

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2012

Looking back, 2011 was a relatively quiet year compared with 2010. I say 'relatively' as the previous year was one of the busiest years of our club's history because we celebrated our 50th anniversary by hosting a SEANA camp, producing a booklet on the Club's history and holding a photographic competition.

I said last year that we should now look forward to the next 50 years and our focus should be how we should attract new members. To go some way to achieve this we have embarked on a number of projects with a technological component. Some of our recent initiatives are:

- The purchase of a digital photoframe to display members' natural history photographs at community events to showcase our activities.
- A set of 4 walkie-talkie units has been purchased for better communication and improved safety on excursions.
- To provide improved audio quality and more flexibility for those writing up talks at General Meetings we have replaced the defunct tape recorder with an MP3 player.
- The Club is developing its website to make more information available to both members and others interested.

I'm pleased to announce that a new position of 'Web Master' has been created and John Sunderland has accepted that role. John has already made a valuable contribution by updating our website and will be posting monthly editions of the 'Latrobe Valley Naturalist'. This arrangement will be reciprocated by other SEANA clubs so we can all be more aware of the activities of these clubs.

We hope that these moves will attract some new members to our Club to share in the knowledge and experience that we all enjoy.

As ever we continue to do plant and bird surveys for other groups and corporations in our area. For example we conduct three-monthly bird surveys at TRU wetlands and plant surveys at Callignee and Traralgon South Flora Reserve. We also assist the DSE in conducting owl surveys at certain times of the year. All these activities demonstrate the high esteem that our club members have

in the community.

The general meetings covered a good cross-section of natural history topics including mammals, geology, botany and birds as well as a couple of trip reports from other interesting parts of our planet. These latter were given by members of our Club and provided us an opportunity to see pictures of Madagascar in April 2011 and Kruger NP in South Africa in March this year. Both these destinations were visited by Ken Harris, David Mules and David Stickney in August 2010. We also had two members' nights instead of the usual January meeting to provide more opportunities for Club members to share their natural history experiences. We are grateful to Ken Harris and Rohan Bugg for stepping in at short notice to give their presentations in October and November. We have experienced more talks than usual from our club members this year and are grateful to those who volunteered.

Our excursions led us to many varied locations. We went to Bunurong Cliffs to study the geology, Baw Baw NP, and Munro grasslands to study the plants, Duff Sawmill trail for fungi, Duck Point and Foster to look for birds and Mt Hedrick, Toorong Falls and Gunya Gunya to experience reserves that we don't visit often. In addition a few of us went to Melbourne Zoo in July, and had an interesting day at a microscope workshop in August.

Our two camps also offered contrasting locations. The spring camp had a coastal location at Cape Conran and the summer camp in the Alps at Falls Creek. Both camps were very enjoyable and provided us with the opportunity to explore the plant life, although the weather was not favourable at Cape Conran.

We continue to monitor our attendance records and although our attendance has declined this year to an average of 25 at our general meetings it is still a respectable number. Our excursion attendances were also lower but we did not manage to record numbers at all of them. One of our members' presentations proved to be the most popular with 35 attending the talk on Madagascar in March 2011.

The contribution of our club members is an indispensable element to the smooth running of the club. We are grateful to all our contributors and our thanks go to those

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members who have renominated for positions on the committee. We should also recognise the services of Wendy - our secretary whom I'm delighted to say has renominated for this position. This year is something of an anniversary for her because it marks her twentieth year in the job. We offer her our congratulations and look forward to working with her for the next twenty years!

David Stickney

BATS – GREG GORDON

Greg Gordon is an animal technician at Victoria University and is involved in wildlife rehabilitation, so his talk, as well as describing the bats found in Victoria gave information about rescuing and caring for injured bats.

He started by talking about the much maligned Grey-headed Flying-fox, a fruit bat in the suborder megachiroptera. Having extended its range some time ago to include Melbourne, there is now a colony in Bendigo and it is also now in South Australia. Tanya Loos spoke to our club in 2003 about this fruit bat at the time when it was causing a lot of damage to the fern gully in the Botanic Gardens and the efforts to relocate it along the Yarra River. Greg showed us the cages with captive bats and even blow-up decoy bats that were used to attract them whilst driving them from the fern gully with loud noises. The colony has now been moved to Yarra Bend at great expense, but a downside is the mortality of young bats in very hot weather. Gum trees afford less protection than fern gullies. Greg mentioned that the fruit bat may be reclassified as a primitive primate.

