

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

SEANA GOES TO CAMPERDOWN

(Continued from last issue)

Evening Talks (continued)

Sunday – Corangamite Water Skink and other reptile fauna

Garry Peterson, South-Western Victoria Regional Threatened Species Officer at DSE, gave Sunday evening's presentation. The first part related to the Corangamite Water Skink Recovery Program. This skink species was discovered in 1963 near Lismore, which is about 40 km north-east of Camperdown. Its snout-to-vent length is 100 mm, with a tail length up to 150 mm; its body mass is up to 25 g. It is closely related to the Southern Water Skink, but is endemic to the Western Volcanic Plains, although sadly now classified as 'critically endangered' in Victoria. The National Recovery Plan development has involved researching its distribution, abundance and ecology, with a view to ensuring the preservation of the species. It is currently known from 33 sites, mostly with very small areas of suitable habitat. After a short break, Garry presented a well-illustrated overview of the reptile fauna of the SW Volcanic Plains.

A selection of excursions

Saturday – Red Rock and Lake Corangamite

This full-day excursion offered the chance to make an anti-clockwise circuit of Victoria's largest lake. Led by Helen Langley, we first stopped near Pomborneit, south-east of Camperdown, to view a fine example of dry stone walling, a notable feature of the region. The Cock and Hen Wall derives its name from its coping style. We first accessed the fringe of Lake Corangamite near its southern end, spotting masses of Black-winged Stilts in the distant shallows. The birds reported a solitary Banded Stilt amongst them.

From there, we headed north to Red Rock, near



Red Rock Eruption Zone

Alvie, 17 km NW of Colac. Red Rock is one of

the most complex eruption zones in the province and includes maars, tuff rings and scoria cones. The summit lookout provides fine views of these features. Up to 30 interacting eruption points have been mapped here, in an area measuring 4 km by 3 km south of Alvie. Worth a mention also is that, during a brief stop half way up to the summit, we enjoyed the opportunity to look down on three Australian Kestrels (possibly a family) wheeling inside a crater below us.

Lunch was enjoyed in a small park in the heritage village of Beeac, where an excellent outdoor museum celebrates its windmill construction industry in its early years. Well laid-out interpretive panels paint a picture of community life – its schools, churches and commercial premises, etc.

In the afternoon, we continued our circuit of Lake Corangamite, crossing the barrages between it and Lake Martin and driving through Foxhow. Few birds were seen as we travelled from Lake Gnarpurt back to base.

Sunday – Mt Elephant

On a full-day excursion, we headed north from Camperdown, the destination being Mt Elephant, near Derrinalum. This peak is a steep-sided scoria cone rising 240 m above the surrounding volcanic plains with a crater 90 m deep. It was formed about 20,000 years ago. Along with scoria, the cone contains blocks and bombs of solid lava with common megacrysts of granite and olivine.

When the previously privately owned mount became available for purchase in the year 2000, it was bought by the local community in partnership with Trust For Nature. The local committee of management has developed walking trails and is progressively planting indigenous trees and grasses. There are plans for construction of an interpretive centre.

Most of the party took the opportunity to climb to the summit as part of the Crater Rim Walk, which can be comfortably completed in 1.5 hours.

Lunch was enjoyed on the shore of nearby Lake Tooliorook, with views of Mt Elephant across its waters.

Most of the afternoon was spent on an historic private property south of Lake Tooliorook, with both substantial homestead and large barn of bluestone construction. The owner kindly allowed our group access to two dams for birding. Unlike those on the same excursion on the previous day, we failed to see any Brolgas. However the second dam carried many birds, including Eurasian Coot, Hoary-headed and Australasian Grebe, Black Swan and various

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

ducks such as Chestnut Teal, Hardhead and Australasian Shoveler.

