

Castlemaine Naturalist

June 2016

Vol. 41.5 #443

Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Swift Parrot - photo by Debbie Worland

Swift Parrot Survey – Goughs Range State Forest Geraldine Harris

Seven members enjoyed a very pleasant morning in the Goughs Range State Forest south of Maldon looking for Swift Parrots for our May excursion.

We made a short stop at the Quince tree off Pullans Road where we saw a Flame Robin, Wattlebirds, Crimson Rosella, Spotted Pardalote, Little Raven, Grey Shrike-thrush and Fuscous, Yellow-faced, Yellow-tufted and White-plumed Honeyeaters.

As we entered Sandy Creek Road the front car stopped to look at White-browed Babblers.

On arrival in the Goughs Range State Forest we headed off on foot along the Middle Track, and in true Field Naturalist fashion, spent the rest of the morning wandering up the track searching for birds in the warm sunshine. At the top of the hill we had a wonderful view towards Cairn Curran with two Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring in the distance. By the end of the morning our list included:

White-throated Treecreeper, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Scarlet Robin, Flame Robin, Magpie, Crimson Rosella, Kookaburra, Varied Sittella, Golden Whistler, Weebill, White-naped, Fuscous, Yellow-faced, Brown-headed, and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Eastern Yellow Robin, Spotted and Striated Pardalotes, Red-rumped Parrots, Galahs, but no Swift Parrots!

After a local tip-off that Swifties had been formerly seen near the mine, one car made a short detour on the way home to the mine on the Lower Track. Unfortunately there were no Swifties to be seen but we did see another Wedge-tailed Eagle and had a very good sighting of light morph Brown Falcon with a very white underpart, which it displayed to full advantage when it moved to face the sun.

Most sightings in the Gough Range were high up in coppiced Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*), on a boundary fence, and on the ground among fallen timber. There was very little understorey apart from a few Hedge wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*), Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), Varnish Wattle (*Acacia verniciflua*), and Coffee Bush (*Cassinia arcuata*) and also little obvious blossom about.



Scarlet Robin – photo Peter Turner



Gough's Range bush

Mystery Flower (May newsletter)

Geraldine Harris

Dark Midge Orchid (*Corunastylis sp. aff. rufa*). These orchids are so tiny they probably often go unnoticed. They grow to 10-20 cm. tall with tiny nodding green and purplish brown flowers arranged in a short crowded spike on a thin green stem. The flowers are upside down (with the labellum above the column). The lateral sepals are 4 mm. long and divergent; the purple labellum has an upturned tip and entire or minutely toothed margins; the dorsal petals sometimes have dark bands. They flower between March and May and display a great deal of variation. They are widespread across Victoria, growing in heath, woodland and dry forest.

If you look closely at the photo in last month's newsletter you might see a tiny fly like insect with loaded pollen sacks visiting a flower. In an interview on ABC (The Science Show) in February this year, Peter Bernhardt, Professor of Botany in St Louis, who is studying the pollination of midge orchids, told how these tiny orchids appear to be pollinated by the tiniest flies in Australia as they come to drink nectar inside the flower. These flies are so tiny they source their food by "following predatory spiders and robber flies and that sort of thing. And when these larger predators attack another insect and wound it then the fly goes in and drinks the hemolymph". He talked about spending a very interesting morning at the Australian Museum photographing and marvelling at these tiny flies wearing pollen sacks measuring half their body length!

Other Midge Orchids found in the district are the Sharp Midge-orchid (*Corunastylis despectans*), the Variable Midge Orchid (*C. archeri*) and the Fringed Midge-orchid (*C. ciliata*).

Ref:

Wild Orchids of Victoria, Jeanes & Backhouse

ABC, The Science Show, Feb 27, 2016

Common Orchids of Castlemaine – CFNC Publication



Wildlife Notes

George Broadway

As a schoolboy In the Forties I enjoyed the weekly broadcasts which came to us via the big speaker mounted over the blackboard in the classroom, the radio (or wireless in those days) was located in the main office. Usually a student would be despatched with the request to turn it on. There was the music broadcast presented by Doris Irving, Lindsay Biggins and others who tried to teach us a song, which was also printed in the accompanying booklet of which we each had a copy. Then there was Professor G. S. Browne who brought us up to date on current events. Years later he was one of my lecturers at University.

But the most interesting for me was the session presented by Crosbie Morrison, Editor of "Wildlife" magazine. Among other things he usually had specimens which had been sent in by listeners seeking identification. Many years later I had the opportunity to purchase a number of "Wildlife" magazines which were about to be scrapped by a library. Since then I have acquired a few more by scrounging in junk shops.

I thought it would be interesting to look back at what people were sending in or asking about all those years ago, so I have pulled out at random an issue from June 1945, and here are some of the items being discussed.

Lacewings 2. ; the smaller one with transparent wings which shimmer like an opal in certain light is the adult of the Aphis Lion, often seen on rose bushes and known as the Old Clothes Man because of its habit of covering itself with the sucked dry bodies of its prey, aphids.