The other bats are microbats, in the suborder microchiroptera, and are all insectivorous. Identification pointers are head shape, type of tail and forearm length. Tails can be free, sheathed or fully enclosed in a tail membrane. The age of bats can be determined by counting the bands of cartilage in the joints of the finger bones in the wing. Three bands indicate a young pre-flight bat. Band number reduces with age with none in a fully grown adult. Bats can be sexed by finding the penis on a male which will 'pop out'. I think you'd have to know what you were doing! Bats use echolocation to catch their prey. This is ultrasonic and in the range 30 – 75 kHz. Humans hear up to 15 kHz. Their diet is a

range of flying invertebrates and due to their high metabolic rate they need to eat a lot, consuming up to half their body weight in insects each night. Bats are placental mammals and the young grow very rapidly.

Greg showed pictures of some of the 21 species found in Victoria.

The Little Forest Bat is very common and weighs less than 4 g (less than the weight of a 10 cent piece). The Chocolate Wattled Bat is chocolate brown and has relatively small ears and a large forehead. Gould's Wattled Bat looks similar but is black above and black or brown below. The Yellow-bellied Sheath-tailed-bat is the largest of the microbats (weighs 30 – 60 g). It's rarely collected as it's thought to fly so high and fast. The White-striped Freetail Bat has a grotesque appearance with huge rounded ears and a prominent fat nose (it only comes into far eastern Victoria). The Eastern Horseshoe Bat also looks weird with a horseshoe shaped protuberance below its nose which is used for echolocation as well as its ears. Common Bent-wing Bats roost and hibernate in caves and also use nursery caves to which they return year after year. The Lesser Long-eared Bat has huge ears and is probably the widest ranging bat in Australia. It has adapted well to human presence and this is the bat I have found hibernating in our shed in winter.

Nineteen of the 21 Victorian bats roost in tree hollows, cracks in trees or under bark. Chopping down trees for firewood is a common cause of bat injury. Main reasons bats are brought into care are disturbance at roost and mishaps to dependent young such as being dropped by the female in flight. Injuries can be broken bones and holes in wing membranes. These can be repaired and the wings will regrow to repair holes. Young bats in care are fed Wombaroo milk replacer, which is lactose free. They are fed whilst hanging upside down and will also be taught to feed on insects before being released as well as being taught to fly (a trial and error process using a soft landing). Being colonial animals bats must always be released in the location where they were found.

Bats should always be handled with gloves as although they are not aggressive, they can carry viruses. Lyssavirus is present in all species of Flying-fox with the highest incidence in the Little Red Flying-fox. It is also found in the Yellow-bellied Sheath-tail

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Bat. Despite this, very few people have been infected, but bat handlers can be vaccinated against it.

Thanks to Greg for his informative talk.

Wendy Savage

The following is another report from our Summer Camp at Falls Creek in January

SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

At the entrance to the track to Wallace Hut near Falls Creek, a small stone shelter has been erected to protect the sign board and club members clustered in its shade or on the viewing platform to eat lunch. Of interest on the sign board, amongst photos and maps, was a brief history of the area with the information that the work of Maisie Fawcett and those who followed her "showed that grazing did not reduce blazing as the cattlemen had argued, and that grazing was indeed harmful to the fragile alpine ecology" and that Australia's Original Peoples, whose forebears had been dispossessed in the past, are now returning to their traditional tribal lands.

The land sloped away towards the distant hills, with low grasslands and ranks of trees. The bare bleached bones of many Snow Gums were a grim reminder of the fires of 2003 which swept through the area, but here and there a patch of dark green was poking through the expanse of white branches, showing that not every tree was devoured by the flames; and, below the burnt tree skeletons was thick green regrowth, the beginnings of a future forest. Along the track a big patch of *Celmisias* held erect their large white daisy flowers on tall straight stems while further down a multitude of small orange moths fluttered about the bright yellow flowers of *Senecio pinnatifolius*.



