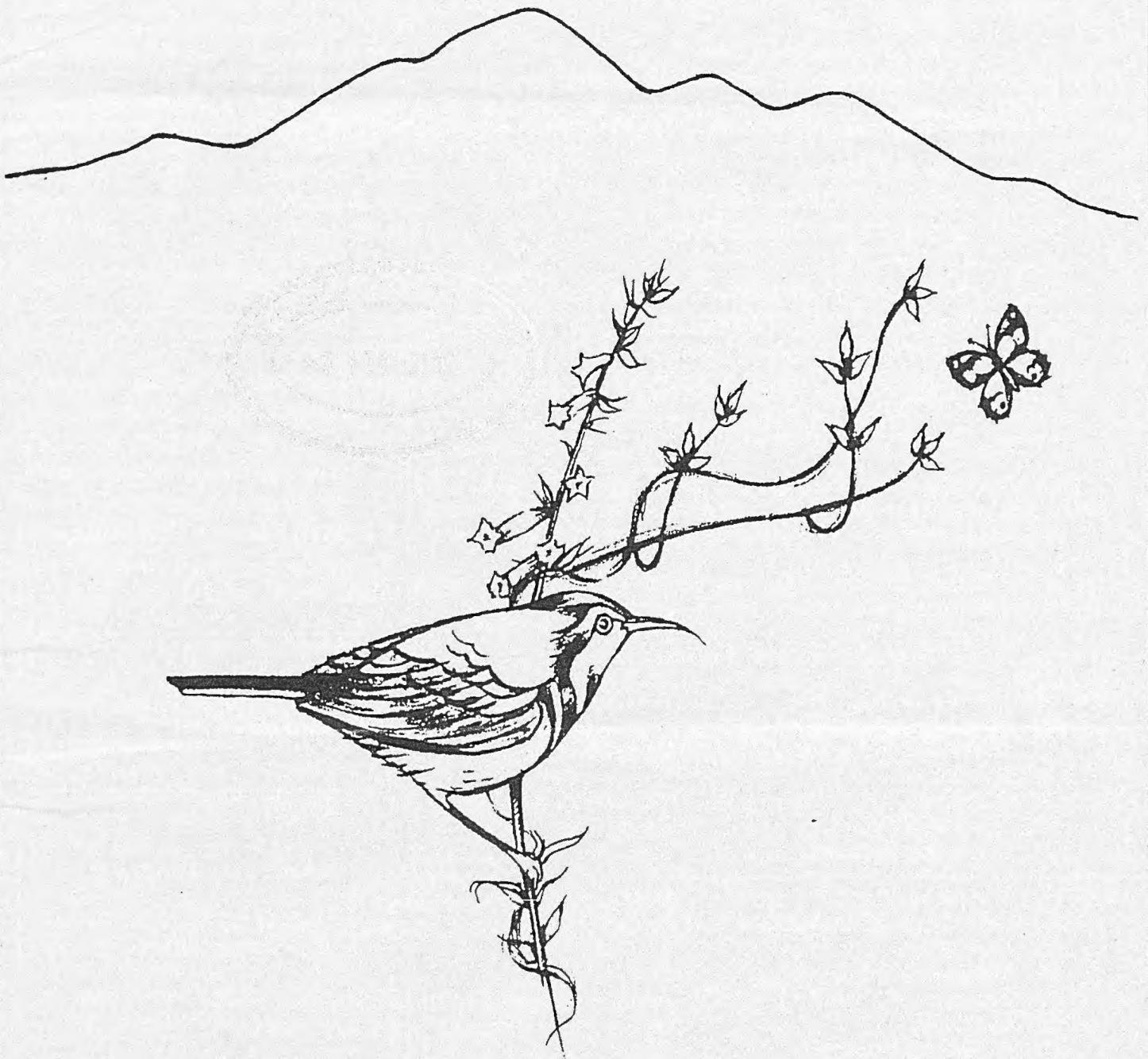


GEELONG NATURALIST

MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE GEELONG FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC



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FEBRUARY 2001

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February 2001



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CONTENTS

Club Notices		1
February Diary	Joe Hubbard	2
Clean Up Australia Day	Claire & Dennis	4
A Myrmicinae Ant from Gluepot Reserve, SA	Dave King	5
November Excursion Report	R. Preston & J. Hubbard	6
Out and About	Valda Dedman	8
January Excursion Report	Gordon McCarthy	9
Mid-week Bird Group Outing	Polly Cutcliffe	10
On the Table	Ade Foster	10
Biodiversity Workshop Group Report	Claire Greenwell	10
Mammal Group Report	Trevor Pescott	10
A Case of Confused Identity	Ade Foster	11
A Gem of a Book on Insects 1872	Claire Greenwell	12
Bird Group Report		14
Bird Group Observations		15

COMING EVENTS

FEB	6	General Meeting	The Habitat of Mars - Allan Gould
	13	Plant Group	
	15	Mid-week Bird Excursion	* Bald Hills - Leader: Peter Bright
	17/18	Excursion	French Island
	20	Bird Group	The World's Weird Birds - Barry Lingham
	25	Biodiversity Excursion	* Otway Coast
	27	Biodiversity Workshop	*
MAR	6	General Meeting	Photosynthesis - Dianne Tilley
	10-12	VFNCA Campout - Rawson	Various workshops and excursions
	13	Plant Group	
	15	Mid-week Bird Excursion	* TBA
	18	Excursion	Brisbane Ranges - Ted Errey Nature Circuit
	20	Bird Group	Birds from the Inside Out - Part 2 Craig Morley
	25	Biodiversity Excursion	* TBA
	27	Biodiversity Workshop	*
			* Note change to program

GFNC Web page
Email address:

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Tonight's speaker is...

Dr Allan Gould BSc (Hons) PhD who is Senior Principle Research Scientist at Geelong's CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL- which he joined in 1983) as Group Leader of Newcastle Disease Virus research.

His main areas of interest are molecular biology, in particular virology and genetic engineering.

His current interests outside of the laboratory are astronomy and photography.

His subject for tonight will be ...

The Habitat of Mars!

March speaker will be Dianne Tilley.

Dianne is currently teaching Natural Resource Management at the Gordon Institute of TAFE and is coordinator of Natural Resource Management Landcare at Gordon TAFE. She formerly worked at the Australian Animal Health Laboratories as a Scientific Officer.

Her interest in the natural environment is wide. She has been involved in Orange-bellied Parrot and mammal surveys, is the holder of quite a few wildlife licences, and is a representative on environment committees, e.g. The Reference Committee for Coastal and Marine Planning Program and the City of Greater Geelong Environmental Implementation Committee.

Dianne's subject will be 'Photosynthesis.'

(Tim New will now be speaking at the May meeting.)

I wish to thank Alison Watson for acting as editor for the October and December magazines, also Valda Dedman for backup support and Deborah Evans, chief proof reader as always.
Claire Greenwell

See pages 3, 4, 10 & 15 for more notices!

The following new members joined in recent months

Dr. Jeanette Johansen
Robert G. Ganley

We wish them a long and enjoyable association with our Club.