Monday morning – Mt Leura and Mt Sugarloaf Reserves

One of the concluding half-day excursions saw us head for the adjacent Mt Leura and Mt Sugarloaf Reserves on the edge of Camperdown. Mt Leura, originally gifted to the community by the Manifold family, is now owned by the Corangamite Shire, whilst the National Trust took possession of the larger Mt Sugarloaf in 1972 following a conservation battle to protect it from further quarrying. The combined area of the two reserves is 50 hectares.



Mt Sugarloaf

Today, a committee for the pair of reserves guides their development, supported by a paid part-time Project Coordinator, who gave us an introduction to the site and accompanied us on a walk from the Mt Leura summit back down to the reserve entrance, passing the base of the Mt Sugarloaf cone. On the way our leader explained that by the middle of last century the two mounts were largely bare of original trees; since 1995, over 35,000 indigenous trees and shrubs have been planted by the local community, most having been grown at a nursery at Camperdown College. I would only add that the interpretive signage through the reserves is excellent, setting a standard one could wish was achieved elsewhere.

Conclusion

Lunch together at South Beach on Lake Bullen Merri afforded the chance to thank our friends of Timboon FNC for hosting a great camp as we bid our farewells.

Philip Rayment



Interpretive Centre at Mt Sugarloaf Reserve

SHADWELL QUARRY AND MAARS

As the Camperdown area was unknown to us, when we chose our excursions at the March SEANA Campout we really did not know what we were selecting but thought that a visit to a quarry would be interesting even though we didn't have the hammer we were told to take. Shadwell Quarry is north of Mortlake and owned by the local council and, when we stopped in the town to meet our guide, we were asked to sign a form accepting responsibility if we were hurt while at the quarry.

The Mt Shadwell area was created between nine thousand and twenty thousand years ago when magma pushed through an older granite layer. Mount Shadwell is the highest of a group of scoria cones surrounded by lava flows. There is no distinct crater as the scoria mounds overlap, creating several shallow crater-like depressions. The scoria is quarried to provide a basis for roads, drains, etc, and is mixed with limestone for use as soil. The scoria is coarse in texture and both red and black, and contains numerous basalt blocks and smallish "bombs"; the latter are mainly oval in shape and contain the olivine crystals which were the reason for our visit to the quarry--so the lumps of crystals are surrounded by basalt. Olivine is a magnesium-iron silicate that forms in metamorphic rocks. It is green or yellow in colour, hence its name, and when the crystals are large enough to be shaped into gemstones it is known as peridot. A box containing several small cut gemstones with a value of about \$4000, and found by our guide, was passed around for us to see. We were told that, in the past, the main source of peridot was from USA where the quarry is situated on a Reservation owned by the indigenous people. Sales of peridot were their main source of income until they opened a casino. That quarry is now closed and off-limits to outsiders.

The height of the wall of the quarry showed the depth of the layers formed by the volcanic action and a long pile of limestone to one side was ready for use. The bombs and

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

scoria rocks were in a large pile and a huge scoop had pushed some down to make them easier for us to access. Some Field Nats were assiduous in hunting for gemstone size olivine, some hunted for bombs just for the fun of hammering them open to discover what was inside, some grandparents were looking for lumps of olivine to take home for grandchildren, one person was gathering bombs to take home to put in a pile in her garden, and some people simply gathered interesting rocks for their collection or scoria rocks for their gardens.

After lunch we visited several maars, shallow salt lakes formed by volcanic action. The area has underlying old granite which was covered by water. As the hot molten lava came up through the water between nine thousand and twenty thousand years ago, "the water turned to steam and it all went boom! And that was that". These flat-floored craters have steep inner walls and a low surrounding rim built of fragments of rock materials blown out of the crater during eruptions. The first maar we visited was cut by the road and we stopped between the two sections for bird-watching. A raft of pelicans floated on the far side of the southern part. Even through the telescopes that were set up it was difficult to identify species of birds because of their distance from us, especially those that were in the several flocks where the birds were crowded together, but of interest were both Banded and Black-winged Stilts with their long pink legs, Red-necked Stints and a tiny Red-capped Plover paddling in the distant shallows.

