

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2013-14

This year was saddened by the loss of two of the Club's most valuable and founding members Bon and Ollie Thompson who both passed away within 13 days in June. There have been many tributes to Bon and Ollie and I would like to thank Phil Rayment and Jackie Tims for their eulogy and reflections. It is largely through the work of Jean Galbraith and followed by the work of Bon (and Ollie) who served as the Club's Conservation Coordinator for 30 years that have enhanced the club's reputation within the community. They were made life members of the Club in 1993 and received Latrobe City Citizen of the Year award in 2002. To encapsulate my reflections of Bon and Ollie I would like to quote some of Phil's eulogy:

'So this time we honour a remarkable couple's 'generosity of spirit' – the enthusiasm and joy which they brought to the Club's activities and to sharing their knowledge with the rest of us, who are richer for having known them.'

The Latrobe Valley Field Naturalist Club is a regional club whose primary objective is the conservation, understanding and appreciation of our local wild life and their habitat. We seek to achieve this by bringing together those people with an interest in our natural environment to generate knowledge, and facilitate its use for the conservation of our regional biodiversity.

It is a local club that has an enthusiastic and dedicated committee who all volunteer their time and is a group I am proud to be part of. In many ways it is unique because it is the only group that provides a vital link between the community and our diverse natural environments and a wide spectrum of knowledge. We continue to provide expertise and information to other volunteer groups by carrying out bird and plant surveys and extending our database with this information.

This report is an opportunity to acknowledge the massive amount of time put in by each of our committee and club members. It is an opportunity to thank you all for your contribution. It is encouraging that there is a growing interest from younger people in our

club activities and more actively involved in our field work and would encourage us to continue to build on these developments for the future sustainability of the club.

We have had a strong emphasis on ecological and conservation topics at our general meetings. These presentations began with a talk by Mary Ellis on the Pre and Post Fire Monitoring at Wilson's Promontory which provided some local interest as many of our club members are participants in the project. This theme continued with the talk by Andy Gillham in his role of our local Ranger in Charge for the West Gippsland Parks and Matt Bowler's talk on the restoration of Heart Morass. More recently the talk by Jennifer Lavers on Plastic Pollution and Australian Seabirds and Pam Whiteley on Wildlife Health Surveillance provided an insight into the impact of our lifestyle on wildlife health. The talk by Jennifer Lavers highlighted a major issue in our marine environment and the Club agreed to use a significant amount of our environmental reserves to help fund the project.

There were three international presentations given during the year. The first was the talk by Deb Archer on the dentition of some of the animals in Kruger National Park. This was followed by a talk on the Birds, Dams and Conservation in China by Wendy Wright and Steb Fisher and a talk on Julie Parker's Modern Voyage of Discovery through the North East Passage.

Many of our excursions were to local reserves this year including Lyrebird Walk, Mount Worth State Park, Morwell National Park and Moe Town Reserves. Some of our excursions were a little further out and were related to our talks such as the fires in Wilson's Promontory, and Cape Liptrap to look for fossils of megafauna following Mike Cleland's talk on the Megafauna of SE Australia. In addition many of us had an enjoyable day at Cranbourne Botanical Gardens in the spring.

Our two weekend camps this year gave us the opportunity to go a little further. Our spring camp was at Bacchus Marsh which allowed us to explore the Brisbane Ranges and Werribee Gorge. We had limited time

for our summer camp at Dargo because of bush fires in the area but for those of us who managed the trip we had a pleasant day exploring the Dargo High Plains.

The Club's web page continues to be an important source of information to our club members and our thanks go to John Sunderland for maintaining this valuable resource. This year we had to change our web host from the State Library at very short notice and our thanks go to John for the smooth transition. I'm happy to say that the new web host is free and community focussed towards clubs and societies like ours. The only cost is our registration of our domain name which will be an ongoing annual cost to the Club. However it provides us with web based access to the Naturalist which will be available to Club members and the public to read each month. It also opens up other communication opportunities which we can explore more fully in the future. Meanwhile our registered domain name has changed to LVFieldNats.org.