**GFNC Weekend at French Island Trip
17th/18th Feb 2001**

This promises to be an exciting and interesting trip to explore the many habitat types found on French Island. If you wish to find out more, please contact Barry Lingham promptly as places must be confirmed shortly.

Departure: 6:00 am Saturday 17th Feb from the old Post Office Cnr Ryrrie & Geringhap Streets. (We will be leaving by bus at about 6:10 am.)

Return: (via Ferry) Queenscliff at 6:40pm Sunday. The Queenscliff-Geelong bus arrives Geelong at 7:15 pm at the old Post Office.

Costs: Total cost of \$130.00 per head includes travel, accommodation and a two course meal on Saturday night.

The Club has new meeting rooms.
See page 3...

The closing date for the next magazine will be Monday evening, February 26, 2001
Early lodgement of articles (small & large) would be a great help - late copy may not get in.
Hard copy (for scanning) or diskette to: 4 White Street, Belmont, 3216
Email: cndgreenwell@myplace.net.au
Phone Claire: 03 5243 7047 or Mobile 0409 723022

FEBRUARY DIARY

...Joe Hubbard

Let's start our new year with a riddle. What is the difference between a Grey Goshawk and a Grey Falcon? Well, among other things, about 600 kilometres. And what is he on about you may well ask! Well, if one reports a Grey Falcon over Newtown when it really is a Grey Goshawk you get some people unduly and unnecessarily excited. As soon as Marilyn Hewish contacted me to confirm my observation, I realised I had blooped – a really big one at that! Thank goodness for alert and knowledgeable FN's – they keep the likes of me out of trouble.

1.2.99 Newtown

Outside, early, for my look around and attracted by the noisy Lorikeets in the tall trees next door. Hard to see them amongst the foliage. Three Sacred Ibis flew over, cleanly white, with wings almost translucent against the sun. Low in the sky a flock of Galahs.

The street gums are flowering beautifully and these attract the Lorikeets. Mainly Musk – the book says bright green – and that is impacted upon your senses when you see a small flock fly past, low, with backs sunlit. The other Lorikeet is the Purple-crowned.

3.2.99 Newtown

Wanderer Butterfly observed briefly before flying westwards. Several hours later, evening, saw one feeding from Buddleia.

4.2.00 Newtown

Middle of a heat wave and power restrictions. The hot evenings and nights bring a lot of insects, flying Mole Crickets, moths and beetles, and sheltering in the early morning shadows, brown and black Ichneumon Wasps, slim bodies ending with needle-like ovipositors.

5.2.97 Newtown

In the evening cool, walked along the Barwon to discover Purple Loosestrife and Sweet Bursaria flowering.

Almost out of light, a flock of Galahs skimmed over the trees with the last rays enough to catch the pink of their breasts.

I strained to see a Clamorous

Reed-warbler still catching insects from its reedy perch.

6.2.98 Hospital Swamp

A few steps and we were surrounded by tall reeds. The wind rustling through them added a sense of wildness to this wetland which was just off the road.

It looked great for waterbirds and promised some botanical rewards. The only birds we got close to were plenty of Purple Swampheens and some Greenshanks easily recognised by their ringing "Tew-lew" call.

Near Barwon Heads, where the marsh of Lake Connewarre meets the main road, we noticed extensive grey-green patches of low growing Silky Wilsonia. It was a fine spectacle, the grey-green amidst the subdued greens and reds of Glasswort.

This is the "Grey Falcon."

8.2.00 Newtown

Grey Goshawk circling over Newtown. Had trouble working out what it was. My first recording of the Grey. The white morph can be a regular visitor at certain times of the year.

Val and I watched tiny black ants removing a grass stem (quite large for them) from their nest. We wondered how they organised themselves into such a coordinated effort. Near the entrance was one with a very large head – probably a soldier on guard during the operation.

Found a Sugar Ant with brown-orange thorax and part of abdomen, legs, the rest black. Glad to see – reminded me of bush living when we had plenty of these in the kitchen.

Lizards (someone told me Weasel Skinks) come to drink at the outside tap – spilt water. Baby lizards, about 3 cm, scurry from cover to cover – good bird bait!

Fledgling Silvereyes, with singsong begging call, in the trees.

Watched the 5 Gang-Gang Cockatoos, 3 clustered together, 2 more higher up, chuckling, preening and playing those cocky games of hanging upside down, swinging.

9.2.97 Avalon Beach

Very strong onshore wind bending the grasses and causing

most birds to shelter. Sheltering in, or flying close to Coastal Saltbushes, we found many Chequered Blue Butterflies. Their larvae feed on various species of Saltbush. Good find! Reminds how creatures are so dependent on correct environment – in this case a thin band of Saltbush around the bay.

10.2.96 Brisbane Ranges NP

Found many Austral Lady Tresses orchids in flower – "numerous tiny pink or white flowers arranged in a spiral." There would have been hundreds in flower in late January in this almost open grassland boggy area.

Also flowering were Milk Beauty-heads, some late Chocolate Lilies, and Wiry Buttons.

There were many small brown butterflies – no idea – but looked a bit like Klug's Xenica.

On return trip, 2 Wedgetail Eagles – lazy circles a – great farewell to the ranges.

10.2.00 Newtown

Yesterday, just finishing mug of coffee in backyard corner, jaw dropped as a Brown Goshawk skimmed over the house roof, talons clutching a Dove, and landed on a tree stump next door, a few metres away. I froze – hardly daring to blink! The bird had landed to "catch breath" – its chest heaving with the exertion – beak open – rest of body very still, chest feathers dishevelled. After a couple of minutes it flew off, low. Into adjacent trees, to have a late breakfast.

13.2.99 Barwon Heads

Commenced walk at 11 am under an overcast sky – mild – a great relief from the heat of past weeks. Tide was outgoing, reefs were exposed, and in great demand from resting Terns – mainly Crested and seven Common. This is the first time I actually recognised these – no doubt had "seen" them before.

Climbed up on the Bluff where the Singing Honeyeaters were very obvious – parent and young one very trusting.

Lunched back up the Barwon among some lovely old Moonah trees in flower. Here we saw a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater and an Imperial White Butterfly.

A lone Greenshank fed along the exposed mudbanks.

13.2.00 You Yangs

Sunday afternoon walk, sunny, cool southerly – destination Cressy Gully Road and Barros Pit.

The Pit has developed into a fine wetland with Black Duck, Australasian Grebes, Purple Swamphen, a White-faced Heron and the usual Masked Lapwings.

The ducks were soon spooked into flight by the appearance of a Swamp Harrier.

Later we were to see 2 Whistling Kites and a first year Little Eagle, perched, with rufous headgear very prominent – a crest says Cameron.

18.2.00 Newtown

About 6.30 pm, after a blistering day, in the shade of the pear tree doing some "day-gazing," when I noticed a strange bird in the Ironbark. So did the New Holland Honeyeaters. As usual with a new bird on the block, the honeyeaters gathered around it – not sure at all.

The new bird's reaction was to crouch, fan its tail, and flutter outstretched wings.

At this display the honeyeaters flew off.

And what was the bird? Probably one of the Bronze Cuckoos, an immature, but I couldn't be sure.

And why the display? Wouldn't know!

