



NEWSLETTER: March 2024

Western Treatment Plant visit

Mid-February saw eight members enjoy lovely weather and a rewarding day's birding at the WTP, Werribee, which Melbourne Water describe as agriculture and biodiversity meeting resource recovery, education and ecotourism.

Despite the best efforts of the traffic signals trying to get us to Ballarat after coming across the Westgate Bridge, we made it to the crane pond in the T-section lagoons in good time. We enjoyed terrific views of the cryptic Spotted Crakes, Little Grassbirds and Australian Reed-Warblers, the best views several in our group had seen of these. They were moving slowly around the cumbungi very near to the track where we were watching from. A hungry Sharp-tailed Sandpiper also fed within close range for most of our time there.

A lone Black-tailed Godwit was in the neighbouring lagoon, along with some Greenshank and a single Marsh Sandpiper, bringing out the value of the group in being able to share how to identify some of these trickier wader species. We ended up with six species of waders, with sharpies and Red-necked Stint by far the most numerous. As has been the case for some time now, the Curlew Sandpiper numbers are well down on what they used to be.

Unlike most trips to the WTP, we only saw one parrot - the Galah. Not very good for the land of parrots, but we made up for it with watching several aerial duels between Whistling kites and Swamp Harriers. Even the presence of a majestic Wedgie couldn't stop the antagonism.

Lunch down on the beach saw a compilation of nearly 80% of the species total of 74 for the day. At least one member of our team mentally packed up shop not too long after that when flocks of terns and waders kept being scoured for something different.

The diminutive Fairy Terns were great to watch diving into the shallows and though the only Little Egret seen stood motionless for nearly the whole time we watched it, it did put on a brief series of short run-arounds in their characteristic style.

Why were nearly all the many Chestnut Teal on Lake Borrie males? Where are all the females was the question. Whilst we don't know the answer, one clue may have been one family trailing a clutch of tiny ducklings. Is there going to be an explosion of Chestnut Teal at the WTP like our recent Cabbage White Butterflies?

One snake crossed our path, but a firm ID wasn't made.

As the WTP is roughly the size of Phillip Island, there are too many lagoons and too much coastline to cover in one trip so maybe next time we will start at the other end to change things up a bit.

Text & Photos: Rog Standen



Western Treatment Plant continued



Editor's note: It's not just the birds at the WTP- the scenery and skies are beautiful too.

Photos: Brolga (previous page)
Spotted Crake
Great Crested Grebe
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

The last newsletter had a Spotted Crake photo too, at Coolart



Vale Mike Carter

The birding community was saddened to hear of the passing of the legendary Mike Carter in the New Year.

Mike was regarded as the Father of Australian twitching and for many years he held the top spot for having seen more birds than anyone else.

He made a huge contribution to Australian birding over many years and was a mentor to many young birdwatchers who remember his generosity with fond memories.

He was always willing to share his vast knowledge and his enthusiasm was boundless.

He pioneered and encouraged the monthly Australian pelagic boat trips which resulted in many new pelagic bird discoveries .

I remember an unforgettable pelagic trip with Mike in the early 80's and having spent a long day at sea, where incidentally I added 5 new birds to my list , we disembarked and he set off birding around the Port Fairy area .

He had such boundless energy and it was hard to keep up with him.

I remember windy freezing winter days at Cape Schanck with Mike and Peggy Mitchell with telescopes trained on the many Albatrosses that were common in the 70's and 80's and the prize being the Wandering Albatross that we would often see.

He was always present at the scene of a rarity and some memorable sightings such as the Buff breasted Sandpiper near Geelong and a Lesser Yellowlegs and Hudsonian Godwit and a Ringed Plover were enjoyed in the company of Mike.

He sat on the committee of the Rarities Sighting, which vetted and approved additions to the Australian list.

He conducted the bird counts at the Eastern Treatment Plant for decades, a full day every month, and meticulously counted. We would join him for a day every few years, and it was always memorable.

He was a regular speaker at our club, and had been a committee member in decades past. His last talk to us in 2009 was called 'Seeing Rare Birds & Twitching the Mike Carter Way'.