We need your input, ideas, and comments on the future direction of the Naturalist while recognising the enormous contribution of our editor over many years. This will be a significant development in the production of our magazine that has provided an important communication link with all our members and the wider community. We need to be aware of the costs, new technology of the production and distribution while not compromising valuable basic communication function.

David Stickney

DEN OF NARGUN

Dargo Summer Camp – Monday morning

Visiting the Den of Nargun on the way home from Dargo was a highlight for me, as I had never been there before and it was a beautiful place. It is only a few kilometers off the Dargo Rd, about 25 km north of the Princes Highway. When we arrived, we celebrated my Ken's birthday with a cuppa in the carpark, with not just one, but two cakes thanks to Marlene. The Den of Nargun is in the Mitchell River NP and is situated in the Woolshed Creek Gorge, which leads down to the Mitchell River.

The car park and start of the 5 km loop track is in dry forest dominated by eucalypts and wattles but below near the river are pockets of rainforest. Many of the plants we saw on the walk were at the western edge of their range, so are not commonly seen on our trips. I will mark them with a #. We were interested to find the three cassinias as we set off – *Cassinia trinerva*, *C. longifolia* and *C. aculeata*. A hakea with narrow curved leaves and beaked fruits was *Hakea eriantha* the Tree Hakea. There was lots of Burgan (*Kunzea ericoides*) along the path and we passed a huge Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*). A neat rounded prickly heath bush was very common, and not being in flower we left identification until a later date. Ken Harris consulted the plant list from the botany group's visit in October 2011 and decided it was *Leucopogon juniperinum*.

The view from the Bluff lookout across the park was quite spectacular. From here we descended a long series of zig-zags towards the Mitchell River. The banks along the sandy path had many herbs and small shrubs. I noticed the Ivy-leafed violet, Kidney weed and Hairy Pennywort were growing right near each other. When I was first learning my plants from Bon I had trouble with these three and she drew me up a guide to tell them apart, and it would have been useful at that stage to have seen them all together. Not a lot of the plants were flowering, but there was plenty of variety. A small ziera shrub was clearly not our usual Stinkwood (*Ziera arborescens*) as the leaves when crushed did not smell too bad. It had smaller leaves and was later found to be Sandfly Ziera (*Z. smithii* #).

A few daisies along the path had mostly finished flowering, although one had an occasional purple flower. Both were the less common daisy species Vittadinia which I had first encountered on our trip to Gelantipy. They tend to grow in drier areas, mostly in the west of the state or East Gippsland, so we don't come across them often. They have alternate leaves and a solitary terminal flower head. The purple flowered one was later identified as *V. dissecta* var. *dissecta* #, (Dissected New-Holland Daisy) and as the name suggests

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had tiny leaves which were dissected into 3 lobes at the end. The other had very fine narrow leaves and white flowers and was *V. tenuissima* #. Both have quite a localized distribution within the East Gippsland area.

A large climber with strong shiny leaves became common as we neared the river. I thought it was *Parsonsia brownii*, which has similar leaves and a long green fruit case which opens to shed masses of fluffy seeds like the clematis does, but it was Milk-vine (*Marsdenia rostrata* #). Another unfamiliar climber to me was Jasmine Morinda, (*Morinda jasminoides* #) which also had shiny leaves but its fruits are irregular shaped orange balls. Down near the Mitchell River we started to encounter the trees listed on the information board at the start of the walk – the Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneas*) was flowering with its creamy bells flecked with red inside. Kanooka (*Tristaniopsis laurina* #) with long glossy leaves and yellow 5-petalled flowers resembling teatree flowers, Yellow-wood (*Acronychia oblongifolia* #), Blue Oliveberry (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*), River Lomatia (*Lomatia myricloides*) and Mountain Correa (*Correa lawrenciana*) were all found growing on the river flat.

The river was broad and ran over flat rocks. Jackie admired the rock strata in the red cliffs which were mainly horizontal, but had tilting in various directions in some sections indicating various pressures and changes over the aeons. A small sandy beach made it a very inviting looking spot to spend a few hours, if we had them at our disposal. The Mitchell River is the last wild river in Victoria, presumably meaning it is not dammed or altered along its course, starting at the confluence of the Dargo and Wonangatta Rivers and flowing into the Gippsland Lakes. Here we met the others in our party who had walked the loop in the other direction, preferring to walk down the steep rocky steps to the Den of Nargun rather than up them.