Back to usual – a Spotted Pardalote at the bird bath, a Tree Frog calling from somewhere near it, Magpie-larks calling "Plink-plink," and a new dragonfly, smaller and more orange, patrolling the back yard.

20.2.00 Point Henry

What a relief, a morning with a comfortable temperature of 22° C – a pleasure to be walking along Stingaree Bay – a walk nearly spoiled by the rubbish strewn along the sands and caught in the Coastal Saltbush.

Here you are almost sure to see Little and Great Egrets, Crested Grebes, the occasional Pied Oystercatcher and a Swamp Harrier putting up flocks of Black-

winged Stilts in the saltworks.

The tiny Chequered Blue Butterflies were active and a Painted Lady sunned itself on a track nearby.

In the Point Henry Wetland (Alcoa), Hoary Willowherb had finished flowering with only a few of the attractive pink flowers remaining to suggest the stunning display we had missed.

29.2.00 Lake Victoria

9.30 am start, fine, mild, with the lake very low and shallow which must have been ideal conditions for waders. They were numerous and approachable. We were able to sit and observe a group made up of hundreds of Red-necked Stilts, with lesser numbers of Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

To add to the pleasure there was a sizeable mixed flock of Little and Fairy Terns – and you might say, we played "Spot the Difference!"

Cheers!



CHANGE OF MEETING VENUE



It was announced at the December General Meeting (Christmas Breakup), that Karingal was no longer available for meetings. User groups were asked to vacate the premises by January 6, 2001.

After spending many hours looking at various other venues, the Committee decided that **the old music room at the back of the big hall at Clairvaux Catholic School, Reynolds Road, Belmont (Melways ref. Map 465 D2 (old ref: 227 E12) - formerly South Barwon Secondary College)** was the most suitable. Adequate, secure and accessible storage was the deciding factor, along with suitable parking, size and availability of the meeting room.

Saint Bernard's Catholic Parish Council will make it available to us for \$1,500.00 per year. Although this is \$600.00 more than we were paying for Karingal, most other venues were more. (Grovedale Community Centre – with limited storage space – was \$1,609. The Umpires' Room at Kardina Park was \$400 per year for the General Meeting in the big room and other groups in a smaller room, however this was rejected because of lack of storage space, security, close parking during Netball Games and interruptions during meetings. The cost of storage would need to be added to the cost at both of these venues.)

Members who were available (during the heat-wave) on Monday January 2 and Tuesday January 3 packed up and moved boxes of books, steel cabinets etc., and many more helped with sorting out on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. There were also many offers of help and extra vehicles that were much appreciated.

The Committee wishes to thank all who offered help as well as those who were involved.

- The Bird Group Meeting on January 16, 2001 was the first activity in our new home!
- The Biodiversity Workshop Group will move to the 4th Tuesday of each month.

Claire Greenwell

Clean Up Australia Day

Sunday, March 4th.

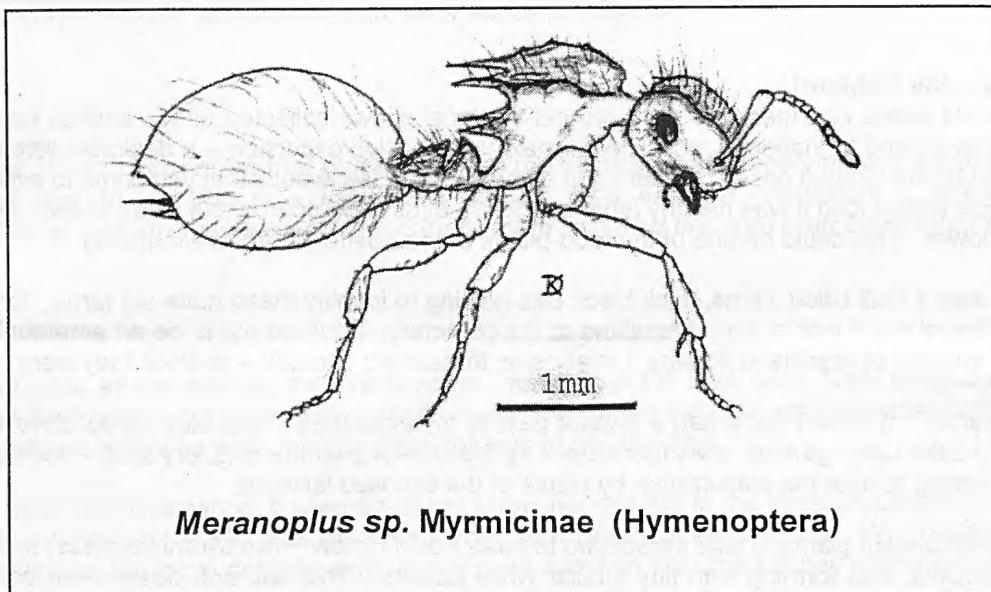
Once again we will be cleaning up rubbish from
Jerringot Wildlife Reserve, Belmont Common.

Join Claire and Dennis at the Bird Hide on the Golf
Course Road,
9.00 a.m. to 12 noon.

You may even be lucky enough to see
Latham's Snipe,
Baillon's Crake,
Spotless (Australian) Crake!

A Myrmicinae Ant from Gluepot Reserve, SA

...Dave King



Introduction

The subject ant, *Meranoplus sp.*, was discovered amongst the collection made during December, 1999, in "Birds Australia" Gluepot Reserve, South Australia (33° 45' 50"S 140° 07' 23"E). It formed part of the invertebrate collection handed to the author, by the South Australia Museum, for the purpose of determining their identification.

Its basic morphology is typical of the sub-family Myrmicinae, that is, a head, mesosoma (*meso* middle, *soma* body), petiole and gaster. A distinguishing feature of the family is the petiole connecting the gaster to the mesosoma, comprising two nodes, normally referred to as petiole and post-petiole.

The genus currently has some 28 endemic Australian species, generally to be found in the warmer and drier regions. In addition the genus is known from other parts of the world, particularly New Guinea (Holldobler, 1990).

Description

The general appearance of this *Meranoplus* species is as illustrated, overall light brown in colour, with the gaster being slightly lighter. An obvious feature is the shield-like process surmounting the mesosoma, broad in aspect, with the edges projecting beyond the mesosoma as a thin plate. The lateral perimeter of this shield is produced in a series of sharply pointed projections. Included in this lateral zone are several transparent areas, having the resemblance of minute oval windows. A pair of sharp projections are present on the posterior of the mesosoma.

The head has a fronto-apex area sculptured appearing helmet-like, the edges forming a carina. Antennae have nine segments, including the scape, with the club consisting of three segments.

The petiole has two projections apical, as is the case for the post-petiole, which is distinctly sculptured on the sides.

An ovoid gaster is smooth without any distinct patterning and equipped with a distinct stinging apparatus. The whole body is hirsute, with unusually long hair, and legs having shorter hair. A tibial spur is present on the distal point of the foreleg tibia.

Biology

Nests are constructed in the ground, usually with an inconspicuous entrance. Food sources appear to be relatively non-specific, ranging from seeds to other arthropods by way of scavenging. Foraging is performed primarily during daytime, but can occur at night, (Shattuck, 1999). Interaction with other ant species appears to be avoided by foraging only at high temperatures. If threatened, they will roll-up into a ball with legs tucked in and the antennae retracted into the side of the head beneath the carina, (Andersen, 1991).

