

# Latrobe Valley Naturalist

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## SPRING CAMP 2012

This year our Spring camp was held in the south-eastern coastal area of Westernport around Corinella, Grantville and the Gurdies. We stayed at the Grantville Uniting Church camp which is set in the bush a couple of kilometres back from the coast. There were 22 of us staying at the camp, and our excursions were organised and led by Terri Allen and Jenny Rejske who showed us around 'their area'. Their local knowledge of the history, plants and birds made the excursions and the information they could impart particularly interesting.

### Saturday morning

We met at Corinella and Terri Allen started us off with the history of the very significant area we were visiting called Settlement Point, which is the name of the cliff top lookout to which we later walked.

Governor Darling established the settlement (1826-1828) to foil a French attempt to claim Western Port. England and France seemed to be constantly at war, explorer D'Urville was interested in Western Port, so the French interest had to be foiled. Apart from inhibiting the French, the purpose was to explore the countryside and report on its qualities. At first Fort Dumaresque was the site (Rhyll), but an insecure water supply caused the move to Corinella.

Using convict labour, bricks were made and a small township sprang up. William Hovell, with three convicts, set off south, locating Flinders' Shallow Lagoon (Andersons Inlet), Wright River (Powlett) and good quality coal (Harmers Haven).

When the French threat no longer existed and the settlement became too expensive to maintain, Settlement Point was abandoned; one bull, six cows and calves, three boars and twenty pigs were set free. The pigs disappeared, but the cows multiplied, crossed the Bass and Powlett rivers and gave the name Wild Cattle Run to the first station which encompassed the Wonthaggi area.

It was to Settlement Point that Strzelecki and his party made when he crossed Gippsland a few years later.

Our excursion to the Corinella foreshore was led by local palaeontologist and poet Mike Cleeland. Mike has the distinction of having had a large early cretaceous fossil, which he found in the Wonthaggi area, named after him. *Koolasuchus cleelandi* were amphibians which existed about 120 million years ago in the rift valleys of southern Australia until they were displaced by crocodiles.

After a brief discussion on the features of igneous rocks and crystal formation we walked from the Corinella pier across the foreshore to the cliffed headland of Settlement Point. This is one of the major exposures of deeply weathered volcanic rocks in Victoria where the lava (basalt) and tuff (consolidated volcanic ash) are weathered to red and yellow basaltic clays. The cliffs themselves, at up to 15 metres, are some of the highest on the mainland coast of Westernport Bay. Their exposed strata indicated several successive eruptions (we counted at least four) with a considerable time elapsing between eruptions.



Photo: Phil Rayment

Fronting the cliffs is a shore platform tessellated with low columnar polygons. An interesting feature of this jointing pattern was the weathering of the outer material of the column to leave a "footstone" of harder parent material in its centre. This process no doubt gave rise to the many cricket ball sized basalt pebbles lying around on the platform at the base of the cliff. There were also signs of a linear fissure eruption where the lava had risen through a fault in the strata. Some of the rock layers were on edge indicating a monocline had formed over a fault line. Atop the volcanics were Haunted Hill

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gravels which stretch from Central Gippsland to the coast.

Further to the west of the jetty was a low cliff which showed horizons containing shells. It is thought that this was prior beach built when the sea level was one to two metres higher than at present during the Holocene period; the most recent geological epoch, going back about 11,000 years.

Not all the participants were always concentrating on the geology, and often the group would be spread along the beach like 'Brown's cows' looking at plants, birds and sea life.

Terri pointed out a slightly different *Myoporum* to the Common Boobialla *Myoporum insulare*. This was Sticky Boobialla, *M. viscosum*. Its leaves were shorter and broader, and the petals of the flowers were noticeably more pointed at the tips. The 'Flora' now has it classified as *M. sp 1*.