Wallace's Hut

Photo: Philip Rayment

Work is being done on Wallace Hut to maintain it with long poles holding up the tin chimney until it can be strengthened. It is very dark inside where some of the old dusty, sagging furniture still sits atop the floor made of slabs from tree trunks. As the old Snow Gums around the hut were not burnt in 2003 their canopy shaded the area and their thick, multi-stemmed trunks retained their rich colours. Out in the sunshine the Grass Trigger Plants, *Styloidium graminifolium*, were a mass of pink. Some people chose to walk to Cope Hut. Much of that track follows the aqueduct put in for the hydro-electric scheme.

In the plains area opposite the car park for Cope Hut we discovered a patch of brown spikes, the buds of the Bogong or Mountain Gentian, *Gentianella diemensis*, just beginning to open. *Pentachondra pumila* lived up to its common name of Carpet Heath, covering a large area and profuse with both its star-like white flowers and bright red berries. Some of the flowers were still attached to the ends of the fruit, making an attractive contrast. Clumps of Mountain Celery, *Aciphylla glacialis*, a favourite of cattle, was evidence that the area was no longer grazed, and we found more of the Alpine Leek Orchid which we'd seen beside the Mt Nelse track. Near Maisie Fawcett's plot, a katydid and a pyrgomorph were being harassed by the photographers, the dark-colored katydid revealing its blue and red spotted abdomen as it crawled through the grass. The pyrgomorph, a large grasshopper, had pale spots all over its dark brown body. The plot was fenced in 1947 and vegetation both inside and outside the fence was less than knee height. The posts were grey with age and festooned with foliose lichen. *Podolepis jaceoides*, growing nearby, has longer narrower (lance-shaped) leaves than *Podolepis robusta* and its golden flowers are larger, though both have untidy fringes around the central florets. Out on the road a small black and yellow patterned moth had short white stripes at the end of its wings, while underneath the wings and body were a rich gold and red.

Cope Hut, which is clad with sheets of corrugated iron, is in better condition than Wallace Hut. At each end of the main room in Cope Hut were bunks with a sleeping loft above. A rusty iron heater sat in the fireplace. Rather surprising were the more

modern chairs. A lean-to room at the back was filled with branches for firewood, though a sink against the far wall, unattached to any plumbing, showed it was probably meant to be a kitchen. On the north side of the track to the hut the land dropped away to a lush bog area, the beginnings of a stream that flows into Middle Creek, a tributary of Big River which it joins north of Anglers Rest.

Further along the road was the path to Mt Cope (1837m). Much of the walk was a gentle climb until we reached the base of the rocks at the peak. The late afternoon sunshine enriched the colours of the grasses across the valleys and hills that stretched to the west as far as the eye could see. We had seen the small shrub *Asterolasia trymalioides* (Alpine Starbush) elsewhere but the bush near the start of the track was profuse with its bright yellow flowers. Another small shrub, with a liberal decoration of red berries, was the Mountain Beard-heath, *Leucopogon hookeri*. A pleasing discovery was Bogong Eyebright, *Euphrasia eichleri*, as it is listed as vulnerable under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The flowers of this little plant have pale lilac petals with narrow purple stripes and a splash of yellow at the base of the main petal. Beside the track a large grey grasshopper with grey-green patterning on its body had large back legs on which we could clearly see the herring-bone pattern. Once again little orange butterflies flitted around the golden flowers of Alpine Everlastings. When a couple of moths settled, they weren't orange at all but striped brown and yellow which blended so that they seemed orange when they moved. David S. was able to watch a Flame Robin for some time.