A dry maar we drove past was covered with mounds of salt glistening in the sunshine. The third lake, Lake Keilambete, is surrounded by farmland. Its water is two and a half times saltier than the sea and comes only from rainfall and run-off from the surrounding rim and its level has dropped six feet during the past few years because of the drought. There are no streams entering or leaving it and all water loss is by evaporation. The bed of the lake has a layer of limestone and it is thought that this area was once under the sea. The rocks around the edge of the lake are rather unusual as they are in quite thin layers which crackled and cracked beneath our feet as we walked on them. Our leader did not know how they were formed but one of the group suggested that they were formed by the continual wash

of the waves leaving behind a film of limestone which gradually built up into layers as the water evaporated and, from the look of them, that could be so. Dark grey volcanic material had built up at the far end of the quarry and its layers were exposed by weathering, or possibly some quarrying. In the steep rim beside the maar, the old trunk of a tree which had been hidden beneath a depth of soil has reappeared because of the erosion of the bank. The only two birds there looked rather lonely: a Silver Gull floating about overhead and an Australian Shelduck.

The Camperdown area is renowned for its dry stone walls and we were taken to a viewing platform that overlooks a section of those. To keep the skill of wall-building alive, the old stone-wallers trained a group of locals in the art, including our leader, Ian. It is expensive to have someone build the walls but it does add to the value of the property as they are good fire-breaks. Some walls, called consumption dykes, were originally erected to use up the large numbers of rocks that littered the properties, while others were a protection from rabbits. The various types of walls have differing styles of construction. Those which are only one stone in width are called Galloway Dykes; to achieve a stable Galloway Dyke is a highly skilled operation. A Cock and Hen wall has pointed coping stones protruding at intervals above the others along the top of the wall.

We might not have known what we were choosing when we selected that excursion but were glad we did as it was a most interesting and instructive day.

Our last place of call was Mt. Noorat, a fairly steep volcanic cone with a deep crater on the outskirts of the Noorat township. This perfect crater is 400 metres wide and 159 metres deep. It is one of the best preserved volcanoes in Victoria and the signboard said it was of international importance. In the past it was an important meeting place for the traditional owners and other groups who came from the coast to trade. From it we looked out onto fairly flat farmland though other stony rises could be seen in the surrounding area.

On Monday we went to Mt. Mumblin which we chose because of its unusual name. It was a crater lake tucked into the surrounding farmland. Of particular interest

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

there was the considerable depth of peat tucked around its edges. It was difficult to climb down to the water's edge and the peat was dry and crumbly so an unwary step had a leg disappearing up to the knee. This was a bird-watching day and all the other lakes we visited were maars, but it was interesting to hear information about the local area which could only be told by a person who lived there, as our leader Helen does. A number of vehicles were left behind when we were held up while turning onto a road and we wandered around the countryside until those of us who were lost used our RACV maps to find our way to the largest maar we visited, Lake Elingamite. A noteworthy bird there amongst all the other water birds was a lonely Magpie Goose which, through the telescope, could be seen hiding in the reeds, turning its head in all directions, probably seeking the support of some companions.

Estelle Adams

KANGAROO ISLAND NATURALLY

We were fortunate to have club member Phil Rayment as our 'guest' speaker at our April meeting and considering he only had short notice he gave a remarkably well structured and knowledgeable presentation on Kangaroo Island. His talk was entitled Kangaroo Island Naturally but he not only covered a very broad range of natural history topics but also provided a historical perspective and included many scenic landscape photographs of the island.

We learnt that the island was first sighted by white people by Matthew Flinders in March 1802 and was then named Kangaroo Island. He was followed soon after by Nicolas Baudin who mapped much of the south and west coastline. Although the island was uninhabited at that time there is evidence that aborigines were living on the island as recently as 2000 years ago. The first formal settlement was not established until 1836 near present-day Kingscote by the South Australian Company.