Along the base of the cliffs were growing Seablite (*Sueda australis*), Sea Box (*Alyxia buxifolia*) and both pig face or Karkalla (*Carpobrotus rossii*) and Rounded Noon Flower (*Disphyma crassifolium*). On the shore were Beaded Glasswort and an old Shrubby Glasswort with a thick twisted trunk lay on the rocks. Some large mangroves grew in the tidal zone.



Photo: Phil Rayment

A large sand island covered in grass had developed off shore with recent changes in erosion and deposition, and it was a haven for water birds. Some of the birds noted were Eastern Curlew, Australian Pied Oystercatchers, half a dozen or more White-

headed Herons and some Royal Spoonbills. A Great Egret was feeding along the tide line and a pair of Australian Shelduck flew past.

After an interesting two hours of exploration we headed to the shelter for a welcome 'cuppa', which was followed by another walk before lunch.

This was along part of a narrow 7 kilometre reserve of remnant coastal vegetation, stretching from the east end of Corinella to Coronet Bay, which is managed by a DSE appointed committee. We walked to the lookout on the top of the cliffs, above the point on the beach to which we had walked on our geology excursion. Jenny Rejske is a member of this committee and she was able to show us the amazing revegetation that has been achieved. A previously bare grazed area including a sports oval and tennis courts is now covered in a thick sward of kangaroo grass and other native grasses and herbs. The kangaroo grass was most attractive in full flower. The top of the cliffs are covered in trees and shrubs: Drooping Sheoak, Sweet Bursaria, Tree Violet and Acacia paradoxa to name a few. An interesting small plant that was spotted was Sweet Hound's Tongue (*Cynoglossum sueveolens*) which has fragrant white forget-me-not flowers above a basal rosette of light green leaves. Whilst at the lookout, David Mules pointed out a Crimson-Eastern Rosella hybrid perched nearby.

By the time we returned to the shelter for our lunch the predicted rain had arrived. It drove in against the backs of those unfortunate enough to be seated on the windward side, and as it showed no sign of abating we decided to return to camp to warm up and see if it would clear for our afternoon excursions.

Wendy & Ken Savage

*Hopefully there will be reports of more of the weekend in future issues.*

## COUNTING WADERS IN CORNER INLET

Talk by Susan Taylor, Senior Flora and Fauna Officer, DSE, based at Yarram Office, 28 September, 2012

### Why is Corner Inlet good habit for waders (also known as shorebirds)?

Susan explained that Corner Inlet includes all inland waters from the Yanakie isthmus to the start of the 90-mile beach near Woodside. The Inlet is a drowned river valley – the waters having flooded the estuaries of rivers as the sea level rose over time. Corner Inlet is relatively shallow and has a tidal range of just over two metres. Illustrating the geography with an aerial photograph taken at high tide, Susan pointed out Bass Strait, the string of barrier islands, the entrances, Wilson's promontory and the Strzeleckis. The Inlet is so shallow that at low tide about 75% of the area is uncovered, revealing a huge expanse of sandy and muddy flats which are excellent feeding grounds for waders. Susan pointed out the large sand spits where the waders roost at high tide. The birds' lives are controlled by the tides. Both counting and catching of waders is carried out at high tide when the birds congregate on the sand spits.

Corner Inlet is among the top three most important sites in Australia for waders. It is the most important breeding site in Australia for Pied Oystercatchers, a species that breeds locally. However, the great majority of the waders are migratory species that breed in the Arctic regions and 'overwinter' here during our warmer months. Corner Inlet is a Ramsar Wetland - Australia has entered international agreements to conserve the wetland habitat. Also, Corner Inlet is included in the East Asian – Australasian Site Network - the countries in the Site Network work co-operatively to conserve habitat of the waders in the East Asian – Australasian flyway.

Susan explained that the work of the *Victorian Wader Study Group* in placing metal bands and coloured plastic flags on waders in Corner Inlet has contributed to the

building up of information about the routes taken by waders during their migration. Colour coding of leg flags allows bird-watchers throughout the flyway to identify the locality where a bird was 'flagged' and report this to a central database. Susan showed photos of waders carrying coloured flags and explained that, for example, orange indicates Victoria, yellow indicates North-western Australia, white over black indicates China and white over blue, Korea.