The other one with the mottled grey wings is the adult of the Ant Lion which makes little conical pits in sandy soil. It conceals itself at the bottom of the pit until an unwary ant happens to fall in, whereupon it emerges to seize its victim with its large mandibles and drags it down into the bottom of the pit.

Tree Cricket: Resembles a grasshopper but with very long antennae which it uses to find its way in the darkness of hollow trees or under litter.

Green Vegetable Bugs: These moult several times before they reach adulthood, each skin having different markings so it is possible to tell the age if one is sufficiently knowledgeable. The unpleasant smell is typical of bugs, acting as a deterrent to possible predators

Geometer Moth Caterpillar. Also known as Inchworm I believe. They have 6 legs up front, nothing in the middle, and false feet at the rear, so they progress by holding on with the false feet while extending the body as far as they can reach. Then with the forefeet planted, they form a loop with the body while they bring the rear end up against the fore part of the body. This is why they are known as "Looper" caterpillars. If alarmed they pretend to be twigs. I have an Acacia I planted in Kaweka which was completely defoliated by these. I now check all "twigs" very carefully.

Giant Phasma: from Fairfield. Another member of the Grasshopper family, but may be very large. Being female, this specimen was very stout in the body. By keeping perfectly still they pass themselves off as twigs.

Leopard Moth or Footman Moth. Fam. Arctiidae (Peter Marriott, Pt 2)

Listed as *Ardices glatignyi*, but I wonder if the name has changed? Peter Marriott mentions a *Spilosoma glatignyi*, could it be the same? According to Crosbie Morrison the caterpillar is common and destructive in gardens and is a typically brown "Woolly Bear" unattractive to possible predators.

Black-shouldered Kite: Protected throughout the whole year in Victoria. Food is mostly mice and large insects. A specimen brought in recently, shot because accused of taking chickens, had no chicken remains in the stomach.

A junior member sent in the following description of a spider she had found: "Legs and feelers are shiny black: his body is Air Force blue, and the front of his body and his big front nippers are bright red with eight tiny eyes set in black. His feelers are almost heavy enough to be another pair of legs"

For this excellent description, 6 y.o. Eunice Robb was awarded a prize of 2/6

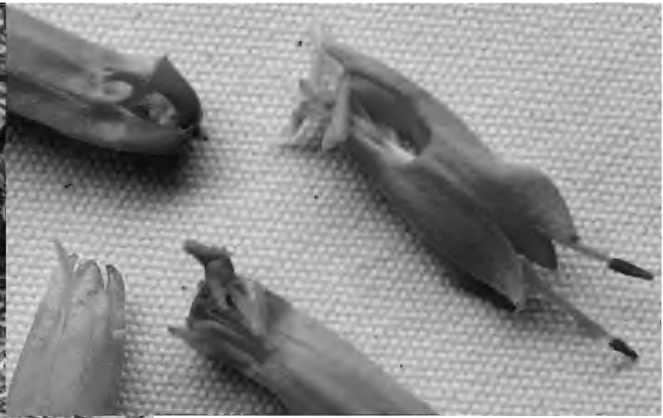
Who's been eating our *Correas*?

Rosemary and Peter Turner

We often have Crimson Rosellas drinking and bathing in the bird baths in our front garden. But recently we observed two bright-eyed specimens demolishing flowers on a *Correa glabra* bush. Each flower was plucked from the branch, then the end was crushed and (presumably) the nectar sucked out; the flower was then dropped. Then one bird decided to try the newly planted *Correa* 'dusky bells', before checking out those littering the ground for left-over sweetness. By the time they flew off, there were many fewer blossoms for the Spinebills that are the usual feeders on these important plants in bird lovers' gardens.

A third rosella flew into one of our small mallees and proceeded to remove lerps by holding a leaf in one claw and pulling it through its beak to scrape off the sweet lerp. This could be seen clearly through binoculars, but the trio flew off before a useful photo could be taken. Pizzey mentions seeds and flowers as parrot food, but not lerps; the Handbook of the Birds of the World reports psyllids and insects being found in stomach contents.





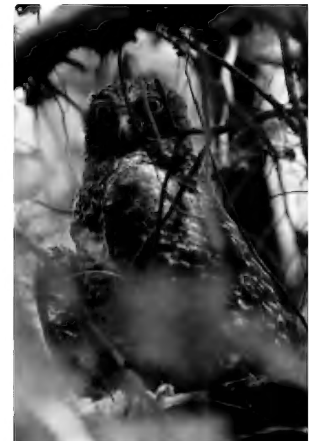
Discarded flowers

Anything left in this one?

Bird and Plant Quiz

Noel Young

Last month the mystery bird was of course, the Powerful Owl. In the first few years after I joined the club in 2008, these remarkable birds visited the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens on their territorial rounds. They would stay for a few weeks, and were seen with their favourite prey, the Ring-tailed Possum. Mostly they are solitary, so you would see only one bird, roosting high in a favourite tree like a Stone Pine, below which you would usually find discarded pellets full of animal bones. But in at least one year that I know of, the female nested and successfully raised one young in the gardens.