It surprised many of us to learn that Kangaroo Island is the third largest island in Australia following Tasmania and Melville Island. It is 155 km long (east - west) and up to 55 km wide (north - south) and we were all pleased to discover that over half the island is made up of native bush. There is quite a large number of conservation

reserves on the island (18) and one national park, Flinders Chase NP, which covers 34,000 ha in the SW corner of the island.

The island is geologically interesting because of its complexity. Most of the island is made up of Cambrian sandstone but there are other sedimentary rocks including shales and many metamorphic rocks including schists. There are also many granite outcrops on the island and perhaps the best known is the Remarkable Rocks with weird weathering shapes. We were also shown some photographs of the Kelly Hill limestone cave system with many stalagmites and stalactites, so the island must have been under sea for part of its geological history. There are also some good examples of glacial scouring particularly at Christmas Cove, near Penneshaw.

Kangaroo Island was only separated from the mainland 10,000 years ago so it was surprising to hear that there is a large number of endemic plants on the island. Out of 891 species of native plants 46 are endemic to Kangaroo Island. Phil showed us a good selection of the endemic plants on the island taken from a reference book, Kangaroo Island's Native Plants by Ivan Holliday and Bev and Dean Overton. A large proportion of these plants (400) are found in Flinders Chase NP. There are also over 60 species of orchids and 19 species of eucalypts, the most common being the mallees.

There are numbers of drooping sheoaks which sustain an important sub species of Glossy Black Cockatoos. This subspecies has been classified as rare and endangered and feeds exclusively on the seeds of this tree which is only found along the coast of Kangaroo Island. The island hosts quite a good variety of birds with 267 recorded species. Other birds of interest include the Little Penguin, Bush Stone-curlew and Cape Barren Geese. The latter is an introduced species and present in quite large numbers. Good birding areas include Murray Lagoon, to the south, and Duck Lagoon, near Cygnet River.

It was encouraging to hear that the island is free of foxes and rabbits – two of Australia's worst pest mammal species. This may account for the survival of many of Kangaroo Island's native mammal species including the southern brown bandicoot and possums. Some other species of interest is

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

the Kangaroo Island kangaroo which is a subspecies of the western grey kangaroo but is smaller and darker than the mainland species and has longer fur. The Tamar Wallaby is now extinct in the rest of SE Australia but is abundant on Kangaroo Island.

Perhaps Kangaroo Island is best known for its large population of Australian Sea-lions which is among the three largest breeding colonies in Australia. There are also numbers of New Zealand Fur-seals along the south coast which are a different species than the Australian Fur-seal, mostly found in Victoria. We were also shown pictures of the Heath Goanna which is thought by some to be the reason why there are no rabbits on the island, despite their introduction at one point.

Many of us have been to Kangaroo Island and Phil's talk has brought back many pleasant memories to us. Many of us have our own experiences of Kangaroo Island but Phil's knowledge of the island provided us with a better understanding of the significance and importance of the island to the natural history of South Australia.

David Stickney

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 21.5.2012

General Meetings & Excursions

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.

Friday 27 July: Winter Members' Night – open theme

Saturday 28 July: Crinigan Rd Bushland Reserve, Morwell. Meet 10am.

Botany Group: Saturday 30 June: Eucalypts – terminology and identification. Meet 10am at Jack and Marja's, 129 Briggs Rd, Nilma North. Contact: Jackie Tims ☎ 5634 2628 (Wendy is away).

Bird Group: Tuesday 3 July: Lyrebird Walk and Baths Rd, Mirboo Nth. Meet by 9.30 at Lyrebird Walk. Contact: Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, alixw@spin.net.au

Finance – Balances: Club A/c (now Cash Mgt Trading A/c) \$1538.77. Investment A/c

now Term Deposit) \$12,000.00.

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

Sound system – David S provided a quote for a headset with throat microphone DC1039 \$22.95. Phil will get serial number from speaker system and talk to Jaycar.