### Counting waders in Corner Inlet – What are the results?

Counting of waders in Australia began in 1981 and is carried out at approximately 700 sites in June (for migratory waders this includes the non-breeding population only) and January or February (the total population). Records are kept for twenty-seven wader species (20 migratory waders and 7 resident species). Currently, counting is managed by *Birdlife Australia* under the *Shorebirds 2020 program*.

Susan showed us data and graphs from an article recently published in *Stilt\**. The total number of waders in Corner Inlet (summer counts) has fallen from 35,000/40,000 to just under 30,000 over the 30 years from 1982 to 2009. This represents a 23% decline. Fourteen species of migratory waders and two resident species chosen for further analysis by the authors of the article.

The resident species examined in detail, Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, show no decline. Although populations fluctuate from year to year, ten species of migratory waders show evidence of a sudden drop in population in the early- to mid-1990s. These are Curlew Sandpiper, Great Knot, Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey Plover, Eastern Curlew, Common Greenshank, Greater Sand Plover, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Lesser Sand Plover. Susan illustrated this with two species, Red Knot and Curlew Sandpiper, showing photographs of the birds and the population graphs. The Red Knot population plummeted in 1993/94 and appears to have declined further in 2009. The Curlew Sandpiper population plummeted in 1995 and also appears to have declined further in 2009.

## What do the species that show most decline have in common?

It appears that the problem is not in Corner Inlet. It has been found that the species showing the greatest decline are those that rely most heavily on the mud-flats and sand-flats of the Yellow Sea feeding grounds on both their northern and southern migrations. On the northern migration the Yellow Sea is the last staging site before reaching the Arctic breeding grounds. Industrialisation had led to the 'reclamation' of extensive areas of the intertidal flats in the Yellow Sea over recent years, reducing the habitat of the waders. For example, South Korea completed a huge project by closing the final sections of a sea wall at Saemangeum in 2006. Counts of Great Knot, a species that relied heavily on that part of the Yellow Sea, fell by 65,000. Red Knot and Great Knot are very particular about which area, and which food, the need. The paths of the overwintering populations of Great Knot from North-western Australia, Queensland and Southern Australia all converge at the Yellow Sea. Similarly, the paths of Red Knot from New Zealand, South-eastern Australia and North-western Australia also converge at the Yellow Sea.

Bar-tailed Godwit and Red-necked Stint populations in Corner Inlet do not show a marked decline. Bar-tailed Godwit are less reliant on the Yellow Sea, calling there only on their northern migration to Alaska and returning to eastern Australia in a non-stop flight. They show a smaller decline. Red-necked Stint, showing no decline, use the Yellow Sea but are more flexible in their food requirements, and more ready to move around, than either species of Knot.

Susan then explained that Corner Inlet is towards the southern extreme of the geographical range of inhabited by migratory waders. We would expect the decline in population to be noticed first, and most markedly, in localities near the extremes of the range.

A lot of interest was shown during question time and the discussion that developed. Many factors could influence yearly fluctuations in population counts. Breeding success in the Arctic would depend upon

factors such as the weather and on the prevalence of predators in the 'boom and bust' ecology of the Arctic tundra. Counting in Corner Inlet is carried out by boat and weather conditions vary from year to year, rough seas can make counting from a boat, using binoculars, difficult. Counting is done at the known roosting sites, but flocks could sometimes be hidden in more sheltered places. In replying to a question Susan reminded us of the importance of industrialisation to the people of the countries near the Yellow Sea and that we all benefit from this industrialisation when we purchase cheap manufactured products from the area.

Susan was asked for an update on the Red Knot population at Delaware Bay, which was the subject of a recent talk by Susan. We were pleased to hear that this year, for the first time, an increase in population was evident. It seems that placing limits on taking Horseshoe Crabs might at last be bringing the desired results.

