

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

January - March 2023

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General meetings

Held at 7:30 pm on the fourth Friday of each month at the Moe Library, 1/29 George St, MOE Vic 3825 (also virtually on Zoom)



Flying Peacock Spider *Maratus volans* photographed by Matt Campbell on Stringybark Ridge, Morwell National Park, in October 2018.

Upcoming events

<u>March general meeting (AGM):</u> Friday 24 March – Reptile adventures with Matt Campbell

<u>March excursion:</u> Saturday 25 March – Matt's property at Jeeralang Junction

Botany Group: Saturday 1 April – Ferns at Tarra Valley

<u>Bird Group</u>: Tuesday 4 April – Sweetwater Creek Reserve, Buln Buln East

zast –

<u>April general meeting:</u> Friday 21 April – Helmeted Honeyeaters

April excursion: TBC

SEANA autumn camp: 28-30 April – Port Campbell

<u>Bird Group</u>: Tuesday 2 May – Wirilda Environment Park, Tyers <u>Botany Group</u>: Saturday 6 May – Morwell River Falls, Olsens Bridge Bird Group: Tuesday 18 May – EA Wetlands survey. Meet 9am

Morwell Bridge.

Peacock spiders in Gippsland

After an absence from general meetings due to COVID, I was very keen to get along to the August 2022 meeting to hear the guest speaker, Mitch Smith, talk about his chosen topic, the genus *Maratus* (Peacock Spiders).

I was aware of these little spiders for quite some time before I found my first one (or at least at the time it was my first one – more on that later) in Morwell National Park back in 2015. I had no idea what it was, other than it was a *Maratus*, but it didn't take long to establish that it was *Maratus volans*, the Flying Peacock Spider. When I had a look online, I discovered that I wasn't the only person in Gippsland finding these; Mitch Smith had quite a number of records by that time. In fact, Mitch was so in front of the pack in terms of discovering these little spiders that, it turned out, he was finding species that had yet to be described.

Mitch started his presentation by giving us a brief history of the genus. Despite how colourful they are, and how common and extremely plentiful many species are, most were unknown to science and those that were known were very poorly studied. Many were also originally placed in different genera. In fact, *Maratus volans* was originally named *Salticus volans* in 1874, with *volans* meaning 'flying' in Latin. It was believed at the time that the small flaps on the side of the spider's abdomen enabled them to fly. Over the years a few species were found and described, but even as recently as 15 years

back, there really were only around 10 or so species in the genus. It wasn't until Jürgen Otto started studying them that they really became known, with his videos of the displaying males becoming an internet sensation. From that point on, these spiders started being found across large swathes of Australia and new species were constantly being found, to the point where we now have around 90 species. By the way, *Maratus* are only found in Australia. Some species of jumping spiders have been subsequently moved into *Maratus*, hence me saying at the start that I thought I'd found my first one in 2015; with *Hypoblemum griseus* and *H. scutulatum* being moved into *Maratus*, these would



Maratus griseus (Photo: Matt Campbell)

be the first species I'd found. These two are extremely common and it's likely that you have them around your house.

I mentioned above the males displaying, and this, along with some species being so colourful, is what made them so appealing. When a male Peacock Spider sees a female, he will almost instantly begin to do his special display. His enlarged 3rd pair of legs will be raised, along with his abdomen (they can look so different when they're doing this that at times it is hard to believe they are the same spider). He will move back and forth, constantly signalling with his legs, his abdomen waving away, in the hope that the female will find his dance irresistible and then mate with him. Quite often she will watch for a while before jumping away, and sometimes she will even jump at him and eat him. But, should he manage to impress her, she will allow him to mate with her. I was aware that the males will sometimes perform for females of different species, but Mitch surprised me when he explained that the males apparently don't recognise their own species – they see a small brown spider and they just start displaying; this explains why I once observed a male *Maratus volans* perform in front of a female *Jotus* species. However, the females know the males and will only ever mate with one of their own kind.

I should explain too that all of the females are, like with many things in nature, quite drab and brown in appearance. Some will have a distinctive mark or two, but many can be hard to tell apart. They are also usually larger than the males, but large is relative – these spiders are in fact quite small, most being around 4 mm in length.



