

Castlemaine Naturalist

April 2018

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



White-faced Heron Forest Ck. – photo Noel Young

PRESIDENT'S REPORT for 2017

George Broadway

As it happens I have been out of action for a significant part of the year. I went to the doctor a perfectly fit and healthy specimen, or so I thought, only to be told that I have a leaky valve and so was promptly whisked off to hospital. After 2 valve repairs and 4 bypasses I am not quite as I used to be, but as my wife reminds me, it usually takes about 2 years to properly recover. I would therefore like to thank the members of the committee who continued to run things in my absence, especially Peter who took over from me as secretary and as a result club business runs much more efficiently than it has done for some years.

I would also like to thank Nigel for his work as president over the past 2 and a bit years: it must have been a bit of a drag coming in from Sutton Grange to attend committee meetings, especially in the depths of winter. He has also sacrificed his time to go on forays in search of rare birds in order to bring back pictures to show we stay-at-home members.

Peter as mentioned has done a magnificent job as secretary. In my absence he has coped with liaison with other groups in order to further the arrangements to carry on the work of 'Ern Perkins, an enterprise which involves several groups in the city.

Noel is a real treasure as I am sure you all realise as you receive your copies of the Newsletter. I am full of admiration for the way he always manages to fill the pages with interesting material, plus of course, coloured photographs. Some of you may remember the early days when the Newsletter was put together by cutting and pasting, literally, then photocopied at the Education Centre. You may be tired of reading about Wildlife specimens of 70 years ago, but I have been trying to help out Noel, and I appeal to other members to try to supply material for him to make his life easier. As an example there is Judy Hopley's excellent account of the club outing to Mt Macedon, something which other members might emulate. Judy's article will make other members feel sorry that they did not attend. There are some members who do not participate in meetings or outings but who subscribe purely for the newsletter.

I could not forget Geoff who has taken over the books, and as a retired accountant has streamlined our financial affairs. We even have phone banking now, or we would have if I could master the procedures and the password.

Richard does not get to every meeting which is understandable as he has to make the journey from Sunshine, but his input is invaluable, and he would be seriously missed if he were to decide that it was all too onerous.

Since Geraldine has had to resign as did Rita previously, it has been pleasing to welcome 2 other ladies, Dianne and Sue on to the committee. We trust they will find the experience enjoyable and will continue to provide their valuable input.

Mention should also be made of Geraldine who has resigned from the committee since Geoff became Treasurer, but performs an invaluable role in organising the mailing of our newsletter. Not only that but is also the provider of the cakes which are so much enjoyed with the "cuppa" following our meetings.

I have mentioned the legacy which Ern has left us. During the time since he left us much effort has been made to continue his work. As an example the priceless mass of data regarding plants has been made available on line to whoever may wish to use it, while the work which he and Lesley did surveying the birdlife of various areas is being maintained by several people. At the launch of the Eucalyptus book which Ern was able to attend, he remarked that next we should do an Acacia book. In order to respect his last words (almost), a group was formed to do just that. Unfortunately I was unable to continue due to my hospitalisation and subsequent recuperation, but the work has been most ably performed by Bernard Slattery and Bronwyn Silver of the Friends of the Box-ironbark Forests and we are looking forward to its launch in the very near future. We as a club also offered to contribute to the expense of production but because of the grants received this proved to be unnecessary.

Mention should also be made of Ron Westcott who took on the role of editing the on-line flora database. I am sure we are all very grateful to Ron as I for one have not a clue as to what the task involves. We also thank Chris Timewell for continuing as our web-master.

Our roadside cleanup work has continued, ably organised by Geoff Harris. I have been unable to attend since my operation but Geoff reported a very good attendance at the November effort when a substantial haul of litter was collected. This is definitely a case of "Many hands make light work". With a good attendance the task is quickly accomplished so please try to make it the next time Geoff organises a working bee.

Finding speakers to address the club has not been easy but we managed for another year and were treated to some very interesting talks. Any suggestions in this regard would be very much appreciated by your committee.

Field trips on the other hand have not been so well attended of late. I remember in the early days of our club when a long line of cars would set off. It was very pleasant to spend an afternoon botanising or birding or whatever and then gathering for a cup of tea before returning home. Now I believe I have said enough. It remains but to wish the incoming committee all the best for the coming year and to ask all of you to try to make some sort of contribution by adding observations,

writing articles, helping on the roadside, keeping a lookout for potential guest speakers, suggesting suitable locations for outings, and so on.

Notes and Specimens 1940

George Broadway

Let's see what specimens were sent in by readers of "Wildlife" magazine in April 1948. Can members find similar specimens today?

Insects

Geelong: A beetle with no common name. *Rhipidocera femcralis*, not uncommon in the Mallee but unusual at Geelong. A suitable common name would be "Featherhead" as it has broad feathered antennae, slender body and fine silvery spots.