\* Details of population studies and discussion of possible causes of decline are available in the published article upon which Susan based part of her talk: *Stilt 61 (2012): 3-18 Trends of Shorebirds in Corner Inlet, Victoria, 1982-2011*. Clive Minton, Peter Dann, Alice Ewing, Susan Taylor, Roz Jessop, Peter Anton, and Robert Clemens. This can be accessed on the website of the East Asian – Australasian Site Network: <http://www.awsg.org.au/stilt>

Margaret Rowe

## REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 22.10.2012

### General Meetings & Excursions

**Friday 23 November:** Presentation on Grand Strzelecki Track – Ken Harris introduction followed by a DVD about the track.

**Saturday 24 November:** Related excursion, walking part of Macks Creek loop of the GST. Meet 10am at Balook Visitors Information Centre.

**Botany Group:** Saturday 1 December – no botany due to Bird Challenge. Contact:

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Wendy Savage ☎ 5634 2246

Next botany day will be Saturday 2 February to look at Dargo plants.

**Bird Group:** Bird Challenge. Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, [alixw@spin.net.au](mailto:alixw@spin.net.au) See p. 6.

**Christmas Party Saturday 8 December** at David and Jacque Mules' place, Narracan.

**Finance** – Balances: Cash Mgt Trading A/c \$4215.25. Term Deposit \$12,000.00.

## **Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business**

Meeting room for general meeting – start at Uniting Church Hall Newborough on Friday. Alix will open up and Wendy will lock up and return key to Alix. Equipment previously held in LCHS cupboard has been distributed amongst committee.

Program for 2013 nearly completed.

Spring Camp to the Gurdies attended by 25 members with varied and interesting excursions. Have thanked Jenny and Terri for leading.

Community Groups Expo 14 October at Old Gippsdown – very few people visited stall and display, but weather was pleasant.

SEANA is looking for a new website coordinator as Ern Perkins wishes to relinquish the role.

Christmas party planning – Gill will bring cake, Phil will do quiz, Jackie punch bowl and lollies, Wendy punch base.

Summer Camp to Dargo Friday 18 to Monday 21 January – will stay at Dargo River Inn in cabins which have a lounge room, kitchen, shower, toilet and separate bedrooms. All bedding and towels supplied. \$50 per person each night for cabins, or \$15 per night for a powered site. Self catering, but evening meals can be bought at the Dargo River Inn (bar and restaurant). We will ask people to eat there on Saturday night. Phil will plan excursions. Will start booking list at GM. Secretary will liaise with venue re numbers and cabin allocations, but members will pay Dargo River Inn directly on arrival.

Wildflower Walk in Baw Baw NP (Mt St Gwinear) 12 January 2013 – FOBB would like club members to come and help with plant identification. Will be looking for id of new weeds that may be found in the area.

Purple Diuris orchid count – Dawson count 17 October had 4 times as many orchids in marked area than last year. Longford count to be done 25 October.

Ken Harris led a walk for Boolarra South Landcare group at old mill site along track to Boolarra cemetery and is providing them with a plant list.

ANN Get-together at Canberra attended by 4 club members. Excellent 8 day program. Phil will put some highlights in Naturalist. Interim steering committee established to decide future of ANN group. Next Get-together in Tasmania 2014.

## **Conservation Matters**

New orchid species discovered for the Latrobe Valley *Caladenia vulgaris* and *Chiloglottis jeanesii* by local ANOS group.

Scarlet Honeyeaters found at Uralla by bird group, new sighting – David M put on Birdline.

## **ANN 2012 GET-TOGETHER**

Four club members, Bruce and Estelle Adams, Phil Rayment and Gill Bremner went to Canberra in mid-October for the biennial ANN Get-together hosted by the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra. The excellent 8-day program combined field trips, institutional visits and lectures. Watch for a full report early next year.