As we climbed higher we could look out in every direction towards the deep blue ranges which faded into ever paler blue as they disappeared in the distance, though in the foreground to the east a mass of white, the remains of the burnt Snow Gums, concealed the hillside. From the top of Mt Cope we could see down into the valley to the north where a line of darker green twisted its way down the slope to an area of bog and pools, and further away still were glimpses of the meandering Cope Creek as it glinted in the sunlight. At the base of the rocks was a lovely garden of wildflowers and short grasses. Adding to their colourful display

were clumps of grass with the base a mound of bright green topped by tall pinkish stems holding up the seed heads. After looking at the photos, Bon and Ollie suggested they could be one of the *Festuca* species. On our way down, a number of skinks, olive-brown with a pale gold stripe down their backs and a brick-red stripe each side, were out on the rocks and in the dust on the path, absorbing the last of the day's warmth. During the drive back to Falls Creek a Richard's Pipit flew across the road and Marlene's sharp eyes spied two Kestrels sitting on top of posts.

Estelle Adams

SEANA GOES TO CAMPERDOWN

The Autumn 2012 SEANA Camp was based at Camperdown over the extended weekend of 16-19 March. The event, ably hosted by the Timboon FNC and attracting about 110 participants, was a great success. The weather was kind, allowing full enjoyment of a range of excursions focussed on the region's volcanic landforms and lakes, with the bonus of a number of wetlands for good birding. Some excursions provided access to sites not normally (or only occasionally) open to the public. An exceptionally convivial atmosphere prevailed at the evening meetings, dinners and talks which were held at the spacious and comfortable Camperdown Golf Club in a delightful setting beside Lake Gnotuk, located in a simple circular volcanic crater.

Evening talks

Friday – Brolgas and Southern Toadlets

Following a welcome to camp by Sue McGuinness, Timboon club president, and Helen Langley, camp coordinator, on Friday evening, two presentations were given.

First up, Stuart McCallum, an Education Officer with Greening Australia, spoke on the subject of Western Victoria's Brolgas. Stuart regularly sees these birds in the Camperdown lakes region. He estimates the population size in central western Victoria to be around 650 birds. Brolgas typically live for 40-70 years. The threats to these birds include habitat loss, power lines, fox predation on chicks and (potentially) the siting of wind farms on flight paths. Climate change manifested in drying out of wetlands makes it easier for foxes to get at Brolga chicks. Stuart noted that there are no local records of Brolga losses to wind turbines, so

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wind farms may constitute one of the less major threats.

The second talk was given by recent honours graduate Yonie Tiljak, who reported on her study of the conservation biology of the Southern Toadlet. This small ground-dwelling species, of snout-to-vent length 30 mm, walks rather than hops. A female lays up to 200 eggs (a relatively small number for frogs) in a male's burrow, and the tadpoles hatch after rain. Yonie noted the severe population decline since the 1970s. Her research into this issue was based on a survey of seventeen breeding sites, at some of which she detected Chytrid Fungus. Chytrid is a major threat to frogs worldwide; it is spread by direct contact between frogs and tadpoles or by contaminated water.

Saturday – Geology of Western Victoria

The Saturday evening speaker was Dermot Henry, Manager – Natural Science Collections at Museum Victoria, who gave an excellent geological overview of the Western Victoria Volcanic Province. There are at least 400 eruption points in this region, including Mt Leura which looms over Camperdown township and Mt Schank, near Mount Gambier at the western extreme of the province.

Dermot explained the process whereby magma entrains lower crustal rocks as it rises to the earth's surface, thereby giving us some understanding of the composition of the lower crust. Victoria has some sites of international significance on this score. Eruptive activity commenced about 4.5 million years ago in the Victorian province. A huge volume, perhaps 1300 cubic kilometres (i.e. 1.3×10^{12} m³), of lava erupted, spreading over about 15000 square kilometres of land area, to an average thickness of around 80 m. Dermot outlined some of the techniques used for the difficult task of estimating the ages of individual volcanic forms. He concluded by describing the different types of volcano found in Victoria. Thus Mt Noorat and Mt Elephant in the Corangamite area are 'scoria cones', the latter being Victoria's largest of this type. Lake Gnotuk, at Camperdown's edge, is a 'maar', a broad, roughly circular, flat-floored volcanic crater with steep inner walls and a low surrounding rim. These form when rising hot magma comes into contact with groundwater contained within sedimentary rocks, superheating it and

creating a huge explosion. Mt Leura is a 'nested maar', formed by further volcanic activity within an original maar. The well-known Tower Hill complex is another example of a nested maar.

