

# Castlemaine Naturalist

January 2017

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Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Sacred Kingfisher CM gardens - photo Noel Young

## **The 1990s Super Birdwatcher from Sandon – Susannah Starr**

By Chris Timewell

From 1991 until 1997, CFNC member Susannah Starr contributed more than 60 articles to the Castlemaine Naturalist newsletter. For the most part, these articles comprised a complete list of bird species that she had seen on her Sandon property during the preceding month. For unusual and rare species, she often contributed more information about the sighting. These lists provide a fascinating study of bird activity in the Sandon area during this period, including the comings and goings of migratory and nomadic species, breeding and abundance.

In the April 1996 issue of the Castlemaine Naturalist, her place in Sandon was described as 'a property of some 40 acres, was cleared and used for farming, but there are areas of trees, mainly box and stringybark, with Yellow Gum on the flats, and the rainfall is relatively low at 550ml per year.'

In the table below is a summary of the 69 monthly bird lists that she published in the newsletter, commencing in March 1991 and ending in April 1997 (NB: there were a small number of months missed along the way). Over this time she recorded 99 separate bird species, 17 of which had evidence of breeding occurring on or immediately adjoining her property.

Only one species, Striated Thornbill, was seen in all 69 months. Many others were seen in more than 90% of months (Galah, Crimson Rosella, White-throated Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-wren, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Brown Thornbill, Grey Shrike Thrush, Scarlet Robin, Grey Fantail, Australian Magpie, Grey Currawong, White-winged Chough, Welcome Swallow). A surprising number of bird species were recorded in one month only throughout the seven years (Great Cormorant, Grey Teal, Swamp Harrier, Sacred Kingfisher, Painted Button-quail, White-throated Gerygone, Singing Honeyeater, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Red-capped Robin, House Sparrow, Tree Martin). The Hooded Robin had the most obvious decline in this dataset, being recorded from 24 of the first 30 months, and then only once thereafter.

Species Name	Months Seen		Years seen (1991-1997)	Breeding ?	Seasonal Pattern of Observations (if any)
	Out of 69 months	% of all 69 months			
Australasian Grebe	28	41%	91-4, 96-7	yes	Year round, peaking August to December
Little Pied Cormorant	7	10%	91, 93-4		Year round.
Little Black Cormorant	4	6%	93-96		November and December
Great Cormorant	1	1%	95		October
Australian Wood Duck	23	33%	91-96		May to Jan
Australian Shelduck	5	7%	91, 93, 95-6		June to November
Pacific Black Duck	37	54%	All		Year round, peaking June to October
Grey Teal	1	1%	92		September
White-faced Heron	44	64%	All		Year round
White-necked Heron	5	7%	94		January to July
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	4	6%	91-93		Year round
Australian White Ibis	5	7%	92, 94-5		December to February
Masked Lapwing	59	86%	All	yes	Year round
Black-fronted Dotterel	2	3%	92		October and December
Wedge-tailed Eagle	9	13%	91-96		Year round
Little Eagle	36	52%	All		June to March
Brown Falcon	49	71%	All		Year round
Swamp Harrier	1	1%	92		January
Brown Goshawk	3	4%	95-6		Jan, Feb and August
Southern Boobook	3	4%	91, 94		March, August and October
Common Bronzewing	19	28%	91-5, 97		Year round, peaking from Feb to May
Galah	64	93%	All		Year round
Long-billed Corella	17	25%	91-96		Year round
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	41	59%	All		Year round, but mainly August to Nov.
Red-rumped Parrot	25	36%	91-95, 97		Year round
Eastern Rosella	53	77%	All	yes	Year round
Crimson Rosella	66	96%	All		Year round
Laughing Kookaburra	60	87%	All		Year round
Sacred Kingfisher	1	1%	91		October
Southern Boobook	13	19%	92-94, 96-7		Year round
Tawny Frogmouth	3	4%	93, 95-6		January, May and October
Australian Owlet-nightjar	33	48%	All		Year round, peaking from Feb to May
Pallid Cuckoo	17	25%	91-96		August to December
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	9	13%	91-94		Surprisingly, no clear pattern.
Black-eared Cuckoo	2	3%	93		October and November
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo	26	38%	91-96		From July to Feb, peaking from August to Dec. One April sighting.
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	23	33%	91-96		August to Feb, peaking from Sept to Dec.
Painted Button-quail	1	1%	93		May
White-throated Treecreeper	68	99%	All		Year round.
Brown Treecreeper	7	10%	91, 93, 95		April to September
Varied Sittella	36	52%	91-96	yes	Year round, peaking March to Sept.
Superb Fairy-wren	67	97%	All	yes	Year round
Spotted Pardalote	62	90%	All	yes	Year round
Striated Pardalote	54	78%	All		Year round
Weebill	48	70%	92-97	yes	Year round
Yellow Thornbill	25	36%	All		Year round
Striated Thornbill	69	100%	All		Year round
Buff-rumped Thornbill	68	99%	All		Year round
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	60	87%	All	yes	Year round
Brown Thornbill	67	97%	All		Year round
White-throated Gerygone	1	1%	91		October
Red Wattlebird	62	90%	All		Year round