## **SCARLET HONEYEATER - BIRDLINE REPORT**

On October 2 the LVFNC Bird Group visited Uralla Nature Reserve, Trafalgar. We saw 6-8 or more male and female Scarlet Honeyeater, Rose Robin male and female; both firsts in the reserve. Also Blue-winged Parrot and Brown Gerygone.

This information was reported to Birdline Victoria along with the VicRoads map reference. Birdline Victoria is an internet site for the reporting of rare or unusual birds

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outside their normal range.

The next day, three members of the Ringwood Field Nats were there looking. We don't know how many other bird observers made the trip to try to see this beautiful little bird - so far west from normal locations.

## SUMMER ACTIVITIES

### Bird Challenge Count Day 1 December

On Saturday, December 1 Club members, their relatives, friends and anyone who is interested in birds can take part in the Australia-wide Bird Challenge Count Day.

We have been doing this since 1998 in an area from Yarragon to Traralgon, Tyers to the Morwell National Park. Participants are organised into groups with an experienced "bird" person as leader and set a series of sites in which to observe and count birds. Some members are able to identify birds and others assist by spotting them.

Data on the types and numbers of birds recorded are sent to Birdlife Australia. This information provides ideas about bird populations and movement in the area.

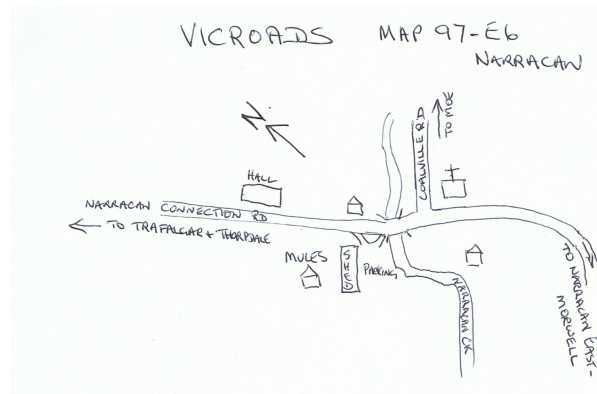
It provides a great opportunity for people to learn about the local birds.

If you are interested in joining in the fun; please contact Alix on 5127 3393 or [alix@spin.net.au](mailto:alix@spin.net.au).

## CLUB CHRISTMAS PARTY

### Saturday 8 December from 12 noon

At David & Jacqui Mules' property at 408 Connection Rd, Narracan (opposite the hall), BYO food and drinks and chair. BBQ, and water for tea and coffee available. Punch and Christmas cake provided. And the quiz will be on again!



## SUMMER MEMBERS' NIGHT

**Friday 11 January 2013.** Open theme – your chance to show and tell.

## FOBB WILDFLOWER WALK 12 JAN

Join Friends of Baw Baw NP on Saturday 12 January 2013, to Mt St Gwinear.

Meet at DSE Office, Parkers Corner at 9.30am for a 10.00am departure (after car pooling). Back mid-afternoon.

Two walks – for able and not-so-able so all can enjoy and learn about the area.

For more details and to say that you are coming: contact Alix on 5127 3393 or [alix@spin.net.au](mailto:alix@spin.net.au).

## CLUB SUMMER CAMP

**When:** Friday 18 - Monday 21 January 2013

**Where:** Dargo River Inn.

**Accommodation:** Cabins with kitchen and lounge, shower, toilet and separate bedrooms. All bedding and towels are supplied. Self-catering, but evening meals can be bought at the Dargo River Inn (bar and restaurant). We plan to eat there together on Saturday night (pay separately). Bring food for breakfasts and packed lunches.

**Cost:** \$50 per person per night for cabins. \$15 per night for powered site. To be paid directly to Dargo River Inn.

Names on list as soon as possible please. Wendy will liaise with venue re numbers

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and cabin allocations. Phil will plan excursions.

## **FROM THE EDITOR**

A big thank you to all contributors and helpers throughout the year. Best wishes for a safe and happy Christmas/New Year to all club members, family and friends.

The next issue will be mailed to everyone in mid-February.