

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Spike Wattle *Acacia oxycedrus*, Junction track
- photo by Noel Young August 28

Wetlands renewal – a success story

Noel Young

Attendees at the August meeting were treated to ecological consultant Damien Cook's detailed account of his most recent project – the restoration of a large area of important wetlands which have been severely degraded over several decades.

Before taking us to the Kerang Marshes and their problems, Damien pointed out that roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world's natural wetlands have been destroyed. He outlined the value of such wetlands in terms of their ecological significance and in the local example, of their cultural significance as well.

The Avoca river is one of three endoreic drainage systems in Victoria. It flows intermittently, and in times of flood rarely flows beyond the Koorangie marshes. The marshes were adapted to cycles of flooding and drying out, and this was disrupted by the introduction of irrigation practices, and a weir to retain water for a duck shooting game reserve resulted in the death of a huge area of Red Gum forest. Red Gums he explained, can withstand wet feet for only 2 or 3 years. Salinity due to irrigation overflow causing rising water tables has also caused vegetation death in the region. Irrigation practice is much improved now with soil moisture sensors.

The Koorangie marshes cover 3000Ha, and are an important part of the Ramsar listed Kerang lakes. They host when wet, tens of thousands of water birds. In 2016, a record 1500 Freckled Duck were counted. Many migrating waders fatten up on the drying mud flats before heading north at the end of summer.

Over the last 4 years a lot of work has gone into planting mainly Red Gum saplings scattered through the marshes. They are deep planted into the mud during summer, when soil moisture means no watering is needed, but they are caged to protect against rabbits. A 95 percent survival has been achieved. 16 indigenous people were engaged on the project, and proved to be hard workers in the arduous conditions. There is potential to convert 13000 Ha of wetland to Red Gum forest, and Damien hopes to continue the work under a new "Wetland Revival" project.

2017 Annual Challenge Bird Count – nationwide results

By Chris Timewell

As detailed in a February 2018 newsletter article, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club has entered a 'team' in the Annual Bird Count Challenge (ABCC) for approximately 20 years. As a quick reminder, the ABCC involves teams from across Australia documenting as many bird species and individuals as possible within a calendar day within their region. This is meant to occur on the first weekend of December, although this was a bit flexible in 2017 due to the dire wet and wild weather forecast for Victoria on these days. For regional teams, searches can occur up to a distance of 25km from a central point – for which Castlemaine is the Market Building. For a bird to be included in the count, it must either be heard by at least three people or seen by at least two. The ABCC is coordinated by volunteers from BirdLife Australia. The 2017 Castlemaine team comprised seven separate groups comprising 22 people, who searched at 50 or so locations.

The summarised results from the 13 regional Victorian teams is provided in Table 1. Of these, Castlemaine was the only team to detect Powerful Owls (with an impressive 6 individuals – or 3 separate pairs). Castlemaine was also one of only two regional Victorian teams to detect Scarlet Honeyeaters, and one of only three to detect a White-backed Swallow.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the most unusual regional Victorian sightings were from the extremes of the state. Among other specialities, the East Gippsland Bairnsdale team detected 18 Wonga Pigeon, 11 Topknot Pigeons, breeding Square-tailed Kites, one Baillon's Crake, 1500 Red-necked Avocets, seven Pacific Golden Plover, four Hooded Plover, eight Black-tailed Godwit, one Whimbrel, one Red Knot, three Curlew Sandpiper, 100 Little Tern, 66 Fairy Tern, one Turquoise Parrot, five Eastern Koel, 12 Southern Emu-wren, one Painted Honeyeater and three Cicadabirds! Interesting species from Mildura included 3 Glossy Ibis, 588 Red-necked Avocets, 331 Blue Bonnet, 6 White-browed Treecreepers, 30 White-winged Fairy-wrens, one Orange Chat and four Black-faced Woodswallow, 47 Little Crow and 40 Torresian Crow.

Highlights from other regional Victorian teams included a single Malleefowl, 200 Black-tailed Native-hens, four Little Button-quail, four Shy Heathwren, two Rufous Fieldwren and 14 Southern Scrub-robins recorded by Horsham; five Magpie Geese and two Square-tailed Kite by Ballarat; five Plumed Whistling-duck and one Azure Kingfisher by Roslynmead (west of Echuca); 1050 Short-tailed Shearwaters by Warrnambool, 1226 Australian Gannets, one Osprey, breeding Brolga and one Bassian Thrush by Portland; five Black falcons by Nhill and an Azure Kingfisher by Latrobe Valley.