He was great company.

Text & Photos supplied by Bett Mitchell

L: Twitching the Nordsmann Greenshank on Cairns Esplanade

R: Cocos Isles



Flinders Beach Walk, 16/12/2023

Our last excursion for the year was planned as a beach walk. After some consideration it was decided to walk north from Flinders Pier to see what we could see. Most people regard the coast as a landscape with high scenic values, and field naturalists are no exception. The people visiting the beach, with or without dogs, seem content with this, but some of us seek a little more. The large numbers of people scuba diving under the pier were one expression of this; our group remained resolutely land-bound but each member had their own major, but not exclusive, interest. These included the geology and geomorphology, the plants, the marine life, and the birds.

On the walk down the stairs from the Flinders monument to the beach the profusion of invasive weeds was overwhelming; we speculated on the difficulty of removing them on such a steep slope. This section of the coast is composed of 'older basalt', laid down in multiple lava flows about 40-50 million years ago. Erosion has exposed the cliff face, and created a wide shore platform in which can be seen the alternating layers of basalt (black) and reddish tuff—a layer of ash from volcanic eruptions. Erosion of the shore platform is not uniform, leaving protruding 'islands' above the base level, in which the layers are readily observed. The jointing of the basalt, leading to the formation of loose rocks, gives an indication of the manner in which the erosion proceeds. This section of coast includes a site of State Geomorphological Significance, pointed out by Heather, where a series of sand and gravel ridges has developed to protect the cliff from further erosion, forming what is known as an abandoned cliff; in the absence of wave undercutting at the base the cliff has been eroded from the top into a rounded bluff. Victoria's Resources Online says that

This is a very clear example of the isolation of a former marine cliff by accretion of beach ridges. The bluffs resulting from this isolation contrast markedly in profile with the adjacent marine cliffs. It is an important site in the context of Victoria to demonstrate this process.

The shore platform was mostly covered with the brown algae, or seaweed, known as Neptune's Necklace (*Hormisira banksii*); a few patches of the red algae *Thuretia quercifolia* were also seen. There were only a few shallow rock pools with little evident marine life. The beach, however, was covered in washed-up leaves of the seagrass *Amphibolis antarctica*, otherwise known as Sea Nymph. Some of the drifts were over half a metre high. Also liberally scattered in the strand line was the sea squirt known as cunjevoi (*Pyuris stolonifera*). This species lives at the edge of the rock platform, around low water mark. The stems of *Amphibolis* are the habitat of the bryozoan *Densipora corrugata* which encircles them a bit like a float on a fishing line. This species was one of the many identified by Velimir washed up on the beach.

Velimir compiled a considerable list of crabs, bivalves and gastropods found on the beach, together with a sea urchin; also washed up was a Little Penguin, which by rights could not be included in the bird list since it was no longer alive.

Leanne meanwhile concentrated on the birds, the final count coming to 33. The most numerous sea birds were Silver Gulls; there were also quite a few Masked Lapwings, Little Black Cormorants and White-faced Herons, and (one of my personal favourites), a few Sooty Oystercatchers, on the shore platform, and Chestnut Teal in the shallows; a single Kelp Gull cruised by. Bush birds above the beach and in the backyards included Galah, Little Corella, Rainbow Lorikeet, Eastern Rosella, Grey Fantail, Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Superb Fairy-wren. A Fan-tailed Cuckoo was heard at the top of the cliff. The oft-heard remark 'I can hear Silvereyes' was quickly vindicated by a sighting. A Black-shouldered Kite watched from a tree at the top of the cliff, above a lawn populated with a dozen or so White-faced Herons.

We walked as far as the mouth of Mantons Creek, a few kilometres from the pier—a peaceful spot beyond the range of the dog walkers, with a Little Pied Cormorant and a Black Duck just at the bend upstream, and Goldfinches in the trees. This is the creek that runs through the back of the Main Ridge NCR.