Maratus purcellae (Photo: Mitch Smith)

Mitch became a bit obsessed with these little guys and made a few trips around Eastern Victoria in the hope of finding some of the species he'd become aware of. Usually these trips were successful, and sometimes so successful that he'd find species that had only been seen a few times. In the case of *Maratus purcellae*, which Mitch found at Golden Beach, it was only known at the time from Queensland. This species is very small, being less than 3 mm, yet here it was, 1500 km outside its known distribution.

Mitch showed us a series of photos of the various *Maratus* found across Gippsland and Eastern Victoria, many of which I was unaware we had. He also showed shots of several undescribed species he'd found. It's amazing just how many are out there and makes you wonder how many more we are yet to discover. I personally now have at my place six described species, and a minimum of four undescribed, and with the rate at which they are being found, this number could very well grow. Mitch has me very keen for this year's '*Maratus* season' – there's a couple he showed us that I now want to see if I can find. Speaking of the 'season', in Gippsland that is generally from September to about February, depending on the species and their habitat. Members of the same species will show up earlier in some locations than in others.

Interestingly, with them now being so well known and popular, Mitch explained that there's still a lot that we don't know about them, such as where they go through winter. I've found 'baby' *Maratus* in late summer and early autumn – are these the offspring of those who mated early, or are they from last year? Nobody quite knows. Oh, and the colourful males are only like that for their final moult – prior to that, they also tend to be mostly brown or black, and it is quite amazing how well some blend in with their surroundings. *Maratus volans* is bigger, and in many ways more colourful, than *M. pavonis*, yet can be hard to spot, while *M. pavonis* can often be made out from several metres away.



Maratus pavonis (Photo: Mitch Smith)

If you wish to get out and start looking for these amazing little spiders, the peak of our local season is from October to around New Year's. I was very happy to hear that Mitch searches the same way I do, by finding a likely-looking spot and sitting down and waiting. It's not unusual to sit somewhere and then, just when you think there's none about, several will appear. I know Mitch has me itching to start finding them again – hopefully many of you will be out looking too!

Matt Campbell

Field Naturalists receive the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)

Two local field naturalists who are well known to Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club members were awarded the OAM at ceremonies at Government House in September 2022. Margaret Rowe, a long term and active member of the LVFNC, and Terri Allen, a member of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria and leader of and participant in many of our activities, are worthy recipients of this award.

Below is a record of their activities and achievements, and I would like to thank Mary Ellis and Alison Brewster for providing me with the background information used for the application, and Margaret Rowe and Terri Allen for checking the facts and supplying me with further information.

I think it is important that two such eminent Field Naturalists should have their significant conservation efforts and volunteer work for the community recorded and publicised.

Wendy Savage

Margaret Rowe

Margaret has been a passionate volunteer in conservation for around 50 years. She is an active long-term member of: the South Gippsland Conservation Society (founding member), Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club, Marine Research Group of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, Victorian Wader Study Group, Australian Plant Society, more recently of the Wonthaggi Seed Bank and Nursery, and, for several years, was a member and secretary of Natural Environment Inc.



Graeme, Margaret and Chris Rowe at the ceremony.

She is also a long-term member of the Leongatha Uniting Church Council (chair for over 12 years) and a member of the Gippsland Presbytery of the Uniting Church.

Margaret was an esteemed maths and science teacher and, both during her teaching career and in retirement, she has been a hard-working unpaid researcher and educator in various fields of natural science, mainly native flora, intertidal marine organisms and shorebirds. As a science and biology teacher at Leongatha High School she raised awareness of the value of natural areas by embedding into the school's curriculum excursions to intertidal areas and natural bushland.