Species Name	Months Seen		Years seen (1991-1997)	Breeding ?	Seasonal Pattern of Observations (if any)
	Out of 69 months	% of all 69 months			
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	54	78%	All	yes	Year round
White-plumed Honeyeater	42	61%	All		Year round, but particularly from Feb to June.
Fuscous Honeyeater	41	59%	All		Year round, but particularly from Feb to July.
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	61	88%	All		Year round
White-eared Honeyeater	42	61%	All		Year round, but particularly from March to Sept.
Singing Honeyeater	1	1%	96		June
Black-chinned Honeyeater	2	3%	95		April and May
Brown-headed Honeyeater	57	83%	All		Year round
White-naped Honeyeater	39	57%	All		March to October
New Holland Honeyeater	2	3%	95-96		June and August
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	1	1%	96		July
Eastern Spinebill	1	1%	96		June
Southern Whiteface	10	14%	91-96		Year round
Grey Shrike Thrush	67	97%	All	yes	Year round
Eastern Yellow Robin	37	54%	All		Year round, but particularly March to October
Scarlet Robin	65	94%	All		Year round
Red-capped Robin	1	1%	95		October
Hooded Robin	25	36%	91-94	yes	March to Dec, peaking from June to Oct.
Flame Robin	2	3%	94-95		Both sightings in April.
Jacky Winter	37	54%	All		Year round
Grey Fantail	66	96%	All		Year round
Restless Flycatcher	41	59%	All		Year round, peaking from Feb to September
Speckled Warbler	53	77%	All		Year round
Willie Wagtail	53	77%	All	yes	Year round
Magpie-lark	34	49%	92-97		Year round
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	50	72%	All		Year round, but from from May to July.
White-browed Babbler	20	29%	92-96		Year round
Golden Whistler	38	55%	91-96		Feb to Oct, peaking from March to September
Rufous Whistler	45	65%	All	yes	August to April
Olive-backed Oriole	20	29%	91-96		August to Dec, with one March sighting.
Crested Shrike-tit	19	28%	91-96		Year round, peaking from May to August.
Australian Magpie	66	96%	All		Year round
Australian Raven	59	86%	All		Year round
Grey Currawong	63	91%	All		Year round
Dusky Woodswallow	4	6%	92, 94		October and November
White-winged Chough	68	99%	All		Year round
Mistletoebird	15	22%	All		October to February
Rufous Songlark	2	3%	92		November to December
Richards Pipit	25	36%	91-95	yes	July to March, peaking from Sept to Dec.
House Sparrow	1	1%	94		May
Red-browed Firetail	35	51%	All	yes	Year round, peaking from Feb to August
Diamond Firetail	49	71%	All		Year round
Silvereye	49	71%	All		Year round, but fewer from Nov to Feb.
European Goldfinch	9	13%	92-95	yes	Year round
Common Blackbird	3	4%	94-95		September and October
Tree Martin	1	1%	95		January
Welcome Swallow	64	93%	All		Year round