Reference

- Andersen, A.N. (1991), *The Ants of Southern Australia*, CSIRO, E. Melbourne.
 Holldobler, B. & Wilson, E. (1990), *The Ants*, Harvard University Press, USA.
 Shattuck, S.O. (1999), *Australian Ants: their biology & identification*, CSIRO, E. Melbourne.

Excursion Report - November 2000

Cressy, Lake Martin, Lake Corangamite and Rokewood Cemetery

...*Bob Preston & Joe Hubbard*

12.11.00 Planning – Joe Hubbard

"I was told that an old snake charmer who went around the local shows collected all his snakes here," said Robert Missen. We had just arrived to inspect a 'possible' for next week's Club excursion – a desirable little wetland, spring fed, and surrounded by the tangled basalt boulders and a few ancient Blackwoods that you come to expect in the Stony Rises country. Frogs announced it was healthy (snake tucker!), birds were scarce, but I was shown a good specimen of Scrub Nettle in flower. This could be one of the food-plants of the Australian Admiral butterfly.

At Lake Martin we saw 3 Gull-billed Terns, thick black bills helping to identify these quite big terns. On to Rokewood, where Robert had heard there was a good grassland at the cemetery. It turned out to be an amateur botanist's feast – full of colour and species of grassland flowers – every step threatened to crush – so thick they were in some areas.

"Cressy could be better!" It wasn't but it had a brilliant display of Grass-lilies – dull blue carpet covered much of the small grassland. To Lake Corangamite. Very low water – receded back over the long, dry spell – headlands and coves accentuated – interesting to note the colonization by plants of the exposed lakebed.

This is an area of salt tolerant plants. I was introduced to three I didn't know – two trailing leafless, rootless parasites, Dodders, and a *Wilsonia*, mat forming with tiny tubular white flowers. This and soft bushes are parasitised by the Dodders.

Here also were patches of the Austral Hollyhock, the palest of pink flowers fading to white. Another wetland, quite close to Eurack, had a good show of waterbirds, particularly Banded Stilts, most immature and some Red-necked Avocets.

19.11.2000 The Club Excursion – Bob Preston

The November Club Excursion took us to Cressy, with the old Hamilton Highway Bridge giving us a grandstand view of Clamorous Reed-warblers in the reeds below. Also viewed a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike on its meagre nest. A Red-rumped Parrot posed on a tree branch for all to see.

Across the road we saw masses of Blue Grass-lilies, but the sun wasn't doing its job, so the Grass-lilies weren't at their glorious best. Also thousands of Common Onion Orchids *Microtis unifolia*.

Next we were taken onto private property to access the Lake Martin Wetland. WOW! What a sight! As we walked to the area, 7 Rufous Night Herons flew from the pine trees beside us, flying around and giving us a great viewing. Not to be outdone, Brown Songlarks put on a show for us.

Out on the wetland, we saw a Gull-billed Tern, 10+ Marsh/Whiskered Terns, 3 Great Egrets, 5 Cape Barren Geese, 10+ Black-winged Stilts, 20+ Australian Shelducks, 100+ Black Swans, Hardhead Ducks, Chestnut Teal, 1 Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Black Ducks, 2 Marsh-harriers, one pursuing a very fortunate Galah which managed to escape by about half a metre. A flock of White-fronted Chats moving back and forth along the fence also drew a lot of interest.

On to Dreeite to find a shady tree to have our lunch under. We found a suitable one just past the old tennis courts and former Dreeite State School site. Our gathering under this cypress tree drew a lot of attention from the local Neighbourhood Watch, with several cars and light trucks driving slowly past us, giving us the once over. The suspense was too much for one driver who returned about 10 minutes later to pull in and check who we were. He turned out, after a bit of talking, to be a cousin of our Joe and former cricket opponent of Joe's.

We travelled to Lake Corangamite, to the shelly beach, a half metre deep accumulation of tiny molluscs. Narrow-leaf *Wilsonia wilsonia backhousei* was seen to be host-plant to *Cuscuta australis* with pink flowers and *Cuscuta tasmanica*, an orange-coloured Dodder. Very interesting. *Suaeda australis* Austral Seablite was in its almost purple leaf stage, and *Geranium retrorsum* Austral Cranes-bill, and Squirrel-tail Fescue *Vulpia bromoides*, were also of interest to members.

The finding of a White-fronted Chat's nest with three eggs was another highlight. Back to Cressy for a "Cuppa" and for many an icecream.

On to Rokewood Cemetery, a place of floristic wonderment. Button Wrinkle-wort *Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides*, Curved Rice Flower *Pimelea curviflora*, Feather-heads *Ptilotus macrocephalus*, Spur Velleia *Velleia paradoxa*, Blue Pincushion *Brunonia australis*, Sweet Hounds-tongue *Cynoglossum suaveolens*, Hoary Sunray Daisy *Leucochrysum albicans*, Clustered Everlastings *Chrysocephalum semipapposum*, White Box trees *Eucalyptus albens*.

On the return journey, some observed 2 Brolgas with one or two chicks, and in a newly mown hay paddock, we saw 1000+ Straw-necked Ibis, and further along the road, 7 Richard's Pipits.

With many thanks to Rob Missen and Joe Hubbard for a wonderful day out.

Editor's comment: *It isn't very often that two reports of one excursion are received, and normally I would obey Joe's instruction not to put his in – he thinks he has said enough elsewhere – however, his report complimented Bob's, painting such a rich diversity of plant and bird life, that I felt compelled to include it.*

Joe

Homeward bound! Just as we reached the Warrambine Creek, from the back seat, "Two brolgas next to the road!" Graeme Tribe had seen what we in front had missed. Returning via the old road and bluestone bridge, we found not only two Brolgas but two chicks as well. What a delightful way to end the day!

Just back up the road near Rokewood, it seemed all the Straw-necked Ibis in the Western District had congregated to feed in a recently cut hayfield – 800 was the count from Dick Southcombe's group. We had just left Rokewood Cemetery and its field of botanical delights, and feeling quite satisfied with the full day's program, when we had the encores.

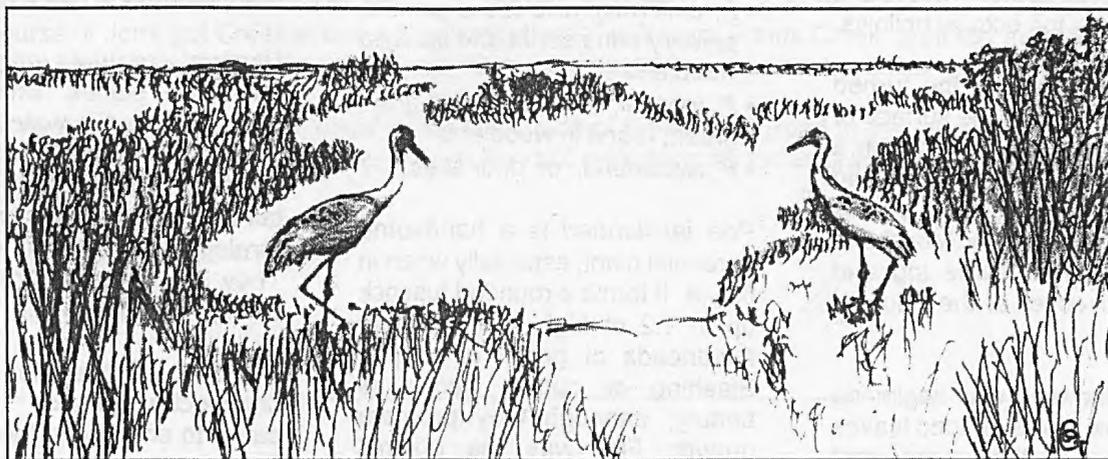
A lot of things stand out. I think it was Bob Preston, meticulous recorder of plants and creatures observed who handed around the Sweet Hound's-tongue for us to smell. A strong sweet fragrance emanated from this tiny plant with yellow-centred, minute white flowers – surprising and delighting!