She was a major researcher and writer in 1980 in offering information in response to the Victorian Land Conservation Council's call for comments on the value for nature conservation of public land in South Gippsland Area, District 2. From the submission, a booklet was prepared listing 28 sites with descriptions of their attractions: *Brief description of land suitable for reservation 'South Gippsland Study 11'*. This led to the preparation of a number of submissions about individual sites. Eventually, the booklet assisted with future publications, most recently *Coast & Bush Walks*, by fellow members of the South Gippsland Conservation Society.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Margaret, in consultation with others, and frequently being the writer, gathered information for many letters and submissions advocating the protection of intertidal areas along the Victorian coastline and of waters such as Corner Inlet and Westernport. For example, in 1982, on behalf of the South Gippsland Conservation Society and Natural Environment Inc., Margaret co-authored a submission supporting the establishment of the Bunurong Marine and Coastal Park. Seeking the support of the general community for a protected area, she co-authored the production of a booklet *Rockpooling around the Bunurong*, led rockpooling excursions for the public, prepared the text of pamphlets, and communicated with the local press. This also involved writing letters advising against the construction of a sewage outfall that would have been inconsistent with a marine protected area. The Bunurong Marine and Coastal Park was declared in 1991. Later, Margaret prepared a submission supporting the inclusion of part of that park into the Bunurong Marine National Park which was declared in 2002. In another issue relating to the intertidal area, in the mid-1980s Margaret coordinated the efforts of several groups to present a case against the construction of a marina inside Westernport at San Remo. Data offered by the Marine Research Group was critical to the success in protecting this special area under the *Flora and* Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

Activities with the Victorian Wader Study Group became part of Margaret's family life from the early 1980s. Margaret and her husband, Graeme, were awarded Life Memberships in 2021. Margaret's contributions to fieldwork involved leading small groups of team members, and often training newcomers, to set nets and handle birds safely while gathering relevant data. At times, Margaret assisted with data entry and with preparation of the yearly Bulletin. The work of the Victorian Wader Study Group has revealed information about the routes of migratory shorebirds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, indicating the localities of feeding areas along the route and locating breeding areas in the Arctic. More recent work in conjunction with Deakin University explores further details relevant to the survival of the birds.

Whilst working in the Department of Environment and Heritage for a year in 2000, as a teacher in the *Teacher Release to Industry Program*, Margaret wrote *Feathers, Flyways and Fast Food*, a booklet about migratory shorebirds for use in science classes in years 5-8. This was available on the website of the Department of Environment and Heritage and was translated and reportedly used in Chinese schools.

Since retiring, Margaret has volunteered at the marine invertebrate laboratory of the Museum of Victoria to offer assistance and to learn to identify many of the crustaceans of Victorian intertidal areas. With assistance and photographs from fellow members of the Marine Research Group of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, Margaret prepared two field guides. These assist with the group's ongoing program of surveying intertidal areas along the Victorian coastline by providing images and brief descriptions enabling the animals to be named while in-situ or from photographs. They are available on the Facebook page of the Marine Research Group: *Field Guide: Some Intertidal Shrimps of Victoria, 2017* and *Field Guide: Some Intertidal Isopods of Victoria, 2022*.

Margaret is a valued member of the Prom'n'aides, now the Prom'n'exes, who monitored the vegetation recovery after the 2005 and 2009 fires at Wilsons Promontory. Margaret, Lorraine Norden and Mary Ellis produced a publication using the database that we all generated: *An exploration of the capacity of a database generated by post-fire vegetation monitoring to yield*

useful information about responses of individual species to fire, published in *The Victorian Naturalist*, 2019.

More recently, participating in the work of the Wonthaggi Seed Bank and Nursery, Margaret assists with the identification and propagation of local native flora. These plants are used on private property and for revegetation of public land.

When Margaret leads an excursion for a group, her preparation is thorough. For a recent excursion focusing on mosses at Morwell National Park, in preparation she visited the area, planned where we would walk, photographed and identified the mosses she found, and produced sheets with photographs of their key identifying features. This gave us a wonderful entry to a difficult group of plants.

On any excursion Margaret is knowledgeable about a huge range of things. She is invaluable in producing and checking plant lists, including the more difficult fungi, mosses and lichens. Her clear photographs, particularly those taken under her microscope, help us all with final decisions, but Margaret is never prepared to add anything to a list if we can't be quite certain of the identification.

Margaret is a complete and meticulous biologist – fungi, plants, birds and marine animals – for just one of these voluntary contributions, she would be worthy of the OAM.

