

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

SEANA AUTUMN CAMP AT MERRICKS

Nine members of our club participated in the Autumn 2013 SEANA Camp, hosted by Peninsula FNC over the weekend of 15-17 March. This enjoyable camp was based at Merricks Lodge, which afforded plenty of space for evening talks, dinners and meetings in a treed setting adjacent to wetlands. Eighty-eight naturalists took part in a well organised program: excursions focussed on the southern Mornington Peninsula, taking in Point Nepean NP, Coolart wetlands and woodlands, Jacks Beach (for mangroves), Warringine Creek Reserve, Balbirooroo Wetlands at Balnarring, Greens Bush and the Flinders area for coastal geology and rockpooling (led by Margaret Rowe). A boat trip to the Mud Islands and South Channel Fort had to be cancelled due to inclement weather.

Evening talks were given by Leon Costermans on Geology of the Mornington Peninsula (more next Naturalist) and Dr Jeff Yugovic on saltmarsh and estuarine vegetation, drawing on his extensive field research on the Mud Islands vegetation.

The SEANA AGM, general meeting and management committee meeting saw Russell Green (FNCV) take up the reins as president from Helen Langley, with Deborah Evans (Geelong FNC) as new vice-president. Denis Thurgood was re-elected as treasurer and Phil Rayment as secretary. Votes of appreciation for the long and valued contributions to VFNCA/SEANA and natural history study of Dr Noel Schleiger and Dick Southcombe were recorded with acclamation.

Many thanks to Peninsula FNC members, in particular president Pat Gomm, secretary Judy Smart and camp coordinator Doris Weigert for their great organisation of the event.

Philip Rayment

MEGAFAUNA EXCURSION TO MORGAN'S BEACH 23.3.2013

In the Bunurong Environment Centre in Inverloch, Mike Cleeland of Bunurong Coast Education (a component of the South Gippsland Conservation Society) commenced with items relevant to the

Dinosaur Dreaming project, both in the Otways (where 100 bones including 2 jawbones were recently found), and at Inverloch. He had fossils or casts of the original 1903 dinosaur claw, disarticulated dinosaur bones and footprints, and plant fossils. (The Koonwarra Mesozoic dig site is to be re-opened in April.)

The megafauna of the day's excursion are hugely younger. New material can be exposed by erosion or rock falls. There have been megafauna world-wide except for Africa, and Mike had illustrations of a selection of Australian candidates: a horned tortoise (*Meiolania*), a marsupial lion (*Thylacoleo*), a giant goanna (*Megalania*), an attacking giant emu (*Genyornis*), a python, a hippo sized giant wombat (*Diprotodon*), a short-faced carnivorous kangaroo, and giant birds such as penguins, ducks and flamingos (*Phoeniconotius*).

Theories of megafauna extinction include climate change and the arrival of aborigines with their hunting techniques including burning.

The field trip was to Morgan's Beach off Cape Liptrap Coastal Park. The view of Venus Bay from the primary dune is impressive for it arcs round from the Cape Liptrap peninsula in the east into Morgan's Beach, thence to the spectacular bedding and cross-bedding of Pleistocene age calcarenite dunes to the remaining rock stack of Arch Rock in the west.



Exhibit A showing evidence of at least four megafauna species. Photo Graeme Rowe

Exhibit A of megafauna footprints at the western end of Morgan's Beach were on a

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slab of calcarenite recently fallen from the cliff. (They're not actually footprints, but the infill of the layer above into the footprints, for the slab is now downside up!) The slab shows footprint evidence of a number of animals, all unidentified. The most obvious tracks are possibly of a large wombat, there are another set of tracks headed in the opposite direction, some hopping prints, and a footprint of a large bird. The age of the prints is 80 – 120 thousand years.

Further west along the difficult to negotiate beach were a couple of other fallen upturned rock slabs showing footprint infills, again unidentified. High in the cliff face was evidence of a collapsed limestone cave with remnant stalactites and redeposited limestone cave columns. On beach level were further columns distinguished by their smoother texture and lighter colour.

Graeme Rowe.

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 18.3.2013

General Meetings & Excursions

Friday 26 April: Pre & Post-fire Monitoring at Wilsons Prom – Mary Ellis

Saturday 27 April: Excursion to Wilsons Prom. Meet 10am at carpark behind Prom entrance station. Carpool at Mirboo North Baromi Park (near Baths Rd reserve) by 8.30am.

Friday 24 May: Ecological restoration in Kruger NP – Deb Archer

Saturday 25 May: Excursion to Lyrebird Walk, Mirboo North. Meet there at 10am.