Philip Rayment

To be continued next issue.

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 23.4.2012

General Meetings & Excursions

Friday 25 May: Bird Photography – Tips & Techniques – Chris Tzaros

Saturday 26 May: Wirilda Reserve. Meet 10am at carpark and picnic area. (*Water Factory tours not available at weekends*)

Friday 22 June: Lichens – Simone Louwhoff

Saturday 23 June: Uralla Reserve and Lichen Microscope workshop at Trafalgar High School with Simone. Meet Uralla Reserve 10am.

Botany Group: Saturday 2 June: Ferns in the field at Glen Nayook at 10am. Contact: Jackie Tims ☎ 5634 2628 (Wendy is away).

Bird Group: Tuesday 5 June: Edward Hunter Reserve, then later to Moe Wastewater Treatment Works. Meet by 9.30 at EH Reserve, 2nd carpark on the Coalville Rd, Moe. Contact: Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, alixw@spin.net.au

Finance – Balances: Club A/c \$1173.17. Investment A/c \$13,742.35.

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

Sound system – John Sunderland trialled a fixed microphone on stand at the GM. Good sound, but restrictive for speaker. David Stickney will investigate prices for headpiece microphone at Jaycar. Phil will contact supplier of present unit for advice.

LVFNC Web page – John Sunderland has put Naturalist on website and has suggested other additions. David Stickney will discuss future options of Yahoo site versus further development of existing website.

Callignee plant survey - David M will check if we have been paid \$500 and follow up.

Picnic area development at Traralgon South Flora and Fauna Reserve – five club members walked 5 km of track to look at

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plants to highlight for signage. Ken Harris has list and will work with committee on sign development.

LCHS meeting room – can now use room until September. Migrant Resource Centre available for \$30 and LCHS in Morwell has room for \$44, same as currently, but extra \$11 for use of kitchen. Will inspect facilities and report back at next meeting.

Grand Strzelecki Track opening and activities May 5 and 6. Guided walks on both days including return transport.

Change of investment at Bendigo Bank – Motion: That we close our ethical investment account, putting \$12,000 in a term deposit at 5.45% for 6 months with interest to be credited to that account. We will change our club account to a Community Sector Cash Management Account paying approx 2.8% interest. David Mules/Jackie Tims. Passed unanimously.

Heart Morass excursion Sat 8 September organized by WGCMA. Our club invited. Plan to put this excursion and related talk on program for 2013.

Thornells Reserve Botany excursion March 3 – have provided plant list for Friends group and preparing report of excursion for their newsletter.

The FNCV Fungi Group are foraging at Mt Worth May 20, 10.30am.

TRRCR will have a new front entrance sign. Graphic designer Sharon Harrup requested high resolution version of our logo.

Club details for 2012 checked and updated.

Equipment register to be prepared. List item, model & serial numbers, location, initial price and date purchased. David Mules to start list from accounts.

Tom Simpson's bush – BOCA group bird surveys have not been done recently so David M will set a date and let members know.

Radio channels – Alix checked with SES and we can use any channel we like.

Moths of Victoria publications – Ken Harris will be producing the volume on the Lacewings.

Conservation Matters

Hancocks Victoria Plantations Forest Management Certification audit 3 days of site visits 22-25 May.

GUEST SPEAKER FOR JUNE

Simone Louwhoff has studied lichens for 20 years and was employed in that field for some years, both in Australia and the UK. She currently works part time in the Faculty of Science at Monash University, Gippsland and maintains her interest in lichens through leading field trips and workshops and carrying out lichen surveys with members of field naturalist groups. Simone's talk will cover the diversity and ecology of lichens, focussing on the more commonly found groups in Australia and what distinguishes them. She will lead a field trip to Uralla Reserve, Trafalgar on Saturday morning, followed by a microscope workshop in the afternoon, both aimed at learning basic lichen identification skills.

FOR THE DIARY

SEANA Spring Camp in Bendigo area. 17-20 August 2012, hosted by Bendigo FNC. More information available soon.

2012-13 SUBS ARE NOW OVERDUE!