept. 11 meeting: Speaker JASON EDWARDS: Wildlife photography

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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