Botany Group: Saturday 4 May – Field trip to Rokeby Flora Reserve. Meet 10am at the Old Trestle Bridge, Bloomfield Rd, Crossover. Turn off Princes Hwy at Nilma and travel north up Bloomfield Rd for about 15km. The bridge is signposted on the left about 1km before you meet the Neerim Sth-Warragul Rd. Contact: Wendy Savage ☎ 5634 2246

Bird Group: Tuesday 7 May – Tarra Bulga NP. Meet by 9am at tennis courts in Shakespeare St, Traralgon for carpooling, or 10am Visitor Centre, Balook. Contact: Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, alixw@spin.net.au

Finance – Balances: Cash Mgt Trading A/c \$2511.74. Term Deposit \$13,327.00. Motion: That we appoint David Davies as our auditor for 2014. D Mules/A Williams

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

Offer of grass tree stickers from Catherine Eldridge – she still has them and will post them to us.

Summer Camp, Dargo – have booked venue for Jan 2014 and will pay deposit of \$500.

AGM – Positions vacant: President, VP1, Treasurer and Assistant Secretary. Nomination forms prepared for meeting.

Spring camp – have enquired about accommodation at Lady Northcote Camp, Rowsley.

SEANA Autumn Camp at Merricks attended by 9 members from LVFNC. SEANA President Helen Langley retired and new president is Russell Green from FNCV.

Changes to Incorporation and rules for club. Motion: That the letter Alix has prepared to send to Consumer Affairs Victoria seeking to clarify our position be sent. A Williams/P Rayment. Passed. Public Officer will be replaced by Secretary under the new rules so Sec needs to send in her details. We will use the new annual statement form. Thanks to Alix for all the work sorting this out.

Sales of 'Nature of Latrobe' – books can be sold at Tourist Information Centre at Traralgon and paperwork needs to be completed for this to be done.

Surveillance camera (for wildlife not people!) – David Stickney suggested we consider buying one for the club. Can borrow one and try it out to see if the expense would be justified.

Conservation Matters

Gold prospecting will be allowed in National Parks, and pumps will be able to be used. Closing date for submissions has passed but letter will be written to local members.

GUEST SPEAKER FOR MAY

Deb Archer works for Gippsland Water as an Environmental Scientist. She manages

their diversity programs and works with the assets group in planning and delivery stages on environmental issues. She obtained a PhD in restoration ecology research on captive breeding programs in South Africa. She has previously worked at Monash University, the Arthur Rylah Institute and Department of Primary industries.

FOR THE DIARY

2013-14 Subscriptions are now due – see inside back cover for full details

SEANA Spring Camp at Numurkah, hosted by the Broken Creek FNC Inc.

“Riverine Flood Plains, Red Gum Forests, the Mighty Murray River”

Friday 11-Monday 14 October, based in Numurkah, in the Goulburn Valley.

ANN 2012 GET-TOGETHER IN CANBERRA

(Continued from last issue)

(ii) Gavin Young

Dr Gavin Young, from the ANU Research School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, addressed the topic “Vertebrate fossils, especially fish species, of the Devonian period”. He outlined research work right up to the immediate present, based on excavations at sites at Wee Jasper, near Burrinjuck, north-west of Canberra and at Gogo in the Kimberley in WA. The use of 3-D computed tomography techniques has greatly enhanced visualisation of the species being studied on the basis of fossil evidence, demonstrated by the remarkable images which Gavin screened for us. In an interesting closing remark, he noted with some regret that Australia’s case for the return of some of the extensive fossil record held by the British Museum is weakened by our lack of a national natural history museum.

(iii) Don McGregor

We returned to the CSIRO Discovery Centre on Thursday 18th October for an evening talk by naturalist Don McGregor, entitled “The lure of the lyrebird”. He and his wife Gwen commenced an extensive observational study in 2007, in Moruya State Forest in NSW. Using movable, readily demountable hides, a digital SLR camera fitted with a

300mm lens and motion detector gear, along with a compact digital video camera, and setting up observation sites with small ponds cut into the ground, they collected some remarkable images of lyrebird behaviour. Don found that each male covers an approx. 1 km² territory, with borders seemingly not governed by man-made structures. A male may have up to seven mounds, including some from the previous year. The hen’s nest nearly always faces north-east to catch the morning sun.

Go to the website www.lyrebirdman.com for some stunning time-lapse sequences and video clips of lyrebird behaviour, including even that of a chick in its nest.