We continued on to the Den of Nargun along a track that headed away from the river and looped around above Woolshed Creek. Ferns increased in variety and number, especially as we neared the Den where it was sheltered and moist. Sickie fern

(*Pellaea falcata*) was very common, and we wondered for a while if it was a blechnum, but Jackie pointed out that its sori are along the margins of the pinnae whilst blechnums are near the mid vein. The Common Rasp Fern (*Doodia media*) was very common, and we saw Necklace Fern, Maidenhair Fern and Shiny Shield Fern growing amongst the rocks.

Woolshed Creek was full of large rocks and dry, and we walked along its bed or on a rocky path beside it for some way under the deep shade of rainforest trees such as Lilly-pilly and Kanooka. The highlight for me was seeing two uncommon ferns here. Fragrant fern (*Microsorium scandens*) was growing up a tree fern. It is similar to the other microsorium species, Kangaroo Fern, and according to my fern book, both have fronds which vary from entire to pinnatifid. Its sori are situated nearer to the margin than the midvein, whereas Kangaroo fern's are midway. I have only seen it once before, at Sealers Cove in Wilsons Prom, and both times it looked quite different to Kangaroo Fern, having nice even pinnatifid fronds with about 8 to 10 lobes on each side. It's a very pretty fern. The other fern was the Rock Felt Fern (*Pyrrosia rupestris*). Creeping along a fallen trunk, it had small rounded fronds like little ears covered in stellate hairs. Its fertile fronds are tall and narrow, up to 8 cm long.

Finally we reached the Den, and it was a thing of great beauty. Sacred to aborigines, we were asked not to enter the low cave. It was situated across a pool of water at the base of a cliff, with limestone stalactites and stalagmites forming beautiful shapes and contrast to the dark rocks. The Nargun was said to inhabit the cave and abduct children who visited the rockpool. It was considered a special place for women of the Gunaikurnai tribe and may have been used for women's initiation and learning ceremonies.

It was a short, but strenuous walk up the steep steps to the track leading back to the carpark, where we had our lunch before heading for home. If, like me, you have never got around to visiting the Den of Nargun, make sure you go as it's such a lovely place.

Wendy Savage

OPHIOGLOSSUM IN THE LITTLE DESERT

At the beginning of October 2013, botanically minded members of our Club together with members of the Prom'n'Aids and my university friend the Treasurer of the Bairnsdale Field Naturalists Club, Margaret Regan, travelled to the Little Desert for a few days of botanising. There were 30 of us so while mostly went to places of interest together the group fragmented into smaller clusters. When we returned back to our base Margaret asked me if I had seen the *Ophioglossum* at our last stop.

So what is *Ophioglossum*? 'Australian Ferns and Fern Allies' calls it as one of the 'fern oddities' while the Flora of Victoria describes it (with my translations) as 'Rhizome (underground stem) erect or prostrate, unbranched, glabrous (smooth, hairless). Lamina (leaf blade) of frond simple, entire, more or less fleshy, glabrous, with netted venation (veins), erect, spreading or pendulous (our specimens were erect) subtended by stipe (it had a stalk). Fertile spike arising from sterile lamina or below, stalk fleshy. Sporangia (bags of spores) in 2 rows embedded in spike, opening by transverse slits.'

There are 3 species in Victoria, 6 or 7 in Australia and about 50 world-wide. *Ophioglossum*'s closest relative is *Botrytrichium*, which has a similar spike of sporangia (although branched like a fern frond) but has a truer fern-like frond. However neither of these species have fronds that uncoil (circinate venation) as do true ferns. There are no known fossil records. Judging from the distribution of 'our' *Ophioglossum* (from the Greek 'ophis' – snake, and 'glossa' – tongue), is *O. lusitanicum* or Austral Adder's Tongue. It has a wide distribution across our State but not in West or South Gippsland except for one small locality on the south west corner of the Prom.

