

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

SALE WETLANDS

As we gathered beside Lake Guthridge a squad of Eurasian Coots squatted on the south-east bank and a Darter hung itself out to dry on the northern shore. The latter stayed there even when a family began throwing bread to the Pacific Gulls, but it became too much for it when the Coots decided to join the feeding frenzy; it dived in, its snake-like head reappearing far out in the lake. Some of the Coots flew part way and swam the rest of the distance, with the others passing them as they raced across the surface of the lake with wings outspread, barely ruffling the water as the flattened lobes on their toes acted like paddles and gave them momentum. Another bird seen was a Noisy Miner.

In the car park at Lake Guyatt blue-tailed Fairy Wrens hopped tamely about the car, evidently also knowing that humans can be a source of food. Yellow Thornbills flitted through the foliage of a eucalypt and we continued to see them all morning. On the platform on the water a Chestnut Teal and Pacific Black Duck perched beside a stately Pelican which pointed its beak towards the skies. A Reed Warbler could be heard and a Great Egret was seen on the other lake. Back down the road Australian Magpies were warbling while a cacophony of raucous calls came from Purple Swamp Hens. From high up, a young Nankeen Night Heron observed the world but eventually turned its frowning gaze on the group of people clustered below the tree. A Striated Thornbill darted about in the lower branches. Growing beneath the trees, the caps of the brown form of the yellow stainer fungus, *Agaricus xanthodermus*, had begun to split into a crazed pattern.

One of the deciduous trees was beginning to break into bud, but the growth of crustose and foliose lichens coating its branches made it look more like a 'lichen-tree'. A female or young male Satin Bower Bird was active on the ground while up above Brown Thornbills, identified by their call, spread their wings and conversed with each other as they perched on the branches. We could hear a Spotted Pardalote. Down in Flooding Creek a busy Brown Thornbill, hunting among the brown leaves, made the most of the coverage provided by a shrub toppled in the water. Two adult Black Swans and five cygnets, almost fully grown, fossicked

amongst the reeds. Two alien geese preened their feathers on the further bank. The Tree-violet, *Hymenantha dentata*, was a mass of creamy-yellow flowers, with their turned-back petals forming tiny bells. A New Holland Honeyeater called.

As we returned to Lake Guyatt, a Little Black Cormorant flew across to Lake Guthridge. Both an Australian White Ibis and a Straw-necked Ibis stabbed hopefully at the ground, while an Australian Wood Duck and a Chestnut Teal had settled on the island. Along the eastern shore of the lake a Reed Warbler that had been whistling amongst the reeds took flight close to the water's surface and disappeared into Melaleuca shrubs. Other birds seen in that area were a Little Raven, a Little Wattlebird and a Grey Butcherbird as a Whistling Kite soared overhead. Amongst the bright red flowers of a mistletoe growing on a eucalypt was a ladybird, its yellow jacket patterned with zig-zag black lines and glinting in the sunshine.

Beyond the lake, to the south, the lower areas of the paddocks were flooded and larger numbers of birds had gathered on and around them. Amongst them were a White-faced Heron, Hoary-headed Grebes, the smaller Australasian Grebes, Grey Teals which were identified by their pale throats, and Hardheads. On the far bank were Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Masked Lapwings and a couple of hares bobbing about. Welcome Swallows snatched at insects above the water as a Yellow-billed Spoonbill flew off into the distance and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos screeched in the background. A pleasurable time was spent observing and identifying the various species, with there being much discussion before some species, especially the Grey Teals, were finally identified.

As we returned to the car park for lunch, we passed the *Acacia decussens* shrubs (a NSW species) with their masses of bright golden fluff-balls, and another acacia over-infested with mistletoe. Sparrows were at the Powder Magazine and, on the western side of a large pool, Red Wattlebirds and Rainbow Lorikeets looked for a feed amongst the red flowers of a *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*. The largest bird we saw all day, a noisy Silver Helicopter, flew overhead. A chorus of Australian Magpies serenaded us at lunch-time while three other hopeful ones ventured

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

closer looking for a free feed, until an Australian White Ibis chased them away. It continued to patrol the area but was generally ignored by a multitude of Fairy Wrens. A Crimson Rosella watched on from the trees and a pair of Ravens flew past with beaks full of what looked like food. An Australasian Coot swam across the water with its beak stuffed with bread. Before it reached its comrades, it stopped, dipped the bread in the water then tossed it up in its beak and swallowed it. Through binoculars a pair of Sea Eagles could be seen riding the thermals.