All in all a very productive and enjoyable outing.
Text & Photo: Lee Denis



Bird List For Flinders 16 December 2023		
Pacific Black Duck	Spotted Dove	Willie Wagtail
Chestnut Teal	Galah	Grey Butcherbird
Little Pied Cormorant	Little Corella	Australian Magpie
Little Black Cormorant	Rainbow Lorikeet	European Goldfinch
White-faced Heron	Eastern Rosella	Welcome Swallow
Australian White Ibis	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Silvereve
Black-shouldered Kite	Superb Fairy-wren	Common Blackbird
Sooty Oystercatcher	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Common Starling
Masked Lapwing	Grey Shrike-thrush	Brown Thornbill
Kelp Gull	Magpie-Lark	Little Wattlebird
Silver Gull	Grey Fantail	Noisy Miner

Velimir's List

Arthropoda

Brachyura, True Crab (C) Malacostraca (O) Decapoda (IO) Brachyura
Carcinus meanas European Green Crab (C) Malacostraca (O) Decapoda (F) Carcinidae
Notomithrax ursus Hairy Seaweed Crab (C) Malacostraca (O) Decapoda (F) Majidae
Cyclograpsus Varunid Crab (C) Malacostraca (O) Decapoda (F) Varunidae

Bryozoa

Densipora corrugata Bryozoans (C) Stenolaemata (O) Cyclostomata (F) Densiporidae

Bivalves

Acrosterigma cygnorum Oblique Southern Cockle (O) Cardiida (F) Cardiidae
Brachidontes rostratus Beaked Mussel (O) Mytilida (F) Mytilidae
Mutilus Black Mussel (O) Mytilida (F) Mytilidae
Xenostrobus pulex Little Black Mussel (O) Mytilida (F) Mytilidae
Mactridae, Trough shells (O) Venerida (F) Mactridae
Mactra pura Pure Trough shells (O) Venerida (F) Mactridae
Venerupis galactites (O) Venerida (F) Veneridae

Gastropoda

Cominella lineolata Lineated Cominella (O) Neogastropoda (F) Cominellidae
Conus anemone Anemone Cone (O) Neogastropoda (F) Conidae
Siphonaria diemenensis Striped False Limpet (O) Siphonariida (F) Siphonariidae
Nerita Nerita (O) Cycloneritida (F) Neritidae
Patelloida alticostata Tall-ribbed Limpet (F) Lottiidae
Granata imbricata False Ear Shell (F) Chilodontidae
Haliotis scalaris Staircase Abalone (O) Lepetellida (F) Haliotidae
Phasianella australis Painted-lady Pheasant Shell (O) Trochida (F) Phasianellidae
Phasianotrochus eximius Top Snails (O) Trochida (F) Trochidae
Lunella undulata Common Warrener (O) Trochida (F) Turbinidae

Echinodermata

Amblypneustes elevatus Little Pink Urchin (O) Camarodonta (F)
 Temnopleuridae

Chordata

Edyptula minor Little Penguin (C) Aves (O) Sphenisciformes (F)
 Spheniscidae

Velimir's Photo:

Line 1: (F) Mactridae; *Acrosterigma cygnorum* Oblique Southern Cockle;
Patelloida alticostata Tall-ribbed Limpet;

Line 2: *Granata imbricata* False Ear Shell; *Brachidontes rostratus* Beaked
 Mussel;

Line 3: *Cominella lineolata* Lineated Cominella; *Sabia australis* Cone-
 shaped Hoof Shell; *Phasianella ventricosa* Common Pheasant Shell; *Pha-
 sianotrochus eximius* Top Snails



Hawaii– Hot Spot Volcanic Chain (Not All Honolulu and Hula)

Heather Ducat, Feb 14, 2024

This is Heather's 22nd talk to us, and fascinating as always.