Birdwatching from the old road bridge over the Woody Yallock river at Cressy and the discovery of a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike on its saucer nest blending in so well with the dull grey branches of the River Red Gum – which was in itself an impressive sight. And the nest of the White-fronted Chat, low in rushes on the shore of Lake Coragamite, cupping three sparingly spotted pinkish-white eggs, guarded by Robert Missen until everyone had shared his find.

On a farm near Lake Martin and before getting to the "serious" bird-watching site, putting up seven Nankeen Night-heron from a Cypress hedge.

It was a great day, hopefully enjoyed by the twenty participants, although sometimes the hot weather conditions were quite trying. At day's end, most flagging spirits should have been lifted by the beauty of the Rokewood grassland.

With many thanks to Robert Missen for his assistance over the two days – days he could have been "making hay while the sun shines!"



The Brolgas of Reedy Lake

OUT AND ABOUT

...Valda Dedman

First bird of the century, the joys of cleaning up the riverbank, native grasses and grassland butterflies, Bluetongue's exotic diet, unusual sightings, Bogongs, Gang-gangs and Black-Cockatoos, "bird-listening".

Mopoke! Mopoke! My first bird for the year 2001 was a Boobook. At three in the morning, it started up and continued for about half an hour. It has been around Highton for a month or two. Often it calls just after dark has descended. It moves around its territory before starting the night's hunting; sometimes the calls are very close, sometimes distant.

In the weeks before Christmas I spent many hours weeding the steep Barwon riverbank at Pollocksford, attacking my "enemy" *Phalaris aquatica* which threatens to overrun the native vegetation. Twenty hours work and twenty metres cleared. Call me mad, if you like, but there are compensations. The birds are all around. Swallows hawk for insects, a Shining-bronze Cuckoo calls, and a Grey Thrush. A Sacred Kingfisher goes *kek-kek-kek* and Eastern Rosellas tinkle (they are waiting for my apples to ripen, up the hill). Galahs drop by, and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Long-billed Corellas. A Willie Wagtail chatters and scolds. Its cobweb-covered nest on a low branch had become dislodged and fallen to the ground.

There is a nesting pair of Rainbow Lorikeets in a Redgum hollow just downstream. An almost continuous background buzz comes from young starlings — they too occupy hollows.

One morning a floating log turned out to be a platypus at the surface of the water. It swam and dived near a large fallen branch that had moved to the middle of the stream on the last flood. Three Dusky Moorhens slid silently off the same log and slipped under cover at the edge of the bank.

The Great Bindweed was beginning to entwine; the spade-shaped leaves became larger as the weeks went by. Flowering spikes of Water

Ribbons took on a bluish hue. The River Bottlebrush was finishing flowering, its creamy spikes turning brown; the lignum flowers were just forming. Tree Violet berries changed from green to white to purple. Native Raspberries ripened and the canes lengthened. The Black Wattles were heavy with seedpods after a good flowering season.

Common Brown and Cabbage White butterflies fluttered around and a garden skink slid under a tussock as I passed.

And there was always the thrill of releasing a native grass from the clutches of the introduced phalaris. And yes, the tussock I was so thrilled to find was the "dreaded" *Poa labillardieri*, which has been given such bad press and has been subjected to so much vandalism in the Geelong Boulevard plantations.

Now, maybe the *Poa* was an unwise choice for that particular situation but it IS a large component of our local native grasslands and were we not so ignorant of our Australian inheritance, we would appreciate it more. There are other native grasses which may have better filled the bill, but they are as yet not so readily available nor so easily propagated. I am thinking of the various wallaby grasses and Weeping Grass, *Microlaena stipoides*.

There are several *Poa* species indigenous to Geelong, among them

- *P. labillardieri*, the tallest and toughest
- *P. poiformis*, also tall, a plant of primary dune scrub and banksia woodland
- *P. morrisii*, soft, dense and grey-green, found in woodland
- *P. sieberiana*, on drier sites.

Poa labillardieri is a handsome perennial plant, especially when in flower. It forms a rounded tussock up to 1.2 m high, with feathery seedheads of green or purple. Slashing or cutting spoils its beauty, although they promote growth. Fire was the original management strategy that kept

the plants healthy and allowed a profusion of inter-tussock wildflowers to persist.

Weeping Grass grows well in shade and can make a useful lawn. It is an important butterfly larval food. The Common Brown, Spotted Brown, Ringed Xenica, Silver Xenica, Barred (Dispar) Skipper and White-banded Dart all feed on it.

Some of the Skipper Butterfly larvae feed on *Lomandra* species, which have also been planted along the boulevard. Perhaps they will bring back the butterflies.

Bluetongue lizards are omnivorous and eat a variety of native plants and invertebrates and are well known for keeping gardens snail-free, but they will also take to an even more exotic diet.

During the CCMA mammal survey of the Barwon River a bluetongue lizard was caught, attracted no doubt by the bait of rolled oats, peanut butter and honey.

A Blotched Bluetongue once visited my bush picnic. It tried a finger (ouch!), but was after something more tasty. It licked the outside of a bag of prawn leftovers, but was disturbed and retreated to its shelter under fallen debris. The smell of food lured it out again and, blue tongue tasting the air, it came right on to the picnic rug and tried to get into a plastic container of strawberries. It scabbled with its sharp little claws, it tried biting off the lid, all to no avail, so it moved on to the prawns, poking its head right into the bag until it went too far and panicked. We took pity on it and tipped out the prawn shells near the entrance to its retreat and soon it reappeared and had a great time.

Unusual creatures may turn up in unwanted places. Brian Latter of Leopold found a water scorpion in his swimming pool. Water scorpions are long slender bugs with a long tail-like "snorkel" for breathing and forelegs adapted for seizing prey. They live on small arthropods and can inflict a painful bite.

Echidnas sometimes arrive in unexpected places. I was once called to see one in Mount Pleasant Road and a few days later an

echidna was reported from Belmont Common. We had not seen one at Pollocksford before January of this year, when a large echidna was seen ambling along our neighbour's driveway.

And on a hot Christmas Eve in 1993 I saw a koala positively galloping along Barrabool Road, near Devon Road.

Where are all the Bogong Moths this summer?