## **(Attempted) Murder Most Fowl**

Rita Mills

I heard quite a fuss outside the kitchen window the afternoon of January 4. There was an unfamiliar but very agitated/aggressive sound, plus a rather indignant raven call, too. I looked out to find a Red Wattlebird attacking an Australian Raven (there is a resident pair here, and two pairs of Little Ravens into the bargain). It was quite a vicious attack, too. I'd earlier in the week found a dead Wattlebird on the back garden, and couldn't blame the cats as they hadn't been out for 48 hours. I wondered if we had a very aggressive bird around the house again, but suddenly I saw on the ground behind the raven a wattlebird nestling, and banged on the window to frighten the ravens off (by this time it's mate had arrived to try to lure the wattlebird away), and they both flew off. As there was only one wattlebird, perhaps the dead one was its mate, and it was trying to defend the nest on its own?

I went out to see what I could do, but realized that there was no hope for the little one. It wasn't very long before the parent lost all interest, and afterwards there was no sign of the nestling.

What to do in a case like this? If I brought it inside, it would still have died (and I probably would have got my just desserts from the parent, too!), it was no good putting it in a sheltered spot, and no matter what was done, it was going to die. And frankly, do we need to rescue species that are building up large numbers?

I felt quite sad for the small bird, and wished I could help (despite the above question) but I didn't get the impression that the parent was as sentimental as I was. It did come down and perch in the shrub outside the window later, but just flew off about its business again.

I noticed later that the nestling had disappeared, and concluded that the ravens had won after all, but as I was watering on dusk, I noticed a very cryptic heap of feathers on the ground some 10 metres from where I'd last seen the youngster. I was soon scolded by both parties. I decided to just let things be, and didn't try to touch it, hoping that a neighbour's cat, or one of the foxes, didn't get it after all this.

Six o'clock next morning, forgetting all about the young wattlebird, I let the cats out for their short run. As usual I stayed outside until they were ready to come in for breakfast, but suddenly I noticed some excitement, and realized one had the little wattlebird in his mouth. I roused him, and got it off him (not hard, he hates being in trouble) and to my surprise I was sworn at by both parent and child, again. I decided to try putting it in one of the Melaleucas out the front of the house, and it stayed there for a couple of hours, and when it disappeared I thought it must have fallen and probably

had died of fright (not that it showed much fright at any time), but no, it was asleep on the ground under the shrub, and not impressed by me waking it, neither was the parent. I haven't seen it being fed, but obviously I was wrong about it being deserted.

I have come to the conclusion (again) that we probably interfere too much with nature. Certainly in this case the parent has known more about what it was doing, than I did. I have also concluded that it's no wonder such a feisty bird is so successful and that there are so many of them. They are certainly tough.

## **Spring In England**

Joy Weatherill

As someone interested in Natural History, it is always good to visit a completely new area and discover beautiful new things. So, in May last year, while I was walking around England, I enjoyed seeing a variety of birds, butterflies and flowers.

One of the richest areas for butterflies was in Devon around Dunsford in the Dartmoor National Park and particularly a shady woodland walk from Steps Bridge beside the River Teign to a meadow near Clifford Bridge.

Rare butterflies flit through the woodland glades. Five types of Fritillaries live here-the rarest is the High Brown Fritillary, whose larva feed on violets that grow beneath bracken in the sunny heathland. The High Brown Fritillary is probably the most endangered species of wildlife on Dartmoor. With the Pearl-bordered Fritillary they share similar habitat requirements, ie., medium density - particularly bracken over violets, which produce the conditions and food necessary for larval development. More care is now being taken with things like bracken control, so that land is not cleared so that over-wintering eggs and larvae are not destroyed.

The Devon Wildlife Trust has begun work on a 40,000 pound project spread over the next three years to help protect one of Britain's rarest butterflies. The money will be spent on habitat management work at the Dunsford Nature Reserve to boost numbers. This will include management of scrub and opening up of some of the reserve's woodland glades. (The funds money comes from landfill tax credits donated by Biffa Waste Services).