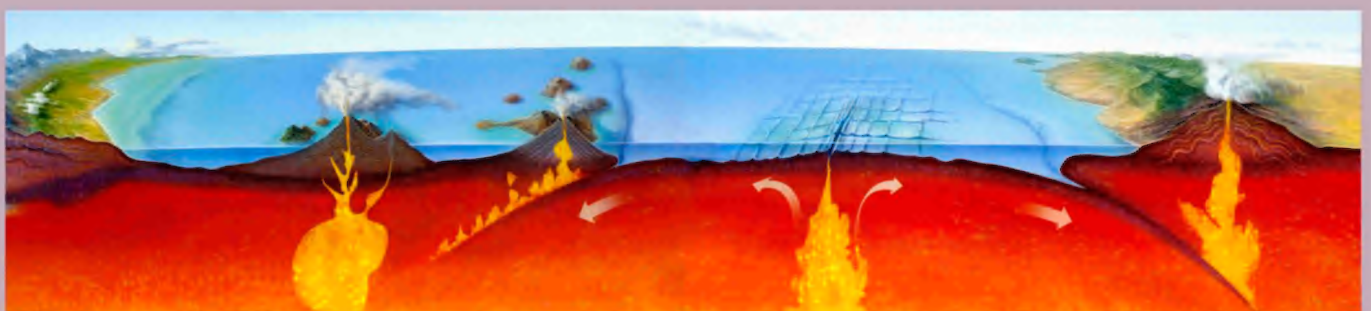
For Heather and Robert the attraction of Hawaii was not Honolulu or Waikiki Beach, but instead the volcanic activity and history. The islands are at the active southern end of the Emperor-Hawaiian Seamount Chain, which starts at Kamchatka Peninsula Siberia, and stretches 6000k to the island of Hawaii. The Pacific Tectonic Plate is moving over a stationary mantle plume, creating shield volcanoes which erupt with very fluid runny lava. (See information plate for detail). The Hawaiian section of the chain is 2600k long, and has 15 volcanoes- active, dormant and extinct. There are 8 main islands, with Hawaii by far the largest, 160k wide, and bigger than the rest put together. It has the most recent volcanic history, from half a million years ago to the present. Mauna Loa is the largest active volcano on earth.

Surprisingly there are *Metrosideros polymorpha* shrubs growing on the floor of the crater, after only 60 years. The revegetation succession is algae, then lichen, ferns, mosses and grasses. It depends on the type of lava and the rainfall. *Metrosideros polymorpha* is a close relative of the NZ Christmas bush, and very showy. Kealakekua Bay is where Captain Cook was killed.

The second largest island is Maui, where volcanic activity was from 1.3million years ago to 750,000 years ago. There are 2 dormant volcanoes. It was the site of the wildfires last year. Silver sword plants (see information box) are endemic, and the Hawaiian goose, which has strong feet adapted to lava. Their numbers were reduced to 30, but with management they are back in the thousands now. The highest areas are alpine cinder deserts, at 3000m, with 300 inches of rain per year, and lots of erosion. On the north coast there are areas of rain forest.

The next island travelling north is Oahu, where volcanic activity was from 3.7 mya to 2.6 mya. It is where the famous attractions of Honolulu, Waikiki and Pearl Harbour are, and agriculture such as sugar cane and pineapple growing. There are lots of introduced birds, as other birds moved to remote islands to escape the introduced animals. The Polynesians introduced pigs, goats and rats, when they arrived around 1200 AD (there was a previous settlement in 500 AD.) Europeans introduced horses, cattle and mongoose subsequently. The last island visited was Kauai, (active between 6 & 5 mya), and one of the wettest places on earth, with 600 inches of rain per year.

There are 141 resident species of birds, including 71 endemic species, such as honeycreepers. There are no reptiles or amphibians, and only one mammal- the Hoary Bat.



Hot-spots are deep fixed plumes in the Earth's mantle that rise to the surface. As the tectonic plate above moves slowly over the plume the hot-spot burns a hole through the crust, leaving a line of closely-spaced volcanoes. As the crust continues to move, the volcano is carried past the hot-spot and its supply of magma stops; the volcano becomes extinct. A new volcano forms over the hot-spot.