After Lunch

At Sale Common we parked close to the eastern end of the boardwalk and from there watched Tree Martins dashing in and out of a tall Red Gum which grows beside the deep drain on the northern side of the road. They are distinguishable from the Fairy Martins, which we saw over the water a little later, by their slightly larger size and blue-black crowns instead of the rufous red of the Fairy Martins. Other birds we saw in that area were the White-eared Honeyeater and a Grey Fantail, a Whistling Kite and a Black-shouldered Kite and we heard the call of a Crimson Rosella. Along the Flooding Creek Track an ancient River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), with a huge trunk and branches, leaned steeply towards the east, its angle copied by the drunken lean of the nearby bird hide which had been undermined during the June floods. Other reminders of the floods were the piles of debris and mud amongst the water weeds. A sheet of fern-like pink, the Pacific Azolla *A. ficuloides*, along with some Duckweed, covered much of the surface of the water.

Near the start of the boardwalk a White-plumed Honeyeater was busy in a tree, while a Little Grassbird was seen down amongst the tussocky grass and, for some time, we watched a Masked Lapwing assault a Sea Eagle circling overhead. The Common Froglet *Crinia signifera* sounded its ratchet in the reeds. Reed Warblers warbled from the reeds and gave us occasional glimpses of them. A Pelican flew in to sail majestically across the water and a Darter kept disappearing beneath it as it went fishing. A mound of sticks on a reed island was a deserted swan's nest. Apart from a few tufts of weed on the handrail and some patches of mud on the boards, there was little evidence

of the flood along the boardwalk until we reached the far end of it and saw the broken and tangled reeds and the layer of mud on the wooden seat. Across the water a busy Egret could be seen but, because of the distance, it was difficult to determine which species it was; after some discussion it was decided it was probably an Intermediate Egret. We listened to a variety of bird calls: trills, two different whistles, chimes and a chuck-chuck before a Grey Shrike-thrush flew in to the trees near us to confirm the identity of the songster.

After we left Sale our excursion was not quite finished as travelling west along the highway we stopped at the edge of the road to observe two pairs of birds some distance away in the paddock. One pair were Magpie Larks but the more distant pair were Banded Lapwings, which are much smaller than Masked Lapwings. They had been spotted that morning by some of our Birdos as they drove towards Sale. As I watched these little birds running across the grass, I was amazed that anybody driving along on the far side of the road could have seen them, let alone realised that these birds were something unusual and I marvelled again at the skills of some of our club members.

As I had not nominated to write up this excursion I was not prepared or equipped for it. So, many thanks to everyone who helped me: to Ron who supplied the notepaper and pen and all those who patiently answered my questions, pointed out things and supplied the names of plants and birds. I could not have done it without all your help.

Estelle Adams.

A GEM AT THORPDALE

The July botany excursion to a property at Thorpdale was a very pleasant surprise. Driving along the main road through the Thorpdale area one sees potato crops, large dams and cypress hedges – a much cultivated landscape, and although there are some huge eucalypts along the roadside there is very little of the original vegetation to be seen. At the end of Dingley Dell road is Cornwall's property where 100 acres of bush has been preserved. Here we were able to walk through the bush that would have covered the area before it was cleared.

Our guide was Murray Cornwall, whose

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

parents and brother run the farm. After walking some distance down the hill through paddocks we entered a wet forest and walked along above the creek. Beneath the huge Mountain Ash trees was a fern gully with tree ferns and plenty of ground ferns. Kangaroo fern covered damp trunks and *Fieldia* grew up tree ferns, some with large creamy bell flowers. Four *blechnums* and two *aspleniums* were found. It was no surprise to find Blanket-leaf, Muttonwood, Austral Mulberry, Christmas Bush and Musk Daisy-bush here. All the dogwoods we saw were *Cassinia trinerva*.

The property owners knew of three lyrebird nests along the creek, and we were shown one built just above the creek on a steep bank. Probably this would be a place safe from foxes. Old bottles lay in the bush below the site of an earlier house and Balm of Gilead grew wild here. Our progress was slow as we were recording the plants and there were plenty to see. The terrain was fairly difficult for walking as well, with some steep sections and fallen tree debris to negotiate.

We emerged from the bush to lunch in a grassy paddock in the sun. Bruce and Estelle thought it wise to return through the paddocks after our strenuous bush bash. Next we headed into another area of bush that produced new plants such as Mountain Grey gum, *Melaleuca squarrosa*, *Gahnia seberiana* and *Pterostylis nutans*. We did a big loop along a track at the back of the farm and entered drier forest dominated by Messmate and Peppermint. This bush adjoins the Mirboo North Forest, and Murray told us that his father was able to drive his tractor through the bush to Mirboo North in the same time that his mother took to drive there right around the road.