Should we be doing more to encourage our Eltham Copper Butterfly? Perhaps, as Penny Garnett suggested at a meeting, we could plant more Sweet Bursarias, as these are the preferred plant as larval food for this butterfly.

I also enjoyed walking on Dartmoor and Exmoor among the standing stones, rows and stone circles and the wild ponies.

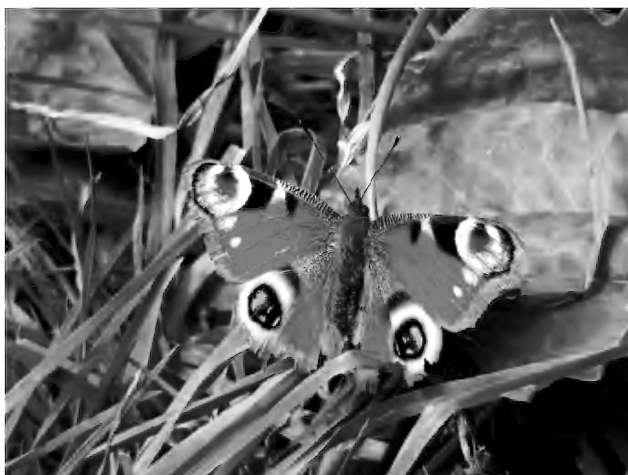


**Spring in England:**  
Magpie, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Robin, Campion and Pied Wagtail



**Spring in England:**

Above - Spotted Orchid; Spotted Purple Orchid; Foxglove  
Below - Pearl bordered Fritillary; Small Copper  
Peacock; Speckled Wood



# A Naturalist's Diary

George Broadway

Last year I wrote a series of articles based on readers' queries sent in to the editor of "Wildlife" magazine, P. Crosbie Morrison. I had managed to identify several specimens myself from reading the descriptions and identifications.

There is a bit of repetition in these articles; it would seem that not everyone had learned from previous examples (like myself), people kept on sending in the same specimens after they had previously been identified.

So let us see what caught readers' interests in 1946 in January and February. First, **January:**

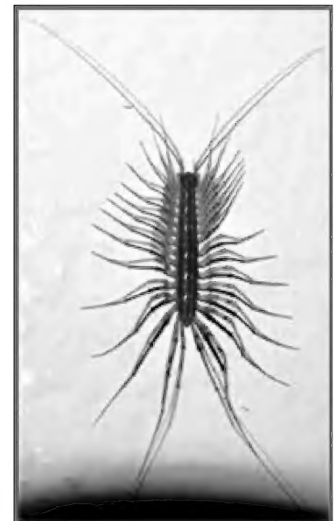
1. An insect known as "The Old Clothes Man". The larval nymphs of the Golden Lacewing Fly. These little critters are the enemies of aphids which they eat, then attach the skin of the aphid to their own backs as camouflage, and possibly also their own outgrown skins as they grow larger. See June 2016
2. Young nymphs of the Green Vegetable Bug, *Nezara viridula*. In the garden they suck sap from plants such as beans and tomatoes. Suggested treatment is dusting with tobacco dust, and removal of garden refuse. Also in June '16
3. Caterpillar of the "Drinker Moth" which depends for camouflage on its resemblance to a twig aided by the skirt of hairs which disguise the outline. I encountered one of these at Hattah in the Mallee years ago when I grasped a twig, only to find it soft and hairy. See Dec '16
4. Black scale on Daphne. Explained that underneath lurks an insect which is sucking juice from the plant. Suggested spraying with white oil, or thin boiled starch which will suffocate the insect.
5. A white butterfly with black and orange markings on the underwing identified as the Caper White *Anapeis java teutonia*
6. Sheets of white soft leathery material found inside a log of wood were *Anadou*, a fungus used by fishermen for drying artificial flies after use, and by jewellers for applying rouge in the polishing of jewellery.
7. The bird dropping spider. See photo July '16, also Dec '16
8. Spiders indoors: Huntsmen spiders which frequently enter houses in warm weather preceding rain. Both specimens were females; males are seen less frequently, but there is not a great disparity in size as there is in some other species of spiders. See Sep '16
9. From E Brighton and Geelong. Long-tailed Wasp, *Megalyra* with tail (6 cm) out of all proportion to body length. (1.5 cm) The tail is an ovipositor used to deposit eggs in the bodies of wood-boring grubs, not a sting.
10. Caloundra Qld. Large green insect, body 15cm, wing span 20 cm. Female Green Phasma or Stick Insect. see June '16
11. Montrose. Green Cicada. After a life lived underground as a nymph, they emerge during the hottest days of summer. They have a stout beak for sucking sap. Only the males are vocal but they more than make up for the silence of the females.
12. Surrey Hills. A huge slug found in the garden about 15 cm long.