The Gang-gangs were gone before Christmas from my part of Highton,

but reappeared on 24th January. A couple of days earlier a pair were seen at Pollocksford, where they are seldom observed. Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos, on the other hand, are not unusual. They attack the pine cones and we know to look up when we hear their weird "Kee-laar". In Perth last week I often heard the same far-carrying cadence, except that it was much shriller. It was the call of the White-tailed Black-Cockatoo, now regarded as a separate species, but once classed with its yellow-tailed cousin.

Try a bit of "bird-listening" for a change. Can you tell a Crimson Rosella from an Eastern Rosella, a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo from a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo? A Purple-crowned Lorikeet from a Musk Lorikeet? And what about the ravens? Well, don't worry too much. Just enjoy the amazing variety of bird sound.

PS. Even as I write (24/1), I have just heard a Grey Butcherbird, another first for the year for me.



Excursion Report – Saturday, January 20, 2001

...Gordon McCarthy

12 Adults and several children met at the carpark on Belmont Island at 4.00 pm. The weather was warm and overcast, with no wind, ideal for birdwatching etc.

We saw the beginnings of Jerringot Creek behind the Circus Tent, and where it disappeared through the culvert under the Overpass, to its new course via a drain to the river.

We moved on to our Bird Hide, where we were lucky enough to get good views of a Spotless Crake. Also on the wetland were 4 Great Egrets, 2 Yellow-billed and 2 Royal Spoonbills, 1 Pelican, numerous ducks, moorhens, etc.

A walk was taken up the Golf Course track where we flushed a Baillon's Crake, and another Spotless Crake from the small pond adjacent to the carpark.

Further on, the large pond on the east supported several White-faced Herons, numerous Lapwings and several Snipe. More Snipe were flushed from our own wetland.

We moved on down to the northern end of Jerringot where there were 2 White-necked Herons. We attempted to plot the original course of Jerringot Creek where it flowed southward to Waurm Ponds Creek, probably through a series of billabongs during good rains, before its course was interrupted by roads, levee banks, buildings, drains, carparks, etc.

Dave then led us through the sports grounds on the south side of Breakwater Road to see where Jerringot Creek used to run into Waurm Ponds Creek. We followed Waurm Ponds Creek down as far as practicable, to see its course to the Barwon.

Altogether an enjoyable little excursion.

MID-WEEK BIRD GROUP OUTING

... Polly Cutcliffe

14th December, 2000

Eight members met at the Begola Wetland, Ocean Grove, in perfect conditions. The Snipe appeared as if on cue – wonderful views of them flying; three viewed through the 'scope foraging around the edges; and a few spotted in the grass. It was difficult to know if we were seeing the same birds more than once, but a conservative estimate would be 20 birds sighted.

Some of the resident species had been breeding, and, as the wetland is so small, we had grandstand views of juvenile Coots, Moorhens, Swamphens, Swans and Australasian Grebes.

Other birds present included Grey and Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Black-winged Stilt, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant, Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Grey Butcherbird and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater. In all, we observed 38 species at Begola.

After an early lunch, several of us came home via Black Rock, and were rewarded with a sighting of about 2,000 Red-necked Stints roosting amongst the rocks. Also present were 25 – 30 Ruddy Turnstones, several Red-capped Plovers, Crested Terns, Silver Gulls and one Pacific Gull. We added 11 species here to our day's total.

NEXT MID-WEEK BIRD GROUP EXCURSION THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15TH

Peter Bright has kindly agreed to have another attempt to show us the Bald Hills area, (postponed due to rain in October). This is a heathland/woodland area behind Anglesea, so lots of interesting birds.

Meet at Waurn Ponds Shopping Centre, in front of the Green Grub Nursery, at 8.30 am. Bring morning tea – finish about 12.30 pm.

Enquiries to Polly 5244 0182.

ON THE TABLE

... Ade Foster

The December table was a good one, with a few very nice observations and some quite diverse specimens. It is interesting how often the answer to a 'what is it?' question leads to long and varied discussion which seems to have no connection to the original specimen. So it was at our last meeting. Among the interesting bird sightings were Roy Whiteside's reports of a Pied Currawong preying on Wattlebird young, and a Tawny Frogmouth in Highton. I heard a Grey Shrike-thrush in my Belmont garden (lost or just on vacation?), and saw a Brown Falcon in Newtown with Starling prey. Graeme Tribe reported Eastern Curlews and Whimbrels at Barwon Heads, and a seeming increase in the numbers of hybrid Scaly-breasted / Rainbow Lorikeets in the area.

Perhaps the most interesting was from Betty Waters in Torquay, who noticed an oddly coloured Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo sporting large patches of pale creamy-white on head, breast and back. It was with a small flock of normally coloured birds, and seemed to be well accepted.

Colleen Berger found a huntsman spider and egg-sac, which her school teacher daughter took to school as a live lesson for the children. They researched spiders, caught flies and other insects for food and were enthralled when the spiderlings emerged. They were finally returned to Colleen's Belmont home and released.

Among the specimens on the table was an impressive striped leech, caught by Frank Scheelings despite great personal danger. Frank also provided some early instar caterpillars of the Gum Emperor moth, which had completely stripped the young eucalypt on which they were found, and the cocoon of a cup moth. These are the well known 'Chinese Junk' caterpillars, which can give a painful sting from retractable hairs on their upper surface.

BIODIVERSITY GROUP

...Claire Greenwell

The Biodiversity Workshop Group will be meeting on the 4th Tuesday of the month in future. In fact we had the first "workshop" for this year in our new meeting room on January 23, and we apologise to anyone who would like to have attended that we didn't manage to catch up with.

The group decided that it would only hold separate excursions to search for interesting specimens to study at the workshops when the usual club excursion does not fall on the previous Sunday. This will be the case for February 27. On Sunday, February 25 we will be exploring rockpools and river estuaries along the Otway coast. If it is a warm day, bring your togs and snorkle, should be fun! Meet at the new club room at 9.00 am.

MAMMAL GROUP REPORT

...Trevor Pescott

Our mammal trapping at Watson's property was reasonably successful.

On Friday (26.1.01) night we had 25 Elliotts and 4 cages. We caught 1 Swamp Rat.

After checking them on Saturday 8.00 am, and releasing the rat, we left the traps in place, checking again 8.00 pm.

To our delight we had 3 Swamp Rats and 2 Blotched Bluetongues - caught during the day!

Saturday night we trapped 2 Swamp Rats, possibly (probably?) the same ones as during the day.

We (!?) need to hone our (my) ability to sex the rats - think the two I looked at were males, but I need some practice! (Don't laugh, it's not as easy as you may think!) Also, some temporary marker - liquid paper? - to dab on the animals so we know if we have a retrap or different individual.

I'll do a full report for our records shortly. Oh, we do have some genuine Swamp Rat hairs for Dave!

A Case of Confused Identity

...Ade Foster



My kitchen and dining room are a little different from most. Any summer evening will reveal up to five different species of frogs calling, (some softly, some not quite so) from their tanks, which my long-suffering wife accepts with great good grace. Common Froglets click quietly and Ewing's Treefrogs offer tentative trills just after lights out. The Spotted Marsh Frogs have bred and the male is mostly quiet now, but his 'tock-tock-tock' can still be heard after I spray the tanks to simulate rain. The Green Treefrog's 'grog-grog-grog' is loud and, mercifully, short lived.