Institutional Visits

Canberra is of course fortunate to house a great range of institutions with records or research activity relating to natural history. Some of the Get-Together visits accessed sections not normally open to the public.

(i) Canberra Reptile Sanctuary

Following an introductory talk focussing on the sanctuary’s holdings of snakes and lizards, we had an opportunity to observe and handle a Common and Blotched Blue-tongued Lizard, a Shingle-backed Lizard and a Carpet Python.



Blotched Blue-tongued Lizard in Estelle’s care!

(ii) Canberra Deep Space Communication Centre, Tidbinbilla

This centre, jointly managed by NASA and CSIRO, is one of three complexes (along with facilities in the USA and Spain) used for communicating with space probes such as Voyager and Curiosity, currently exploring Mars. An excellent public

exhibition area displays the challenges of manned and unmanned space exploration.

(iii) GeoScience Australia

In addition to viewing the excellent extensive display relating to geomorphology, palaeontology and mineralogy, I would recommend following the Geological Time Walk outside the building – it is a 1.1 km loop tracking the 4600 million years since the formation of the Earth, taking in the periods from the Hadean and Archean eons right down to the Quaternary. The loop also includes markers for the time-points of Earth's five mass extinctions to date and for the significant stages of Australia's separation from larger land masses including of course Gondwana.

(iv) Australian National Botanic Gardens Herbarium

I took the opportunity to visit the Cryptogams section which receives, classifies and stores fungi, mosses, lichens, liverworts and ferns. This work involves a range of drying techniques. Note that, by cooperation between ANBG and CSIRO, vascular plant material is held at the nearby CSIRO Herbarium, which some groups visited.

(v) National Library of Australia

In addition to viewing a public exhibition of the work of John William Lewin (1770-1819), the first free professional artist to settle in Australia, we had the opportunity to study some of the library's holdings of facsimile editions of paintings by Rohan Ellis (flora), John Gould (birds) and Ferdinand Bauer (flora and fauna).

(vi) National Archives

The key attraction here was the exhibition of the finalist entries in the South Australia Waterhouse Prize for natural history art.

Field Trips

The above-mentioned diversity of natural habitats in the ACT was drawn on in a wide range of field trips to reserves and important sites. Being a city of suburbs surrounded by bushland, Canberra contains many nature reserves, some thirty of which have been incorporated in the Canberra Nature Park. In addition a number of Landcare Groups have

been set up by residents for stewardship of urban open space consisting of creek corridors, lakeshores, inter- and intra-suburban land pockets, etc.

Field trips conducted during the Get-Together included:

(i) Aranda Bushland, on the lower slopes of Black Mountain

A great reserve for wildflowers; orchids in flower that I was drawn to included the Black Mountain Donkey Orchid, *Diuris nigramontana*, the small white Early Caladenia, *C. praecox*, *Diuris sulphurea* and *Glossodia major*. Also in flower – Straggling Beard-heath, *Leucopogon microphylla*, and Blunt-leaf Bitter-pea, *Daviesia mimosoides*, with its acacia-like leaf, Mountain Grevillea, *G. alpina*, and Box-leaf Wattle, *Acacia buxifolia*.



Daviesia mimosoides in Aranda Bushland Reserve

(ii) National Arboretum

This new arboretum, scheduled to open in February 2013, is located at the western end of Lake Burley Griffin. A guide from the

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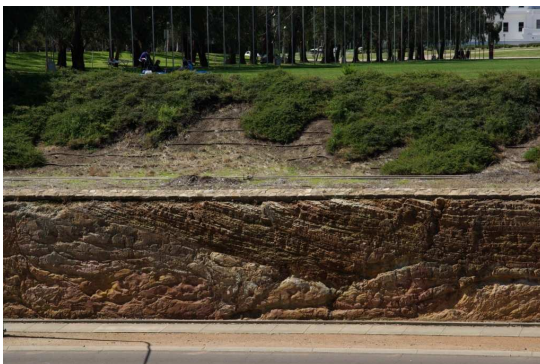
Friends Group explained that the devastating fires of 2003 left the 250 ha site bare, and a decision was taken to establish an international arboretum, in line with Burley Griffin's plan for Canberra. A design competition resulted in a winning "100 forests, 100 gardens" concept of forests rather than individual specimen trees. 20% of the forests will display native species; the first planted was the threatened *Eucalyptus benthamii*, which have grown approximately one metre per year from 2007. A number of rare international species, such as Saharan and Moroccan Cypresses and Purple-leafed Smoke-bush will be preserved.