Photos & Information Boxes supplied by Heather

Photo above: Iki Crater
Photo below: Haleakala Summit Valley, Maui

HONEYCREEPERS



FAMILY: FRINGILLIDAE



Honeycreepers evolved from a single finch-like species that arrived, probably from Nth. America or Asia 5 m.y.a. About 10 species have become extinct since the arrival of humans. There are 41 species/ sub-species which have a remarkable range of colours, songs & beak shapes: enough to make the famous Galapagos Finches seem dull. Honeycreepers feed on a range of foods, including insects, fruit & seeds. Some species have a tubular brush-tipped tongue to feed on nectar. They occur on all the islands.



Gum Moth Larvae

I found these little caterpillars along the railway line near Mornington (right). They belong to the Emperor Gum Moth (*Opodiphthera eucalypti*), the adult of which I am yet to find. However, I have seen a number of their cousins, the Helena Gum Moth (*Opodiphthera helena*) at Woods Bushland Reserve. These two moths look very similar and are easily confused by a casual glance.

What I found fascinating was that the female laid all her eggs in a line around the edge of the leaf. Somehow, the eggs were oriented to enable all the larvae to emerge on the outer edge of the leaf. Why would this be an evolutionary advantage? I've no idea really, but all I can think of is that it might give them some protection (a not so formidable barrier made by the eggshells) from marauders that search the leaves.

The little ones then graze the surface of the leaf left around their home egg case before being able to consume the whole leaf, as evidenced by the chunks taken out of the leaf.

A few adventurous larvae left the maternal home and settled on a nearby leaf to devour their next meal (left).



I don't know how long it will take for these to grow through their five stages of larval development, but it is many weeks. They will then pupate, likely overwintering in this form and emerge as adults in the following spring or summer. The adults do not feed, surviving on what their body stored before pupation and so only last a couple of weeks after emerging.

Helena Gum Moth adult (right)



Roger Standen
January 2024



Balbirooro Wetlands 5/2/2024

Our first outing for the year was to Balbirooro wetlands in Balnarring.

Balbirooro is an aboriginal name for ibis and the nine hectare site of former open pasture was created in collaboration with the Balnarring Primary School and local environmental groups.

It is a wonderful testament to their vision and hard work and the 2k walk through woodland and wetlands is inspiring as to what can be achieved by a few dedicated people.

The birds were plentiful and sightings of the migratory Latham Snipe were voted 'bird of the day' and an impressive list was recorded for our final tally.

Lee identified the fairly uncommon *Utricularia australis* (yellow bladderwort), a beautiful exquisite yellow water plant of the same genus as Fairies Aprons.

The day started cold and damp but the weather improved and with it lots of the Cabbage White Butterflies that Roger Standen has written about on Facebook.

A single Ringed Xenica was photographed by Lee as the only other butterfly seen.

Lunch was enjoyed under the trees out of the wind.

Text & Photos:
Bett Mitchell



Case Moth Foiled by Wasps?

Life is often not as it seems - in the natural world anyway. On a visit to the Mornington railway line, I found a pupal case of what I think is a Ribbed Case Moth (*Hyalarcta nigrescens*).



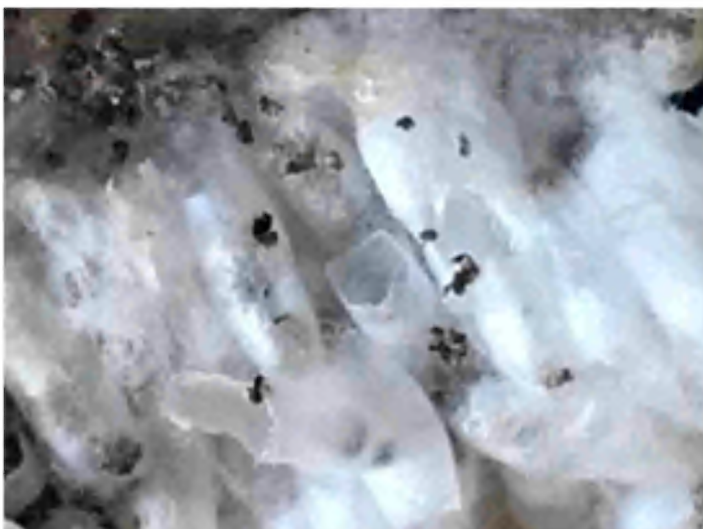
I wanted to see the adult emerge to confirm my ID so collected the case and placed it where I could watch it on my desk. What happened surprised me as rather than a large moth (the case was 45mm long), what emerged were two tiny (7mm long by 1mm wide) cosmet moths (*Pyroderces terminella*). How did they get in there? It seems from the literature that these tiny moths can live in paper-wasp nests and even spider egg-sacs so the larvae may have decided the bag moth case met their needs for shelter.