Pink flowering *Epacris impressa*. Broom spurge, *Acacia mucronata*, *A. verticillata* and Burgan grew along the track. Murray took us up a side track to show us a huge grey gum with a permanent pool inside its base. He had photographed tiny orchids growing up its trunk, and these were later identified as *Caladenias*. It was a long walk and when we came out of the bush to walk back up the hill to the house not everyone felt up to another detour along the creek to see another lyrebird's nest. Those who did were well rewarded, as not only did we see the hen on the nest, but a little chick in there as well.

Growing up on our farm at Gembrook I had seen plenty of lyrebirds, and some nests, but never had I seen birds in the nest. I thought that was pretty special.

Wendy Savage

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 27.8.2012

General Meetings & Excursions

Friday 28 September: Migratory Waders in Corner Inlet – Susan Taylor

Saturday 29 September: Yinnar South Flora & Golden Gully. Meet 10am at ARC building beside park in Yinnar.

Friday 26 October: Biodiversity Management at Dutson Downs – Deb Archer

Saturday 27 October: Dutson Downs excursion. Meet 10am at Longford or carpool Mexican Restaurant Traralgon 9.15.

Botany Group: Saturday 13 October (Spring Camp is on previous weekend): Mt Cannibal. Meet 10am at Mt Cannibal Flora & Fauna Reserve. Turn north off Princes Hwy at the Garfield Nth Road and travel 2.5km to the Reserve. Contact: Wendy Savage ☎ 5634 2246

Bird Group: Tuesday 2 October: Uralla and Trafalgar ponds. Meet at Uralla by 9.30. Thur Oct 11 TRU Wetlands. **If intending to go please contact Alix in advance.** Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, alixw@spin.net.au

Finance – Balances: Cash Mgt Trading A/c \$4112.58. Club A/c closed 23.7.12. Term Deposit \$12,000.00.

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

Sound system – present system is satisfactory if speakers placed behind person talking.

LVFNC Web page – David S attended presentation on using social media for organizations.

Meeting room for general meeting – start at Uniting Church Hall Newborough in October. Will inspect premises at program planning meeting as building is close to Lorna's house.

Program Planning Meeting Wednesday 19 September at Lorna Long's.

SEANA camp and meeting – 19 members

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

attended. SEANA fund spending discussed. Camps up to 2015 organized except one. One third of bus costs used for camp excursions will be subsidised by SEANA.

Spring Camp to the Gurdies 5-7 October – have booked accommodation at Grantville Lodge at cost of \$34.10/person/night. Paid \$500 deposit. Jenny Rejske and Terri Allen have drafted a program and can lead the excursions. Will charge \$70 for 2 nights. List at GM.

Edward Hunter Reserve plant list – Bruce King has requested we update this.

Summer Camp at Dargo 18-21 January 2013 – Dargo River Inn has cabins for \$50/person/night, linen and towels supplied. Cabins have kitchens and lounge. Meals available at licensed restaurant (pay individually).

Kevin Jones is retiring on 31 August. Replacement is Melissa Shankey(?). Will send best wishes and appreciation of the work he has done.

Conservation Matters

Horseshoe Bend update from DSE – Sent comments after request for response. Concern expressed about money spent on tourist facilities rather than environmental improvements.

GUEST SPEAKER FOR OCTOBER

Deb Archer works for Gippsland Water as an Environmental Scientist. She manages their biodiversity programs and works with the assets group in planning and delivery stages on environmental projects. She obtained a PhD in restoration ecology research on captive breeding programs in South Africa, and has previously worked at Monash University, the Arthur Rylah Institute and the Department of Primary Industry.

FOR THE DIARY

Club Spring Camp at The Gurdies

Friday 5 to Sunday 7 October at Grantville Lodge, 200 Grantville-Glen Alvie Rd, Grantville.

www.uccamping.org.au/grantville

Phone 5678 8370

Cost: \$70 pp for 2 nights

Catering: Self-catered so BYO food and bedding. There is a dining hall to prepare food and eat.

Accommodation: cabins with bunks and ensuite facilities. Possibility of roast dinner for \$15 on Saturday evening if we have 20 people.

More information: contact Wendy.

Springsure Hill Landcare Group Walk in the Bush Saturday 10 November.

The club has been invited to join this activity at Sweetwater Creek Track, which is off Beards Track, Shady Creek – 2.6km up Beards Track from Old Sale Rd. Meet at 10am for a 10.15 start, finishing with a BBQ lunch at 12.30 supplied by the Landcare group.

Rob & Caroline Gully 0413 347 665

Bird Challenge Saturday 1 December

More about this later.

Club Summer Camp Friday 18 to Monday 21 January 2013 at Dargo

Accommodation: Dargo River Inn has cabins with kitchen and lounge. Linen and towels supplied. Meals are available at the licensed restaurant (pay individually). More information later.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This is a short issue this month due to lack of material coupled with a three week holiday immediately prior to production. My apologies.

DAYLIGHT SAVING STARTS 7 OCT