National Arboretum and Lake Burley Griffin

(iii) State Circle Cutting

Doug Finlayson introduced us to the geological history of Canberra at a number of sites near the centre of the city, including a cutting on State Circle. Here, sedimentary rock folded from the time of the Benambran Tectonic Cycle (460-445 Ma) is clearly visible. We could see the base of a syncline – its higher level was excavated to reduce the height of the hill between the old and new parliament houses.



State Circle Cutting

(iv) Mount Ainslie

The summit of Mount Ainslie is the best spot from which to see how the city has evolved according to the Burley Griffin design. It is one of a series of "volcanic islands" from the Silurian Tabberabberan Tectonic Cycle (around 428 Ma) that now dominate central Canberra.

(v) Australian National Botanic Gardens

An extended visit started with a pre-breakfast bird watching walk – sightings included a Tawny Frogmouth on its nest, several Choughs near their nests and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. A later guided walk took in the Seed House, where volunteers have an important role. We were intrigued to observe several Gippsland Water Dragons in a rock garden near the main car park.

It was heartening to see this vital national institution in good shape following the better rains of recent times.



Gippsland Water Dragon in ANBG

(vi) Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve & Sanctuary

This reserve is part of Canberra Nature Park and has an important role in conserving Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland. 485 ha of the reserve has been enclosed by a predator-proof fence to form the sanctuary. Ranger Grant Woodbridge explained that a Bettong recovery program is going well; animals reintroduced from Tasmania are breeding successfully.

Habitat provision in the reserve has been enhanced by extensive placement of logs, particularly in and near wetlands.



Mulligans Flat Wetland

(vii) Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

At the Visitors Centre, a talk by Tidbinbilla's Chief Wildlife Officer introduced the reserve's recovery programs for the Corroboree Frog and the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby. This tiny frog, about the size of a thumbnail, lives in Sphagnum Moss, is dormant in winter and its eggs hatch following the snow melt. It walks, not hops. About 300-400 frogs are being bred each year to support the release program. As Chytrid fungus affects Corroboree Frogs at the tadpole stage, releases are made at a later point in their life cycle.

There are thought to be only about 30 Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies in the wild and some 40 in captivity, including 25 at Tidbinbilla. As this species breeds only slowly, Yellow-footed Wallabies act as foster mothers to assist the recovery program.

(viii) Namadgi National Park

Namadgi NP was declared in 1984 and covers 106,095 ha at the northernmost end of the Australian Alps, being more or less the south-western half of the ACT. Habitats range from broad, grassy plains in the valleys to Alpine Ash forests on the slopes and Snow Gum woodlands and sub-alpine meadows on the mountain peaks. The Bimberi Wilderness comprises the western third of the park and an adjoining area in NSW.

A range of walks was available during our day trip to Namadgi. We chose the 4 km return walk on the Yerrabi Track which climbs to Boboyan Trig (1458 m) for sweeping views west to the Scabby Range and Bimberi Wilderness. The first part of the

track descended through an open forest of Broad-leaved Peppermint Gum to swampy grassland in a frost hollow. Beyond the swamp, walkers climb into a taller, more complex forest of Snow Gum, *Eucalyptus pauciflora*, and Mountain Gum, *E. dalrympleana*, before reaching the hilltop with a stunted shrub community and a few Snow Gums just surviving wind exposure from every direction. This hilltop is recovering from the effects of the major 2003 fires. The best views were obtained from a huge granite outcrop just west of the trig point.

Conclusion

The Get-Together concluded with an excellent dinner on Saturday 20 October at the Canberra Institute of Technology Restaurant. Simon Grove extended a warm invitation to all present to come to Hobart in October 2014 for the next Get-Together, to be hosted by the Tasmanian FNC.

Philip Rayment

BOTANY MAY 4 –how to get there.

Meet at the Old Trestle Bridge, Bloomfield Rd, Crossover. Turn off Princes Hwy at Nilma and travel north up Bloomfield Road for about 15km, the Old Trestle Bridge is signposted on left about 1km before you meet the Neerim South-Warragul Road.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the absence of any further write-ups of the club's Spring Camp at the Gurdies last October, I would like to offer a very belated thank you to Terri Allen and Jenny Rejske for their excellent organization and leadership. They are both very generous with their time and knowledge, and we all had a most enjoyable weekend in spite of the weather!

STOP PRESS: NEW ANN ISC MEETS

The inaugural meeting of the Australian Naturalists Network Interim Steering Committee was held on Saturday 13 April at FNCV Hall in Blackburn. Some interstate members participated via a teleconference link. Good progress was made with drafting a Statement of Purposes and setting some of the ground-rules for future management of the national network.