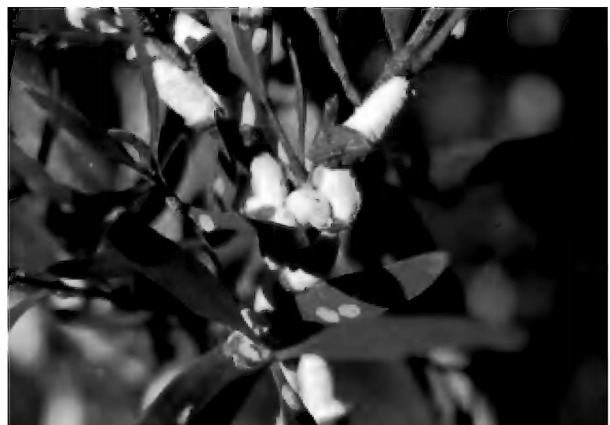
13. Camberwell. Land Planarians. See photo Oct '16. Very primitive, Brightly coloured, unsegmented "worms". Found in damp parts of the garden. Attack earthworms ferociously.

**Observations in February 1946:**

1. Bayswater. The largest gilled fungus in Victoria, *Amanita ochrophylla*. Fuhrer p.25. Many insect larvae feed on the flesh.
2. Miss Marston having outdoor classes disturbed by loud cicadas. No remedies suggested.
3. Wingless solitary wasp, known as Blue Ant *Diamma bicolor*. Charges about madly on hot days and stings like fury. The male is winged, smaller and not often seen.
4. Darley V. Very flat fly found on fledgling bird: member of a group which attack birds as external parasites. The flatness assists them to move between the feathers. Common name Is Louse fly.
5. Elliminyt (near Colac). A very tiny flattened insect found in the house. A book-louse or *Psochid*. Feed on starchy foods, such as in the backs of books and wallpapers. Do little harm but can be dealt with by insect sprays.
6. Melbourne and Sth. Melbourne. Two specimens of House Centipede or "Johnny Hairylegs" Genus *Scutigera* Fearsome looking but does great service by eating silverfish and other small insect pests.
7. Northcote. Cottony Cushion Scale females with large cushiony egg sacs. Introduced accidentally into California they threatened to wipe out the citrus industry before being brought under control by a natural enemy, ladybird beetles from Australia.
8. Red Cliffs. Tree cricket again. See Photo Nov '16
9. Terip Terip and Alexandra. Hawk Moth adult and larva. Large coloured spots near the head end are merely surface markings, but when this part of the body is raised and swollen, they look like a pair of fearsome eyes, striking fear into bird enemies.
10. Preston. Bird Dropping Spider again. See 7 above.



Above: *Scutigera*  
 Below left: Hawk Moth  
 Below right: Soft bodied scale, Hattah



## Mystery Bird – Nigel Harland

The last bird before the Festive Season was the Common Bronzewing. A large bird which is shy and often heard flying away from the observer. It often feeds on the ground, has a whitish forehead with a pinkish breast and white stripe below the eye. When the wings are extended you can see green, blue and red markings on the wings.

The Brush Bronzewing is a very similar species, which has some distinctly different markings. The general colour is brown on the back with bluish underparts. The markings on the wings are distinctly different, being bluish green in colour. It is a less common bird in our district and equally shy.