But my beautiful male White-lipped Treefrog is a frog who likes to make his presence felt. Most nights he begins calling just after sundown. He will continue, if left to his own devices, until about an hour after first light. This might be fine in the far north Queensland rainforest, but in our kitchen, it's a bit much. The call sounds remarkably like a medium-sized dog barking, and he utters three 'barks' every two seconds for hours on end. Most nights I remove him from the female, the cause of his raucous serenade, just so we can get to sleep. It works fine, because Penny has not yet insisted that I remove him permanently.

However, he also calls to advertise to other males that this is his 'patch'. There aren't any other males, but plenty of things that must sound sufficiently like one to cause him confusion. All we need to do is start the food-blender, vacuum cleaner or dishwasher, and our hero is shouting his defiance at the interloping machinery. If females can determine that a male is the right species by his call, why is it that my male does not seem to have that same ability?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Common Froglet | <i>Ranidella signifera</i> |
| Southern Brown (Ewing's) Treefrog | <i>Litoria ewingi</i> |
| Spotted Marsh Frog | <i>Limnodynastes tasmaniensis</i> |
| Green Treefrog | <i>Litoria caerulea</i> |
| White-lipped Treefrog | <i>Litoria infrafrenata</i> |



(Ade does have the appropriate Wildlife Licence as is required by law. Ed.)

Photographs:

Above:
Ade with his female Green Treefrog.

Below:
The Culprit!
The male White-lipped Treefrog.



BIRD GROUP REPORT*...Barry Lingham*

16th January 2001

Finding Hard to Find Birds

Our team this year chose another 4 birds to investigate.

Blue-winged Parrot (B Lingham)

The local population of the BWP appears to breed in the forested areas from Torquay to the Otway ranges between September and January. Most birds have departed by mid-February.

The period from late January to mid March is the best time to find the birds at the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve (OGNR). From March until August, the Blue-winged Parrot (BWP) is found in the saltmarsh areas where it feeds on the seeds of the same types of plants used by the Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP). The two species often feed together and sometimes fly in one flock.

The picture is further complicated by the migration of birds from Tasmania to the mainland. Most of the Tassie population leave in autumn and return in late spring. They are mainly spring and summer visitors to King and Flinders Islands. In Western NSW, they are seen moving north in March-April and south between August and October. It is assumed that the birds that move into NSW and to southern Queensland are the migrating Tassie parrots, but this has not been confirmed. Some of the birds we see may be the Tassie birds passing through.

How to get a good look.**a) Spring/Summer**

Find a nesting site and sit and observe as the birds fly back and forth to the hollow. If you are lucky, you may find a family of young birds who are nearly ready to fly.

Note that most records are of birds flying overhead (giving their distinctive call); it is not easy to get a really good look.

b) February

Go to the bird hides at the OGNR and hope to find the birds as they come in for a drink at mid-

morning or in the evening.

c) Autumn/Winter

Visit our marvelous wetlands and try to find a BWP and an OBP. Take a telescope.

Distinguishing features.

There are two other birds that may cause confusion locally and several others if you travel a little further afield.

Blue-winged Parrot

Male: Olive-green above. Yellow lores. Deep blue frontal band (does not extend above eye). Shoulder-wings a brilliant deep blue. Green cheeks and underparts merging to yellow belly. **MAY HAVE AN ORANGE CENTRE.** Juveniles lack the frontal band.

Voice: Tinkling flight call. Sharp sit-sit alarm call.

Orange-bellied Parrot

Male: Grass-green above. Face-throat-breast a greenish yellow. Deep blue frontal band (does not extend above eye). Edge of wings violet-blue. Yellow abdomen with variable orange centre.

Females: Generally duller.

Indistinct frontal band

Voice: Diagnostic Buzz-buzz alarm call.

Red-rumped Parrot

(Larger than a BWP)

Male: Green above, yellowish below. Yellow shoulder patch with some blue in the wing. Red Rump. No blue frontal band.

Females: Dull olive-green. Larger than BWP. No yellow on belly. Greener back.

Elegant Parrot (usually seen north of this region)

Male: Like BWP but olive-yellow above, brighter yellow rump. Blue of frontal band extends above and beyond the eye. Less blue in the wing

Females: Similar to BWP, but no frontal band.

White-winged Triller

(G McCarthy)

These birds are most often seen in the drier areas such as Bannockburn Bush, Dogrocks, Brisbane Ranges and the You Yangs. They are often quiet and difficult to spot, but their loud call

draws attention. The call is very similar to that of the Jacky Winter.

Their diet consists of insects taken in trees and on the ground, plus fruit, seeds and nectar if available. Belcher noted a dozen pairs nesting in Eastern Park during the years 1896-97, but they are not found there now.

The flight pattern is undulating and they migrate as far as New Guinea. The nest is placed in the fork of a horizontal branch and is similar to that of a Willy Wagtail.

The birds have many local names including White-shouldered Caterpillar Eater and French Magpie. The male bird is distinctive with black on the top of the head, neck, back, tail and wings. A thick white bar goes through the wing and the underparts are white. The male reverts to female type colouration out of the breeding season.

Females are very different. They are generally brownish above and lighter below. A faint white eyebrow is present and some faint barring may be seen on the breast.

Both birds have a flattish head that extends to the beak.

These birds fluctuate in numbers, with seasons when they are plentiful around Geelong and others when few are seen.

Rufous Songlark (M Cameron)

This bird is rarely seen locally. It is a summer migrant, most often noted in the Nov/Dec period. The loud, repeated "twitchy twitchy" song may be kept up for long periods of time. They have been recorded at Paraparap and Anglesea in the last three years.

Ravens Species (M Cameron)

Three species of raven are found in the Geelong region, and they are difficult to tell apart.

Australian Ravens are usually seen in pairs. They have long throat hackles that can be seen when the birds are calling. The voice is distinctive - a series of three or four calls, each with an upward inflection that descend down the scale. Sometimes the call finishes with a

strangled, drawn out wail. The starting notes are much higher pitched than the calls of the other local ravens. Australian Ravens are uncommon.

Forest Ravens have a deep growling call. They are found in the Otway Range, rarely venturing into the plains around Geelong. They lack the throat hackles of the Australian Raven, have a massive, thick beak that merges with a flatter head than the other species.

The Little Raven is a sociable bird, often forming large flocks - a general rule is that any flock bigger than 10 is probably Little Ravens. They have sleek glossy black plumage, a finer bill than the other ravens and flick their wings when calling. The call is a series of "ark, ark" calls that may be followed by a drawn out wail. The notes are deeper than the Australian Raven.

Next Meeting (February 20)

Speaker: Barry Lingham
Topic: The World's Weird Birds

A selection of birds from beyond Australia that I consider to have strange looks or habits.

Wader Watchers Wanted

The summer wader count is being held on the 10/11/12th of February. Don't worry if you are still learning the waders; you will be paired up with a knowledgeable wader watcher and will improve you skill.

Contact Margaret Cameron on 52299792.