LVFNC Web page – David S yet to talk to John Sunderland, but doing some research into social media sites.

Callignee plant survey - \$500 has been received.

LCHS meeting room in Morwell will seat a maximum 50 people. Cost is \$44 plus \$12 for use of kitchen. Phil suggested Migrant Resource Centre, Morwell and Alix suggested Uniting Church Hall, Newborough. Further action next meeting.

Equipment Register – David M has prepared a list of existing equipment. Phil suggested that maps owned by the club be included. One of the donated spotlights is faulty. List process will be ongoing.

Club logo for TRRCR new front entrance sign - Sharon Harrup sent us a copy of how the black and white logo would look. It was decided at meeting to use a copy of the coloured painting which Ken Smith will prepare and to run the club's name as two lines rather than the one line shown in the example.

Another successful Habitat Program was conducted for Year 3 students from the Morwell Primary School on 8 May in the Crinigan Rd Bushland Reserve. The next program will be probably in July. Anyone interested in helping contact Ken Smith. (All offers welcome).

Some club members have been involved with the relocation of purple Diuris from the non-monitored sites on the Longford Rd to the Darriman Grasslands.

David M has sent out reminders to members whose subscriptions are overdue.

Ken Harris reported on a very successful opening of the Grand Strzelecki Track. About 200 people attended over the two days of activities and walks.

Conservation Matters

Rainforest Alliance members will attend the Hancocks Victoria Plantations Forest Management Certification audit on 25 May. John Poppins will also go along and Phil

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

will attend the initial briefing.

NO GUEST SPEAKER FOR JULY – WINTER MEMBERS' NIGHT.

A chance for club members to have a say on something of interest in the world of natural history.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Christine Cattanach from Newborough, Meryl Cracknell from Warragul, Iris McAlpine and Mark Wackett, both from Moe. We wish them a long and happy association with the LVFNC.

FOR THE DIARY

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

Club dates for August

Please note the variation from the normal dates. The General Meeting will be held on the 5th Friday, not the 4th, and the excursion will be held on Saturday 1 September.

LVFNC Spring Camp at The Gurdies.
5-7 October 2012.

UNUSUAL VISITORS TO OUR DAM

There is a small dam in the paddock next to our garden. It is a fairly nondescript dam with no vegetation round it and precariously built into the side of a steep bank. It does however attract a number of ducks including wood ducks, black ducks and chestnut teal and there is the occasional white-faced heron.

I can see the dam clearly from our back veranda and this morning I saw two species that I hadn't seen before. The first was a great egret. Great egrets are solitary birds and usually seen alone but recently there has been an influx of these birds in the Valley. There were four at the Morwell River wetlands and two at Brodribb Road wetland during my recent visits.

The second bird was a white-necked heron which is an occasional visitor to the Valley but this was the first one I had seen in our area this season. The white-necked heron was moving around the dam in an anticlockwise direction and the great egret in a clockwise direction. The next thing I noticed was a second white-necked heron

flying in and immediately the first white-necked heron took off as if to see the second white-necked heron off. Instead they circled around the dam a couple of times to get some elevation and then slowly took off into the distance with their slow plodding wing beats.

Both birds breed in south-east Australia mostly along the Murray Darling basins but the white-necked heron did breed in the Morwell River wetlands in one season recently. The movements of both birds can be described as dispersive but also irruptive following wet seasons in central Australia which is probably what we are experiencing now.

The next question I asked was why these birds were here in this small dam. I believed that egrets and herons mostly eat fish but to my knowledge there were no fish in this dam. The answer was probably frogs. According to HANZAZ great egrets mostly eat fish but also eat frogs and white-necked heron eat mostly small aquatic animals. I have recorded at least five species of frogs from this dam including common froglet, common tree frog, striped marsh frog, spotted marsh frog and eastern banjo frog (pobblebonk). These frogs are not often seen but present a spectacular chorus of calls at night. I suspect this chorus will be more limited following our unusual visitors from now on.

David Stickney