I will leave you with the bird for next month, with no clues. [right]



### Photo observations - Heron chicks in the botanical gardens



Left: Peter Turner - discovery of four? White-faced Heron chicks on the island on December 1

Above: Noel Young - three youngsters visible in the elm tree January 3

Our February speaker: David Cheal

### The role of fire in Box-Ironbark forests

David Cheal is a botanist with expertise in ecological restoration, landscape ecology and survey methodologies. He has worked at the Arthur Rylah Research Institute on aspects of the ecological impacts of fire in forests, and currently holds the position of Associate Adjunct Professor at Federation University, Ballarat. David will make a short presentation on aspects of fire impacts in Box-Ironbark forests, and recovery of flora and fauna. He will then open the meeting to questions and comments from the audience, to extend the discussion in areas of interest to members. David Cheal has said that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers in this complex area of concern to field naturalists in our region – rather, there are wiser, more thoughtful answers and other answers that may be simple and attractive, but counter productive.

## Roadside Cleanup

Our Club takes responsibility to remove rubbish along a 4 km stretch of the Pyrenees Hwy from the top of McKenzies Hill in the direction of Newstead, past the Castlemaine Golf Club & the Steiner School. Our cleanups are held on four Saturday mornings each year and normally take less than two hours. Meet on the corner of Pyrenees Hwy & Willy Milly Rd (near Tait Decorative Iron) at 9 am. Please bring your own gloves. Fluoro safety vests and garbage bags are supplied. Any queries, contact Geoff Harris 0418 392183.

**Cleanups are planned for February 18, May 20, August 19, and November 18**

## Butterfly Observations – December 2016

Chris Timewell

As an observer and identifier of butterflies, I am very much in the beginner category. However, it's a good time of year to be learning, as the adults seem to be prolific and diverse. The recently published book that focuses of Victorian Species has been of invaluable assistance ('Butterflies: Identification and Life History', by Ross Field). During the month of December 2016, I was able to identify the following species from my urban yard in Castlemaine. There were a couple of others as well that flew over and away before I could work out what they were.

- Green Grass Dart (*Ocybadistes walkeri*) – Not many. Often perched on Wallaby Grass stems.
- Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*) – Not many. Near the vegetable patch
- Australian Painted Lady (*Vanessa kershawi*) – Common. Throughout garden, lawn, ground. (also seen many times in local bushlands during December).
- Common Grass-blue (*Zizinia otis*) – Common. Mostly flying low over lawn.
- Caper White (*Belenois java*) – Passing through, landing briefly.
- Meadow Argus (*Junonia villida*) – Not many. On ground.
- Satin Azure (*Ogyris amaryllis*) – Flying around flowering eucalypt.
- Common Brown (*Heteronympha merope*) – Moderately common. Throughout garden.

## Spraying Cicadas

Geraldine Harris

During the last week in December 2016 while taking an evening walk along the Barkers Creek we noticed the shrill chorus of cicadas and went looking for the source for the commotion in order to show our grand daughter. We discovered more and more cicadas in the wattles alongside the creek including one emerging from its final instar, and as we moved in for a closer look we suddenly became aware of explosions of liquid being sprayed over us. We were looking towards the setting sun in the west and the spraying was so profuse it looked like someone had turned on a fine exploding sprinkler system - we were amused as we tried to dodge the sprays and still get a close look at the insects. I have searched, but so far have failed, to find any reference to this behaviour in cicada populations.

**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 Feb 10 2017: Annual General Meeting -**

Please think about volunteering to *share the load!*

speaker: DAVID CHEAL on 'The role of fire in Box-Ironbark forests'

**Sat Feb 11 field trip:** to the Red, White and Blue track, to compare burnt and unburnt areas.

**Saturday February 18 - Roadside Cleanup** (see P. 11)

### **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

### **2016 Committee**

President:	Nigel Harland		5474 8246
Secretary:	George Broadway	georgebroadway@bigpond.com	5472 2513
Treasurer:	Geoff Harris		
Geraldine Harris	5474 2244	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867
Peter Turner	5470 6891	Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345

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