Table 1. Regional Victorian team results from 2017 Annual Bird Challenge Count

| Region | # of bird species | # of Individual birds |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Ballarat | 153 | 6717 |
| Bendigo | 81 | 2262 |
| Castlemaine | 107 | 1723 |
| Eppalock | 95 | 958 |
| East Gippsland / Bairnsdale | 184 | 27,159 |
| Horsham | 172 | 5661 |
| Latrobe Valley | 116 | 2209 |
| Mildura | 136 | 6977 |
| Nhill | 73 | 1504 |
| Portland | 140 | 8512 |
| Roslynmead | 87 | 1905 |
| Warrnambool | 85 | 5680 |
| Yea Rail Trail | 36 | 208 |
| 2017 TOTAL | 282 | 71,475 |
| 2016 TOTAL | 269 | 59,991 |
| 2015 TOTAL | 278 | 96,073 |

As a whole, regional Victoria was quite successful compared to other parts of the country that participated (Table 2). In fact, it could be argued that in the 2017 ABCC, the Castlemaine team alone detected more birds than Western Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory, ACT and Tasmania combined!

Table 2. Summary of national results from 2017 Annual Bird Challenge Count

| Region | # of Teams | # of bird species | # of individual birds |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Melbourne area | 7 | 169 | 16,520 |
| Regional Vic. | 13 | 282 | 71,475 |
| NSW | 2 | 169 | 3189 |
| Queensland | 5 | 225 | 13,027 |
| 2017 TOTAL | 27 | 370 | 104, 201 |
| 2016 TOTAL | 30 | 377 | 87,407 |
| 2015 TOTAL | 33 | 413 | 155, 73 |

Interesting and unusual birds from other regions included seven Pacific Baza, five Squatter Pigeon, one Bush-hen and 14 Grey Plover from Queensland; and five Australasian Bittern and eight Superb Parrot from NSW.

Castlemaine will undoubtedly be entering another team in this year's challenge count, which is being held on the 1 & 2 December. If you are interested in being part of a group for all or part of one of these days, please let me know (c_timewell@hotmail.com). Bird enthusiasts of all skills levels are welcomed and encouraged. It's a fun day, and a good opportunity for beginners to learn from more experienced birdwatchers. You may also wish to have a group of your own – which can be as low as two people but better with 3 or more. If so, also let me know and I can allocate you to a particular set of locations within the Castlemaine region.

Photo Observations

Trace Balla – Kalimna photos

Late July, start of August - I've seen all of the plants below in Kalimna and the gully on Colles rd. The orchids are Emerald Greenhoods as confirmed by ecologist Kark Just, and Alan Ried, who spotted our first flowering sundew on 2nd Aug while we were out walking on the south east end of Kalimna park.



Noel Young – backyard visitors

An odd couple foraging on my urban property on 21st of August - male Common Bronzewing and a Grey Shrike-thrush.



Claire Morgan

Southern Whiteface – seen with Yellow-rumped Thornbills at Muckleford station 3/9; Yellow-footed Antichinus at Echuca 28/8; and Square-tailed? Kites nesting at Muckleford.



Birdlife Castlemaine District welcomes all bird lovers.

There is great strength and enthusiasm for birds in our region, amongst CFNC members (including those continuing the “Perkins” surveys), Landcare groups and, especially over the past decade, all those involved in the monitoring work of Connecting Country. This is the basis for the new Birdlife branch, which as established by Birdlife earlier this year. Jane Rusden, Convenor of the branch, has written about the initial activities being organised:

On the first Saturday of the month the newly formed Castlemaine District BirdLife Branch holds a regular bird walk for anyone who is interested in coming along. September’s walk was our second bird walk and held in Fryerstown. It was a great success - 20 birdwatchers, some very experienced and others not so, saw 40 species of birds as we were guided by Fryerstown locals Clodagh and Carol. The weather was doubtful but spirits were high.



Pied Oystercatcher at Torquay
photo by Joy Weatherill

The morning began with a wonderful tour of Fryerstown old school, followed by Clodagh's excellent bird call quiz of the local birds, to get our ears in tune. Some of the highlights were Square-tailed Kite, Crested Shrike-tit and four Cuckoo species, plus Jacky Winter, Yellow-rumped Thornbill and Southern Whiteface all foraging in a small paddock. Another highlight is the social side where we get to meet new comers and connect with friends. It was lovely to have along a number of Fryerstown locals.