Geelong: Ant-lion lacewing adult with large clubbed antennae. See June 2016

Gresswell Sanitorium: One of the larger Ghost Moths, *Trictena argentata*, which emerge on dark, drizzly nights and spray their eggs among the trees.

Chatswood (NSW): Your sketches clearly indicated that the specimens were Damsel-fly larvae. Damsel-flies are like smaller versions of dragon-flies. Larvae are common in cold clear water where they feed on mostly microscopic animalcules and in their turn form an important part of the diet of river fishes.

[Photo right - Damsel-fly]



Mornington: Not a vine hawk moth but a Wattle Goat Moth, of very different appearance. The larvae burrow into trees, principally Wattles which are often killed as a result. See March 2017.

Sandy Creek (S.A.): Robber Fly. One of the largest Australian flies and very useful as it catches smaller pest flies on the wing. See March 2017

Myrtle Bank (S.A.): Dark brown Helmeted Grasshopper, not harmful because it never appears in swarms. The "Helmet" aids movement through matted vegetation.

Alexandra: Tree Cricket *Paragryllacris combusta*, It can give a good hard nip but is not poisonous. See Nov 2017

Hornsby (N.S.W.): Not a bee, but sufficiently like one to deceive humans and birds. It is a Beefly or Drone-fly, *Eristalis tenax* whose larvae are Rat-tailed Maggots, considered useful in the garden. A true 2-winged fly, the other little appendages are halteres or balancers.

Wonthaggi: One of the Phasmas or Stick insects, see June 2016. Related to the Praying Mantis but is entirely vegetarian. The answers to your questions are:- It has jaws but can bite only leaves and bark. It is pitifully harmless, and it has no sting.

Canberra: Your spider specimen was too dried up to identify positively, but appeared to be one of the Crab spiders. (*Fam*). *Clubionidae*. Your other specimens;

Jewel Beetle, *Stigmodera amphicroa*, Fam. *Buprestidae* Larger bug *Agonoscelis rutila*, and smaller bug *Raphigaster pentomoides*. The Pentatomid bugs are the stink-bugs, most of which feed on plant juices.

Lorne: A beetle rarely found because it lives for only a few weeks after emerging from the pupa. The larvae burrow into Box trees and eucalypts feeding on the wood. When mature they pupate in the tunnel close to the bark. The adults emerge in summer, mate, lay their eggs and die.

Ascot Park (S.A.): Frothy egg case of the large native praying mantis which is brown and nearly twice the size of the introduced green one.

Blacktown (N.S.W.) ; Footman moth. Light wings sparsely speckled with brown and orange markings on the abdomen. The larvae are the Woolly Bear caterpillars.

Dromana: Larvae of the Painted Apple Moth, *Tela anartoides*. Formerly the Painted Acacia Moth until it decided that apples were better. A serious pest in orchard and garden.

Spiders

Hampton: The large spider was a Crab spider, *Heteropoda venatoria*, the small and beautiful green one was a member of the orb-web family, *Aranea similis*. It has no common name.

St Kilda: A pretty little spider with the pair of spikes on each side and a single spike each side of the stern, mosaic black and white with a little yellow is the Spiny Spider, *Gasteracantha minax*. Sociable, common, harmless. See Oct 2016



Crab Spider

Botanical

Daylesford: Hyacinth Orchid, *Dipodium punctatum*

Albury: Wonga Vine, *Tecoma australis* A native member of the genus *Tecoma*, widely grown as garden creepers.

General

Barnawartha: Small scorpion. Not dangerous but the tail could deliver a painful sting comparable to that of a wasp.

Wirrulla (S.A.): Eggs of the little gecko lizard. Most lizards lay eggs with parchment-like shells which will dent but not break if prodded, but the geckos lay brittle-shelled eggs like miniature birds' eggs. They are hatched by the warmth of the sun. See August 2017

March Bird Quiz

In the last issue, the bird quiz photo had magically flown out of our printed copies. Our printer has apologised for the glitch, so we present it again here. The answer is on page 7.



Why is south west Australia's ecology so special?

Peter Turner

Members of CFNC who have visited the iconic south west of Western Australia and marvelled at the extraordinary diversity of the vegetation, especially evident during the Spring, will have pondered this question – the title of Carol Hall's talk on 9th March, after the AGM. Carol's answer was based on the complex geology of the region, largely composed of granitic rocks of various ages, and the ways in which weathering over time has resulted in different structures and soils. Carol, a member of Ballarat FNC, has given talks to CFNC before, most recently on Iceland. Her Perth to Perth tour of SW WA - with International Park Tours – included Boyagin, Sandford and Wave Rocks, Norseman, Esperance, and Albany. The contrast to Iceland is stark!