Terri Allen

Terri has been a teacher and passionate conservationist throughout her adult life, always willing to share her love of the environment with everybody. She has mentored numerous students studying flora and fauna and land management. She has written many publications on the local environment and history, and is a very active volunteer in local conservation and history groups.

Terri is an active committee member of Friends of Wonthaggi Heathlands and Coastal Reserve, and has been instrumental in revegetation projects and in getting public lands reserved for preservation of native flora and fauna; she has represented Friends of Wonthaggi Heathlands at hearings and Bass Coast Shire meetings.



Terri Allen with Governor of Victoria, the Hon Linda Dessau AC CVO

She has participated in the Birds on Farms projects, led excursions (with Peter Homan) for students from R.M.I.T. and for naturalists from clubs around Victoria.

An inaugural committee member of Wonthaggi Seed Bank and Nursery, which propagates indigenous flora for revegetating the local area, Terri offers advice and leads the 'Monday Group' to collect native plant seed, and, in the Wonthaggi Rifle Range Wetlands, to weed and plant.

She has also volunteered for years with the South Gippsland Conservation Society, leading

excursions and helping to run a series of plant identification workshops. Terri's enthusiasm and good 'teacher's voice' kept these classes involved. This is not surprising as she won the inaugural Teacher of the Year Award in 1979. I'm sure the participants all remember her saying 'sedges have edges, rushes are round', or calling *Cassytha* (Dodder Laurel) 'Snotty Gobble'.

She contributes a regular history column to the local online newsletter, the *Bass Coast Post*, and is a regular guest speaker on local history, native plants and conservation. She is a member of the Wonthaggi Historical Society and has produced a number of publications on the history of parts of the local area.

Terri has led many excursions for the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club in her 'patch' and these excursions usually start with a short history lesson. Terri sees interest and beauty in the natural wonders around her and shares this freely as we walk, along with her intimate knowledge of the plants and their habits and the changes she notices.

Over the 20 years from the mid-1980s Terri supported the Victorian Wader Study Group, participating in field work, especially when the group visited the shores of Corner Inlet.

Terri participated, offering her valuable skills in plant identification, with the Prom'n'aides, a group that conducted post-fire monitoring at Wilsons Promontory for ten years. Terri involved that group in also monitoring the vegetation of the Wonthaggi Heathlands both pre- and post-fire. Her knowledge of the heathland is very detailed, an area she has known since childhood. *A trial of slash and burn management of Coast Tea-tree* Leptospermum laevigatum *on Wonthaggi Heathland*, was published in *The Victorian Naturalist* in 2013 by Terri and Mary Ellis.

Coast & Bush Walks was produced by Terri, Mary Ellis and Jenny Watts using the detailed botanical knowledge gained of the area from years of excursions in the Bass Coast and South Gippsland.

Perhaps Terri's most significant publication is *Gippsland Lady Botanists*, an important record of the life and work of eight local amateur botanists whose achievements and significance would otherwise be unsung. Four of these botanists were leading members of the LVFNC.

Terri is not fond of modern technology, but friends are always willing to word process her writings and plant lists. In return she is a great proof-reader and is frequently asked for editorial advice by members of the societies to which she belongs.

Terri is a very hospitable person and invariably bakes a cake to share at lunchtime on our excursions. She retains her friends and keeps in touch with everyone. A visit to her home 'Frog Hollow', the miner's cottage built by her grandfather and where Terri lived as a child, is a great pleasure, as there is tea and cake, all the latest news on the people we know and invariably plants from her garden to take home.

A list of Terri's publications is available in Appendix I.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Club welcomes Erin Walser from Traralgon, and Christopher Rowney and his family from Warragul. We wish you all a long and happy association with us.

Coastal Birds of Bayside

It is a pleasure to write-up Tania Ireton's presentation "Coastal Birds of Bayside" at our September meeting. Tania is one of the leading Australian birders. She has held many significant positions with BirdLife Australia and was the founding President of BirdLife Bayside in 1996 (and still is!) Her current total of sighted species in Australia and its territories is 852. One of her passions is to encourage and inspire people to start, and to improve, their birdwatching and listening skills. She is certainly achieving that with LVFNC people. At past meetings Tania has told us about "How birds fly" and "The colours of feathers".