To the best of my knowledge however, the Powerful Owl has not been seen in the gardens for three or four years.

As Nigel is off on an overseas trip, the mystery bird for this month (left) is one from my collection. It is seen occasionally around Castlemaine.

And the picture at right is the mystery plant photo by Geraldine, who will reveal what it is next month.



Twitching from a Train

by Chris Timewell

A trip to big smoke of Melbourne is not one that I make too often. (Why would one ever want to leave the Castlemaine district?). When I do make the journey, the train is my preferred mode of conveyance. On the warm calm morning of 31 December 2015, I decided to record as many birds as possible along the way, which I found to be more of a challenge than expected. The high train speeds, the fleeting glimpses and the lack of calls all tested my identification skills. Undoubtedly, there were many small and hidden birds missed along the way. But I'm happy with 24 species spread between 5 train stops. Perhaps not too surprisingly, the Australian Magpie was the only species seen in all five sections.

Ten species from Castlemaine Station (8:08am) to Kyneton station (8:25am): - Australian Wood Duck, White-faced Heron, Australian White Ibis, Rock Dove*, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Long-billed Corella, Crimson Rosella, Australian Magpie, raven sp., Common Blackbird*

Seven species from Kyneton Station (8.25am) to Woodend Station (8:33am): Australian Wood Duck, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Crimson Rosella, Musk Lorikeet, Rock Dove*, Australian Magpie, Common Starling*

Five species from Woodend Station (8:33am) to Gisborne Station (8.42am) [Very hard to spot birds at 80-120kph once the forests get close to the track]: Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crested Pigeon, Red Wattlebird, Australian Magpie, raven sp.

Eight species from Gisborne station (8.42am) to Sunbury Station (8.59am): Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Galah, Eastern Rosella, Australian Magpie, raven sp., martin sp., Common Myna*, Common Starling*

Twelve species from Sunbury station (8.59am) to Footscray station (8.59am): Australian Wood Duck, Spotted Dove*, Rock Dove*, Crested Pigeon, Long-billed Corella, Galah, Magpie-lark, Australian Magpie, raven sp., House Sparrow*, Common Myna*, Common Starling*

Book Review:

Miniature Lives – Identifying Insects in Your Home and Garden

By Michelle Gleeson; CSIRO Publishing 2016

by Peter Turner

Michelle Gleeson declared at age 8 that she planned to become an entomologist. After graduating from University of Queensland, she co-founded Bugs Ed, presenting hands-on insect workshops throughout Queensland, and collaborating with U.Q. on biological outreach programs in remote schools. She has prepared this splendid book for those many of us who would like to know about the bugs around us in home and garden. To quote from her introduction, "Being able to identify an insect you have found in and around your house ... allows us to assess the relative amiability or hostility of a given bug, helping us to decide whether to share our space with it or eject it".

An introductory chapter on Insect Basics describes insect structure and the various orders in straightforward language, with clear line diagrams. The book provides three approaches to identification – what does the bug look like? (morphology) - where does it live? (habitat); and third, through clues the insect has left, with a chapter devoted to each approach. Finally, Chapter 6 describes each of the main insect Orders. There is a lengthy Glossary of technical terms, a Pronunciation guide, and suggestions for further reading.

Chapter 3: Morphology – what insects look like, lists 31 questions, starting with “Is it an insect – does it have 6 legs?” Then, “Does it have wings?” – if not, go to Question 21.... Each question has explanatory notes and - if an Order has been identified from your answers - (e.g., Flies) – a reference to the relevant page of chapter 6.

Chapter 4: Habitat – where insects live and occur, is arranged by places, starting with kitchen and pantry, where one might find Rice Weevils and Indian meal moths. Each insect is described and illustrated in typical sites, and an assessment as to “Goodie or baddie”. Other environments include “In Water” and “On trees and shrubs”.

Chapter 5: Clever clues – the strange structures and evidence that insects leave behind, continues the search through sections such as “markings on leaves and bark”, with references to Chapter 6 as possible identifications emerge.

This book is highly suitable for those of us who find more formal texts on Arthropods daunting. And it should be excellent for children interested in creepy crawlies – not surprising, given Michelle Gleeson’s commitment to educating the young about bugs. Her knowledge of and life-long enthusiasm for insects shine through the pages.

Observations

Debbie Worland -

April 4: First **Swift Parrots** sighted near the golf course [cover photo]

April 5: Royal Spoonbill at Muckleford

April 10: Friarbird at Muckleford



Photos – Debbie Worland

Geraldine Harris -

May 2016 – Connecting Country inspection of cameras attached to nest boxes to spot Tuans at Barkers Creek. Multiple sightings of **Tuans** recorded at both boxes. Also recorded on our camera focused on a bird bath in front of the house.

18.5.16 Large flock of Red-browed Finch (30+) swooped across in front of the car on White-gum Road, Barker Creek.

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 10 meeting: PAUL BATES, DELWP - Controlled Burns

Sat June 11 field trip: Blackwood (fungi excursion)

Fri July 8 meeting: DAMIAN KELLY – Hugh Leach and the history of birding in Australia

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 (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2016

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

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

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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