Why hadn't the rest of us seen it? It was tiny – about 7-9 cm but it can grow to 15cm. The plants were thick in a damp patch of more than a square metre in open forest with other individuals scatter nearby. It is the sort of

nondescript plant that is easy to walk over. Margaret however worked for a botany professor who researched and taught about ferns and she had seen it before. Nonetheless I am still impressed she picked it out. Ken Harris, tired though he was, was disappointed not to have seen it so the three of us drove back to the locality for pictures. I am not sorry we did – it is a special plant, evolutionarily speaking.

Jackie Tims

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 23.4.2014

General Meetings & Excursions

Friday 23 May: Thomson River Fishway at Horseshoe Bend – Martin Fuller will now give the talk and lead the excursion.

Saturday 24 May: Related excursion to Horseshoe Bend. Meet 10am at Crater Lake, Rawson then convoy to Horseshoe Bend.

Friday 27 June: Whale Watching – Geoff Glare

Saturday 28 June: Uralla Reserve, Trafalgar. Meet at the reserve at 10am.

Botany Group: Saturday 31 May: Fungi Foray at Beech Gully Nature Walk on Mt Erica with FOBB. Meet 9.30am at DEPI, Parkers Corner (*see Diary p.5*). Contact: Wendy Savage ☎ 5634 2246.

Bird Group: Tuesday 3 June: Willow Grove area. Meet by 9.30am. Turn right off the Moe-Willow Grove Rd onto Spillway Rd, to the Pioneer Rocks before the dam wall. Contact: Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, alixw@spin.net.au.

Finance – Cash Mgt Trading A/c \$3797.57. Term Deposit \$14,148.46.

Business Pending

Storage at Uniting Church – have emailed Marja, and we could look at suitable books on the botany day at her place. Should go through books at a later date for culling, and put catalogue of books in storage cupboard.

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

SEANA camp with Sale FNC for Spring 2016 – met at Sale 4 April and have formed

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a working party from both clubs. LVFNC will assist with advice, paperwork and excursions. Next meeting 13 August, 4pm at Rosedale pub.

LVFNC website – John Sunderland has made further changes including coloured club logo. Changes to membership form require making a new pdf as source document not found.

Club badges – David Mules found he had badges which we can sell for \$5.

Naturalist production – survey will be mailed with this month's Naturalist, and Wendy will email an electronic version as an alternative return method. Returns to be in by end of May.

Dedicated laptop to be obtained for use with the data projector to solve the connection problems we have experienced in the past. David Stickney will set up his old laptop for this meeting.

Sustainability Gippsland Website: www.sustainabilitygippsland.com. This has been set up to allow groups in the region involved in sustainability to add their details and could form a good conduit for advertising our presence and events. Will ask our webmaster to join us up.

ANHM nomination for Ken Harris – David S has sent an update to the existing nomination and a letter of support from Andy Gillham.

Business Meeting times – May will be 7.30, then June-August 3pm.

Conservation Matters

EHHBR & Wagners Paddock proposed development – contacted Bruce King and said we had nothing further to add.

GUEST SPEAKER FOR JUNE

Geoff Glare is a long-term resident of Bass Coast. His particular interest in photography of natural history was sparked over 25 years ago when he began to photograph South Gippsland's terrestrial orchids. His photographic subjects have since broadened to include indigenous plants in general, birds, animals and in particular, whales.

FOR THE DIARY

FUNGI FORAY/BEECH GULLY NATURE WALK

Saturday 31 May. LVFNC & FOBB combined walk along the nature trail with emphasis on fungi. Meet at the DEPI Office at Parkers Corner by 9.30am to carpool. Bring lunch and wet weather gear, and wear suitable clothing for alpine conditions.

RSVP and more info contact: ☎ 5127 3393 or Parks Victoria on ☎ 5172 2186.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2014-15 ARE NOW OVERDUE AND WILL BE CANCELLED IF NOT PAID.

Please see inside back cover for details.

PHILIP ISLAND EXCURSION

A good number of our Club members assembled at the Visitors Centre on Philip Island to discuss our plans to explore the bird life and natural history of Philip Island. The Island has a long ornithological history and is a major tourist attraction particularly for the penguin parade at Summerland Bay.