BirdLife Bayside covers the City Council area of south-eastern suburban Melbourne that runs from Elsternwick to Cheltenham, and down to the coastline of Port Phillip Bay, a region of mainly houses with a smattering of golf courses, small parklands and coastal reserves. Tania's presentation was extensive, covering as she said "only a selection of species" recorded in Bayside. This amounted to 78 species! Her references include a book *Birds of Bayside* published in 1995 which details 253 species, some with information on historical presence of the species. Club members thoroughly enjoyed and learnt a great deal of interesting things about different species. I found the historical references very interesting, having lived in Beaumaris in the 1950s-60s when the heathland area was just starting to be built on.

The aggressive Noisy Miner is flourishing in areas with eucalypts and grasslands such as old golf courses. They are in plague proportions in Melbourne. White-plumed Honeyeater used to be common but is now becoming hard to find, probably due to increased numbers of Noisy Miners. BirdLife Bayside is involved with the development of Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve (formerly Elsternwick Park Golf course). The development of the park and associated plantings are intended to reduce Noisy Miner numbers, but consideration may need to be given to culling the birds.

Rainbow Lorikeets are very common now, but they used to migrate annually from Queensland for the warm weather and then return north, until around the 1990s when a population became established in Melbourne (rather like the Grey-headed Flying-foxes).

Flocks of Little Corellas are now common in Melbourne after they moved in during the big drought in the 1990s. One of the benefits is that they love digging up and eating the corms of Capeweed, as do Long-billed Corellas, which are sometimes seen with Little Corellas. All these cockatoos need large nest hollows, which are often difficult



This photograph is a good example of misguided anthropomorphism. It is interpreted by most people as romantic but is actually two males facing off over territory (Photo: Tania Ireton).

to find in Melbourne as houses with treed gardens are replaced by townhouses and units with a few shrubs.

House Sparrows were introduced in the 1860s, but numbers have decreased substantially; increased urbanisation, including fewer backyard chickens and horses, and cleaning up of vacant lots, has resulted in fewer seeds and grains being available. There are also fewer insects due to the use of pesticides.

Like Silvereyes, Tasmanian Grey Fantails migrate to Victoria in the autumn to escape the cold. However, they don't fly high above the water like Silvereyes, but flutter just above the waves, rather like butterflies dancing over the ocean (my favourite bird always deserves a mention).

Silver Gulls breed on islands in southern Port Phillip Bay and on Phillip Island. Very likely, from the number of birds, they now also nest on building rooves in Dandenong.

Australasian Gannets are frequently seen diving from a height into the water; they have a specialised

air sac in their heads to reduce the impact of hitting the water. They nest on Pope's Eye, Wedge Spit Light and a few other platforms in the bay; this is the only place in the world where gannets nest on man-made structures.

It was known that adult Short-tailed Shearwaters leave their chicks a few weeks before fledging, however recent geolocator tracking has shown that the adults fly all the way down to the Antarctic ice shelf to feed, before coming back past the nesting grounds when the chicks are ready to fledge and join their parents in the main northern migration.

Black Swans are occasionally seen feeding on the seagrass meadows around Ricketts Point, Beaumaris. All five species of cormorant can be sighted on the rock platforms in Bayside.

Constant pressure from people and dogs on bayside beaches has resulted in Red-capped Plover trying to find more isolated beaches on which to breed.

Tawny Frogmouths are a very common resident and Australian Boobooks are seen from time to time in Bayside. Both were resident in our garden (years ago). Recent species Tania has added to the Bayside list include Pied Butcherbird and Eastern Barn Owl.

At Yalukit Willam, nestboxes that resemble natural hollows are proving to be more effective than the old 'wooden box' style. Pieces of already hollowed tree branches/trunks are sometimes available from local councils or tree-loppers, or can be made by hollowing out sections of old logs and capping at the top (with a layer of carpet) and bottom, cutting out a side hole, the size of which can be altered by plugging in different diameter annular rings.

The following day, 21 Birdlife Bayside and LVFNC people spent a damp morning birding in the Mt Worth State Park. Our visitors were entranced by the area and many plan to return. The day finished with 28 species, the highlights being good views of Olive Whistler and Rose Robin.