In the past, Tanya Loos from Connecting Country has run very popular monthly bird walks. Castlemaine District BirdLife is now running these walks along similar lines. We generally do surveys, often it's the 2Ha 20 area count using the Birdata app, as well as noting down a bird list for the morning. Most importantly we aim to create an environment where the more experienced birders encourage and mentor those of less or no experience.

To find out about the walks and where they are each month, there are various options.

Join BirdLife to support birds from a local level to international level, and receive emails about Castlemaine District BirdLife Branch activities. We have to consider insurance and this is the best way for everyone on the walk to be covered: www.birdlife.org.au

Facebook:

<https://m.facebook.com/BirdLife-Castlemaine-District-246773012585580/>

Castlemaine District BirdLife email: castlemaine@birdlife.org.au

Bird list: 1 Sep 2018; Fryerstown

"None" refers to nesting activity

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Australian Magpie (4, None) | Pallid Cuckoo (1, None) |
| Australian Raven (3, None) | Red Wattlebird (2, None) |
| Brown Goshawk (2, None) | Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (1, None) |
| Brown Treecreeper (4, None) | Silvereye (1, None) |
| Common Blackbird (1, None) | Southern Whiteface (4, None) |
| Crested Shrike-tit (2, None) | Spotted Pardalote (3, None) |
| Crimson Rosella (7, None) | Square-tailed Kite (1, None) |
| Eastern Rosella (5, None) | Striated Pardalote (2, None) |
| Fan-tailed Cuckoo (1, None) | Striated Thornbill (2, None) |
| Fuscous Honeyeater (4, None) | Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (2, None) |
| Galah (6, None) | Superb Fairy-wren (2, None) |
| Golden Whistler (1, None) | Wedge-tailed Eagle (1, None) |
| Grey Fantail (1, None) | Weebill (2, None) |
| Grey Shrike-thrush (2, None) | Welcome Swallow (3, None) |
| Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo (1, None) | White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike (2, None) |
| Jacky Winter (2, None) | White-browed Scrubwren (2, None) |
| Long-billed Corella (2, None) | Willie Wagtail (1, None) |
| Musk Lorikeet (4, None) | Yellow-faced Honeyeater (4, None) |
| New Holland Honeyeater (3, None) | Yellow-rumped Thornbill (4, None) |
| Olive-backed Oriole (1, None) | Yellow-tufted Honeyeater (5, None) |

Our speaker for the September meeting will be Peter Turner

"Conservation Issues in Beautiful New Zealand – some observations"

is based on Rosemary and Peter's two visits earlier this year, their first to NZ: stunning scenery, the underlying geology, fascinating plants, intriguing endemic birds - so much to enjoy, so different from Australia. But, like us,



New Zealanders have caused, and face the

consequences of serious environmental damage to landscapes and species. Some of the impressive efforts to enable seriously threatened species such as the Black Stilt and Takahe to recover will be described.



Observations

On July 29, Denis found a male Red-headed Mouse Spider moving fast in the driveway, although it was 9 degrees on a cloudy, windy and showery day.

On September 3rd near Muckleford station, Claire saw a pair of **White-fronted Chats**, and a couple of **Southern Whitefaces*** mixing with Yellow-rumped Thornbills. [see photo observations]

* Interesting to note the Birdlife group on Sat 1st September also recorded 4 Whitefaces mixing with Yellow-rumped Thornbills at Fryerstown - Ed.

SEANA Spring 2019

During September your committee will be starting on the organisation of the SEANA gathering to be held in Castlemaine 4th-6th October 2019. We're seeking a few volunteers to join the organising subcommittee, ideas for excursions on the Saturday and Sunday - and offers to lead an excursion. Can you help?

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 Sept 14 meeting: speaker Peter Turner; New Zealand wonders

Sat Sept 15 field trip: Maldon Orchids with David Elliot

Wednesday wildflower wanders: 4pm on 12th 19th; 26th; Oct 3rd

Fri Oct 12 meeting: speaker Pam Whiteley – Wildlife health surveillance

Sat Oct 13 field trip: Porcupine Ridge wildflowers – Geraldine and RP

Fri Nov 9 meeting: Kirsten Hutchinson and Deanna Marshall (Trust for Nature) - Plains Wanderers

Sat Nov 10 field trip: Wildflowers Fryers Ridge – Richard Piesse

Mon Nov 12 - Roadside cleanup

Fri Dec 14 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 (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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