Our first stop was Swan Lake which has been substantially developed with boardwalks and two bird hides overlooking different aspects of the wetlands. There was good diversity of water birds and waders. There was some confusion with a small plover with an incomplete breast band. We concluded it was an immature black-fronted plover which is one of our resident plovers. They generally do not have a plain non-breeding plumage so do not normally present identification difficulties but the transition from an immature to adult plumage can be difficult.

Our next stop was the Nobbies which presents great vistas of the sea, seal rocks and rock formations and one of the best examples of pillow lava I have seen along the coast line. This is a good headland to see seabirds and although we did not see any pelagic species we did have good views of Australian Gannets diving for fish close to the shoreline. Walking along the boardwalk were several moulting Little Penguins which were either in their purpose built nest boxes or under the boardwalk.

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This is also the most reliable place to see Kelp Gulls which are often seen resting on the rocks. They are not a common bird in Australia but we did see a couple resting in their usual place. Kelp Gulls are an Antarctic and sub-tropical species and only seen along the south coast although they are the most common gull in Antarctic and the sub-Antarctic islands. They are a recent colonisation in Australia and first reported in NSW in 1938 although not reported in Victoria until 1955.

Our next stop was to a viewing point overlooking Rhyll Inlet. We were fortunate to meet a local birdwatcher who advised us she had just seen several hundred Bar-tailed Godwits and some Eastern Curlews on Observation Point. They had just been disturbed by two people with Kayaks and made the point that this sort of disturbance should be managed better as the birds must be in their peak condition before their long migration. We walked a short way eastwards along the coast and did get some views of the Godwits but no sign of the Curlews which are a declining species.

Our final stop was on the track to Churchill Island where we could see Cape-Barren Geese grazing on the grasses. There were some wetlands alongside the track which were mostly dry. There were however small areas of wetlands which we stopped to have a closer look at. It was here that we saw a Black-tailed Native-hen which is a very unusual bird in this region. These Native-hens have a widespread distribution but Philip Island is on the very edge of its distribution. They are a dispersive species and highly irruptive and its presence here may have been caused by an exodus from the drought regions in central NSW and Queensland.

The day ended with a total of 54 species which was a good diversity given the late summer time of the year.

David Stickney

Bird List for the Day

Little Penguin	Black-fronted Dotterel
Australian Gannet	Bar-tailed Godwit
Great Cormorant	Black-winged Stilt
Little-pied Cormorant	Silver Gull
Black-faced Cormorant	Pacific Gull

Darter	Kelp Gull
Hoary-headed Grebe	Crested Tern
Black Swan	Swamp Harrier
Cape Barren Goose	Peregrine Falcon
Australian Shelduck	Australian Kestrel
Pacific Black Duck	Spotted Turtle-dove
Grey Teal	Galah
Chestnut Teal	Superb Fairy-wren
Australian Wood Duck	White-browed Scrubwren
Australian Shoveler	Brown Thornbill
Hardhead	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Freckled Duck	Spotted Pardalote
Musk Duck	Little Wattlebird
Eurasian Coot	Noisy Miner
Purple Swamphen	Grey Fantail
Black-tailed Native-hen	Magpie Lark
White-faced Heron	Dusky Woodswallow
White-necked Heron	Australian Magpie
Australian White Ibis	Little Raven
Straw-necked Ibis	Welcome Swallow
Royal Spoonbill	Little Grassbird
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Silvereye
Pied Oystercatcher	Common Blackbird
Masked Lapwing	Common Starling



Cape Barren Goose at Swan Lake. Photo P Rayment

ADVANCE NOTICE

SEANA SPRING CAMP - PORTLAND

The next SEANA Camp will be held from Friday 26 September to the following Monday, hosted by the Portland FNC. The venue will be the Portland Yacht Club on the foreshore, and participants are to look after their own accommodation, breakfasts and lunches.

Program highlights include botany, coastal heathlands, birdwatching and a Glenelg River cruise.

Contact Wendy Savage for registration details.