Carol's expertise in physical geography and underlying geological formations leads her to focus on the many different environments created by large rock formations and other land forms. She explained the major geological structures underlying the south west – the dominant 2.8 billion year old Yilgarn Craton of granites and gneiss, and the younger 1300 million year granites around Esperance, and Albany. The Stirling Ranges and Fitzgerald NP are quartzite resulting from weathered sedimentary rocks lifted in the Albany-Fraser Orogeny. In considering the varied environments associated with the many massive exposed granite rocks in the region, Carol follows Stephen Hopper's classification*: massive rock surfaces, fractured/fissured rocks, ex-foliated pieces of rock that can form shelters for animals, boulders, Gnammas (pools in the rocks), soil-filled depressions and fringing vegetation.



We were then treated to a sequence of superb photographs showing examples of these types of environment and the plants that grow in and around them, as Carol took us from Boyagin Rock and Wave Rock down to the coasts near Esperance, and around to Albany; from lichens and mosses and tiny flowering specimens to the large trees growing among massive boulders in

the wetter region of Mt Frankland. Finally she returned to the Stirling Ranges and Fitzgerald NP – where the well drained soils have been depleted of nutrients over the millennia – with the paradoxical consequence that they exhibit the greatest biodiversity in Australia.

Future visits to view the wildflowers of the South West will be greatly enriched by the insights Carol gave us into the reasons for the very special nature of the ecology of the region.



* Life on the Rocks by Stephen Hopper, illustrated by Philippa Nikulinsky (Fremantle Press).

Birds of Sutton Grange, March 2018

Nigel Harland

Noisy Friarbird (photo)	Crimson Rosella
Superb Fairy Wren	Red-rumped Parrot
Eurasian Blackbird	Tree Martin
New Holland Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Australian Magpie	Galah
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Willie Wagtail
White-browed Scrubwren	Red-browed Finch
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Eastern Spinebill	Long-billed Corella
Scarlet Robin	Common Bronzewing
White-winged Chough	Black-faced Cuckooshrike
Red Wattlebird	



Will the Silver Banksia survive in Central Victoria?

At our September meeting last year, Simon Heyes talked about the decline in Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) woodlands across Western Victoria – see the summary in the October 2017 newsletter. Those of us concerned about the loss of *Banksia marginata* in our region may be interested to read the recent Connecting Country blog;

(<https://connectingcountry.org.au/saving-the-silver-banksia-presentation/>)

on the talk by geneticist Adam Miller on the latest results from his genetic studies on Silver Banksia populations. This presentation on March 19th was hosted by the Harcourt Valley Landcare Group with the Central Victorian Banksia Working Group.

The threats to Silver Banksia are serious, so it is encouraging that research programs at both Latrobe and Deakin Universities are looking for ways to restore viable populations of this once widespread plant.

- Peter Turner

From your committee:

At the AGM on 9th March, all members of the former committee were re-elected apart from Nigel Harland who did not stand again. The strength of the club depends on the interests, enthusiasm and skills of all members, and we encourage you to assist in one of the following ways:

1. Join the committee! We meet once a month from 6 pm for about an hour, and have vacant committee positions.
2. Become Assistant Newsletter editor to help Noel Young; If you have used MS Word to prepare a newsletter or a document with photos included, you have the skill to produce a *Castlemaine Naturalist*. Learn by working with Noel, using a template based on a previous edition.
3. Write an article for the newsletter on your particular area of interest in our natural world, a report on an excursion you enjoyed or on one of the talks by our guest speakers.

Peter Turner, Secretary

Please note – this year the Editor's email address has changed. If you have the old one in your contacts, please update as the old one will soon be terminated.

Bird Quiz - April

Nigel Harland

The bird featured last month was the Long-billed Corella. It is a very common bird in our district, very similar to the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. In flight it looks much more streamlined and its call is somehow softer than that of the Cockatoo. You will often see them on the ground digging for roots. A similar bird is the Little Corella which is generally found in more northern climes, but occasionally visits our region. The main distinguishing feature is the length of the bill, which is much smaller in the Little Corella.

The bird for next month is shown at right.



Photo Observations

At our Anglesea property - a little pygmy possum appeared under the shade umbrella this morning - a few minutes later he climbed onto the umbrella and launched himself into the heath nearby. This photo was taken in November 2012 when we found one who had taken up residence in the mailbox- Geraldine



And a bowl full of soggy New Holland Honeyeaters at the Turner's recently, plus a spiffy Eastern Spinebill.



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 13 meeting: speaker DAVID HOLLANDS - Cranes, Herons and Storks of Australia

Sat April 14 field trip: We plan to look for water birds following David Hollands' talk - site(s) to be decided

Fri May 11 meeting: speaker ZOE THOMPSON – native grasslands

Mon May 14: Roadside clean-up. Organiser Geoff Harris

Fri June 8 meeting: speaker TANYA LOOS

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 2018

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

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

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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