BIRD OBSERVATIONS for August 2000

-- compiled by John Bottomley

Observations were submitted by (BH) Brian Hart, (CS) Claude Stanley, (DHe) Dean Hewish, (DJe) Don Jennings, (DK) Dave King, (DS) Dick Southcombe, (GMc) Gordon McCarthy, (JB) John Bottomley, (JCa) Jocelyn Calvert, (JH) Joe Hubbard, (JN) John Newman, (JWe) Jo Weinecke, (MHe) Marilyn Hewish, (MAC) Margaret Cameron, (PB) Peter Bright, (PW) Peter Winter, (RBa) Ray Baverstock, (RBu) Rohan Bugg.

Species	No.	Date	Comments	Observer
Stubble Quail	2	26/11/00	Reservoir Road, Moriac.	PW
Magpie Goose	1	14/1/01	Reedy Lake.	JWe
Australasian Grebe	8	18/12/00	Barwon Valley. Two adults with six young.	GMc
White-necked Heron	1	12/01/01	Jerringot.	JH
Great Egret	5	16/01/01	Jerringot.	JH
Nankeen Night Heron	6	3/01/01	Jerringot. Feeding with White-faced and White-necked Herons.	DJe
Australasian Bittern	1	14/01/01	Reedy Lake.	MAC
Glossy Ibis	3	14/01/01	Reedy Lake.	MAC
Spotted Harrier	1	16/01/01	Little River. A juvenile.	RBu
Swamp Harrier	1	12/12/00	Ocean Grove Nature Reserve.	DK
Wedge-tailed Eagle	2	28/11/00	DeMotts Road, Anakie. Also one on 4/12/00	JB, JCa
Little Eagle	1	15/01/01	Cobbledicks Ford Reserve.	RBu
Australian Hobby	1	24/12/00	Grovedale.	DK
	1	1/12/00	Highton. Being harassed by a magpie.	RBa
Black Falcon	1	2/12/00	Little River.	RBu
Brolga	2	13/01/01	Werribee at treatment plant.	PB, BH
Buff-banded Rail	1	7/01/01	Barwon Valley Park.	JN
	1	15/01/01	Jerringot.	DJe
Baillon's Crake	1	6/12/00	Skeleton Creek, Hoppers Crossing.	RBu
	1	7/01/01	Hospital Swamp.	JN

Species	No.	Date	Comments	Observer
Baillon's Crake	1	14/01/01	Jerringot.	JH
	2	16/01/01	Jerringot.	JH
Australian Spotted Crake	2	7/01/01	Hospital Swamp.	JN
	1	14/01/01	Jerringot.	JH
Spotless Crake	1	6/12/00	Skeleton Creek, Hoppers Crossing.	RBu
	1	16/01/01	Jerringot.	JH
Latham's Snipe	36	12/01/01	Jerringot. A group of 22 and a group of 14.	JH
Black-tailed Godwit	1	12/12/00	St.Leonards Salt Lagoon.	MHe
Lesser Yellowlegs	1	13/01/01	Werribee at treatment plant.	PB, BH
Banded Stilt	250	12/12/00	St.Leonards Salt Lagoon.	MHe
Crested Pigeon	8	4/01/01	West of Exford Weir.	MHe
	1	13/01/01	Farmland adjacent the Long Forest.	MHe
	1	14/01/01	Hospital Swamp.	DJe
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	12	19/12/00	Grovedale.	DK
	8	12/12/00	Ocean Grove Nature Reserve.	DK
	3	30/11/00	Clarkes Road, Brisbane Ranges.	JB
	2	11/12/00	Geelong-Ballan Road South of Pringles Road.	JCa
	10	20/12/00	Waurn Ponds.	JCa
	flock	26/11/00	Cape Otway Road, Moriac. Several begging young.	PW
Pallid Cuckoo	1	18/12/00	Bacchus Marsh. Not seen since.	MHe
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	31/12/00	Belmont. A juvenile.	DS
Black-eared Cuckoo	1	17/12/00	Long Forest.	MHe
	2	31/12/00	Long Forest. Different location to above record.	MHe
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	1	10/01/01	Highton. Singing from TV antenna.	RBa
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	1	31/12/00	Belmont. A juvenile.	DS
Powerful Owl	2	9/12/00	Banksia Track, Brisbane Ranges. Male and female calling.	MHe
Southern Boobook	2	4/01/01	Highton, Barwon River Valley. Calling at 0500.	JN
Sacred Kingfisher	1	26/11/00	Durridwarrah.	JB, MHe, DHe
	4	Dec.00- Jan.01	Werribee River. Two nesting pairs.	RBu
Speckled Warbler	1	9/1/01	Long Forest. Intermingling Grey Shrike-thrush, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Silvereye calls with its own song.	MHe
	2	26/11/00	Waterhole Track, Brisbane Ranges.	MHe
Little Wattlebird	2	15/12/00	Bream Creek. A long way East of usual local range.	GMc
Scarlet Robin	1	16/01/01	DeMotts Road, Anakie. Male and female regular since early December.	JB, JCa
	1	26/11/00	Aspera Track, Brisbane Ranges - recently-fledged young (worth noting since the species is on the skids).	MHe
Red-capped Robin	1	2/12/00	Long Forest. Also on 19/10, 2/12 and 7/12.	MHe
	1	31/12/00	Long Forest. At a third location in the forest.	MHe
Crested Shrike-tit	3	2/12/00	Little River Picnic Ground, Balliang.	RBu
Satin Flycatcher	1	9/12/00	A male. Also a male on 20/12. Four calling 31/12.	MHe
White-winged Triller	2	26/11/00	Savannah Track, Brisbane Ranges.	MHe
	1	26/11/00	Waterhole Track, Brisbane Ranges.	MHe
Olive-backed Oriole	2	2/12/00	Little River Picnic Ground, Balliang.	RBu
	1	16/01/01	DeMotts Road, Anakie. Heard calling.	JB
Grey Butcherbird	8	Nov.- Dec.00	Clifton Springs. Two pairs each raised two young in same gum tree.	RBa, CS
Pied Currawong	1	2/09/00	Indented Heads. Very unusual on Bellarine Peninsula.	PB
	5	27/11/00	Highton. Two dependent young.	RBa
Singing Bushlark	1	31/12/00	Grassland to West of Long Forest. Dark plumage.	MHe
	4	9/01/01	Grassland to West of Long Forest. One with dark plumage.	MHe
House Sparrow	3	6/01/01	DeMotts Road Anakie. Neighbour feeds seed.	JCa
Red-browed Finch	1	15/01/01	St.Leonards.	PB
Mistletoebird	1	4/12/00	DeMotts Road, Anakie.	JCa, JB
Fairy Martin	5	17/12/00	Dogtrap Creek, Rowsley. A nesting colony of 15 nests.	MHe
	15-20	17/12/00	Balliang - were breeding. 2 nests with sitting adult, 1 fallen nest with live young, and 22 other nests with fresh droppings below.	MHe, DHe
	5	24/12/00	Parwan Creek, Bacchus Marsh. A nesting colony of 39 nests.	MHe, DHe
	30	26/08/00	Portarlinton Sewage Works.	PB
Brown Songlark	1	26/11/00	Reservoir Road, Moriac.	PW

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The old Music Room behind the big hall at Clairvaux Catholic School, Reynolds Road, Belmont.
Use the driveway between the big hall and the playing field

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