Was the bag moth still going to emerge? To find out I cut open the case and had a look. Inside was yet another cosmet moth of the same species, plus many other tiny pupae! These looked to me like those of parasitoid wasps I have seen before.

Despite watching with interest to see what, if anything, would emerge from these tiny pupae, nothing did. On closer inspection, it was clear that the wasps had already come and gone as all the tiny pupae had holes in the end and were empty.

One thing was for sure, the bag moth larva came to grief and there would be no adult emerge.

Roger Standen
December 2023



Congratulations are in Order

Leon Costermans

In our last newsletter we paid tribute to our friend, Leon Costermans. We weren't the only ones thinking along these lines – Leon received an OAM in the recent Australia Day awards.

The following tribute and photo is from the Frankston City Council Environews:

'Congratulations to Leon Costermans who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the General Division for his ongoing service to conservation and the environment. Leon has been volunteering in the local community for over 35 years, he is a current and founding member of the Frankston Environmental Friends Network as well as an expert advisor in their Biodiversity Action Group.

He is the founder and coordinator of Parks Victoria's Friends of Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve since 1988, handing over the reins at the end of last year. A professional botanist, geologist and author, his most recent book 'Stories beneath our feet, Exploring the Geology and Landscapes of Victoria and Surrounds' was published in 2022 in collaboration with geologist Fons VandenBerg, it took over 16 years to write. Well done, Leon, the honour is well deserved. '



Gidja Walker

Another friend of our club who received an OAM is Gidja Walker, also for services to conservation and the environment.

Gidja is an independent Environmental Services Professional, restoration ecologist, artist, and member and leader of numerous Mornington Peninsula Reserve Friends and Trusts. She was a co-founder, and Chair since 2000, of Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association,.

As well as that she is an enthusiastic presenter at the annual MP Schools Environment Week, and will-walk leader and speaker. And a wonderful ecology communicator and companion.



Karkarook Outing, 4/3/2024

On a fine mild sunny morning five of us set off to Moorabbin to see what was about. We knew that after the WTP any birding was going to be 'ordinary'.

How Karkarook came to be constructed is quite an achievement. The space was a nightsoil dumping ground for a long time, until the installation of universal sewerage made it redundant. It became a sandmine, with the proviso that once mining ceased it would be rehabilitated by the miners, which is what happened. In the early 2000s the lakes and ponds were constructed, and planting by volunteers and others commenced. Now it is a popular public space, and the birds didn't take long to move in.

We walked around the ponds and lakes in the morning, and apart from the usual water birds saw only the dreaded noisy miner, in great numbers. But after lunch we walked through the woodland in the centre, and picked up common bronzewing (our bird of the day), white plumed honeyeaters and willy wagtails, as well as

wrens, thornbills etc. The lone raptor was probably a whistling kite. Altogether about 30 birds.



Text & Photos: J Smart
Looking across the lake
Lythrum salicaria— Purple loosestrife



Contact Us

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

CAV: A0010510T

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip on the following Saturday. Visitors always welcome.

We also go birding on the first Monday of the month.

Further information and current Program of Activities can be found at our website:

www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au

We are also on Face book: **Peninsula Field Nats**

Email: penfieldnats@gmail.com

Secretary & temporary editor: Judy Smart

President: vacant

Treasurer: Linda Edwards

Annual subs due July

Adult \$35

Concession \$30

Family \$40

To pay direct to bank account: Bendigo Bank

BSB 633-108

Account 123350068

Please email secretary when paid