Eastern Rosella in a nestbox constructed from a log (Photo: Tania Ireton)

Alix Williams

A bird list for this excursion is available in Appendix II.

Latrobe Valley Naturalist is the official publication of the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club Inc. The Club subscription includes the "Naturalist".

Brief contributions and short articles on any aspect of natural history are invited from members of all clubs. Articles, including those covering Club speakers and excursions, would typically be around one A4 side in length, should not exceed 1,000 words, and may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Photos should be sent as an attachment and be a maximum of 1 megabyte in size.

Responsibility for the accuracy of information and opinions expressed in this magazine rests with the author of the article.

Contributions should be addressed to:

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Deadline for articles to be considered for inclusion in the next issue (Apr-May): 1 May 2023

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APPENDIX I – List of Terri Allen's published works

- Nature diaries and plant lists for every excursion and flora reserve or national park since 1967
- Wickliffe, 1970
- Wotjobaluk: Aborigines of the Wimmera River System, 1974
- Wyperfeld, 1975
- Shears in Hand, 1976
- RRR: A History of Early Education in the Southern Mallee, 1977
- Hedley, home of the orchids, 1989
- Numeralla Estate Hedley 1892-1928, 1989
- Gippsland Lady Botanists, South Gippsland Conservation Society, 2007
- Shy Whisperings (a collection of poetry), South Gippsland Conservation Society
- Allen, T. et al. Notes on the post-fire recovery of plants at Wilsons Promontory,
 The Victorian Naturalist, Vol 125 (3), 2008
- Coast and Bush Walks, with Mary Ellis and Jennifer Watts, South Gippsland
 Conservation Society, 2010
- Powlett Tent Town, South Gippsland Conservation Society, 2010
- A trial of slash and burn management of Coast Tea-tree Leptospermum
 laevigatum on Wonthaggi Heathland, with Mary Ellis, The Victorian Naturalist Vol.

 130 (5) 2013
- Walking Wonthaggi's Wetlands (a legacy of our mining history), Friends of Wonthaggi Heathland and Coastal Reserve Inc, 2014
- Information pamphlets: Rifle Range Wetlands, Wonthaggi Rifle Range Wetland,
 Powlett Coalfield Tent Town, Wonthaggi Heathland & Coastal Reserve
- Newsletter, Friends of Wonthaggi Heathlands, Editor and author of numerous articles 1995 to present
- Newsletter, South Gippsland Conservation Society, author of numerous articles
 1992 to present

APPENDIX II – Bird list for Mt Worth excursion 17.09.2022

(LVFNC & Birdlife Bayside)

Australian Magpie

Australian Raven

Brown Gerygone

Brown Goshawk

Brown Thornbill

Crescent Honeyeater

Crimson Rosella

Eastern Shrike-tit

Eastern Spinebill

Eastern Whipbird

Eastern Yellow Robin

Fan-tailed Cuckoo

Golden Whistler

Grey Fantail

Grey Shrike-thrush

Large-billed Scrubwren

Laughing Kookaburra

Olive Whistler

Pied Currawong

Rose Robin

Striated Thornbill

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

Superb Fairy-wren

Superb Lyrebird

White-browed Scrubwren

White-throated Treecreeper

Yellow-faced Honeyeater

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo

LATROBE VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC Annual General Meeting 2023

We wish to nominate	
for the position of	President
	Vice President 1
	Treasurer
	Assistant Secretary
Moved by:	Seconded by:
(print name)	(print name)
(signature)	(signature)
Post to PO Box 1205 Morwell \	VIC 3840
or scan and email to info@lvfie	eldnats.org
	====

Alternatively, please email the Secretary, Rose, at info@lvfieldnats.org stating your nomination. Rose will automatically second your nomination and contact the nominee to seek their acceptance.

SUBSCRIPTIONS Send remittance with completed form	to Marj	a Bouman, LVFNC	Inc, 129	Briggs Rd, Nilma	North
Bank details for direct transfer: BSB 6 identification.	33000 A	/c no. 145729844	– please	remember to inc	lude
Full Name(s)					
Full Name(s)					
• •					
Address	s)	Email			5)