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General meetings

Held at 7:30 pm on the
fourth Friday of each month
at the Newborough Uniting
Church, Old Sale Road
Newborough VIC 3825



Australian Emerald *Hemicordulia australiae* seen during the February excursion to Traralgon Railway Reservoir Conservation Reserve (Photo: Tamara Leitch).

Upcoming events

September general meeting: Friday 23 Sept – Revegetation of high country bogs – Conor Wilson

Excursion: Saturday 24 Sept – Holey Plains State Park. Meet 10am at Harrier Swamp, or 9.15am at Mexican restaurant, cnr Whittakers Rd & Princes Hwy, Traralgon to carpool

Botany Group: Saturday 1 Oct – Lang Lang Bushland Reserve with Jenny Rejske. Meet 10am at reserve

Bird Group: Tuesday 4 Oct – Meet 8.30am Mackeys Rd carpark at Lake Hyland, Churchill

October general meeting: Friday 28 October – Woodland Birds for Biodiversity Project – Dean Ingwersen

Excursion: Saturday 29 October – Uralla Reserve, Trafalgar 10am

Botany Group: Saturday 5 November – Saltmarsh plants in Bass area. Meet 10am, location TBC

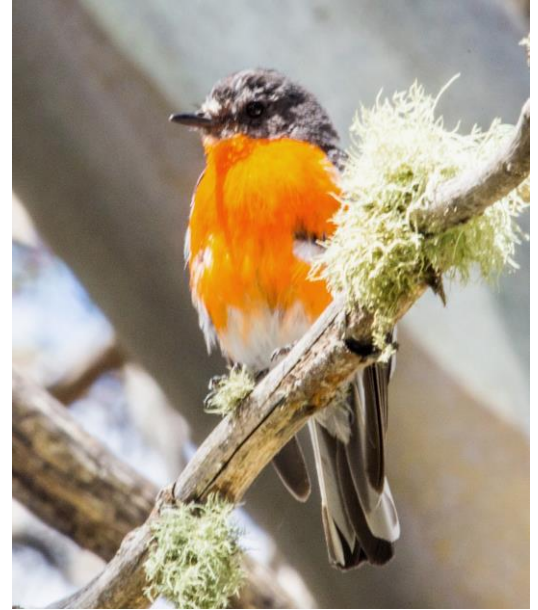
Bird Group: Tuesday 8 Nov – Meet 8.30am intersection of Trafalgar-Willow Grove Rd & Old Sale Rd to explore various locations in Neerim area.

CLUB SUMMER CAMP 2016 – Part 2

Birds of the Baw Baw Plateau

If there is one thing that can be said about the birds of the Baw Baw Plateau, it is that there were very few species. I have made a list of less than 20 species, which is a low number, but most were outnumbered by only three species: Flame Robin, White-eared Honeyeater and, to a lesser extent, Olive Whistler. These species were quite widespread throughout the area that we covered.

The most conspicuous birds were the Flame Robins which had just completed their breeding cycle. We would come across parties of a dozen or more juveniles and immatures, and if we observed them long enough, a single male bird would appear. The female was even more elusive and sometimes difficult to distinguish from the immatures. The difference is that the juveniles have buff wing bars whereas the females have white wing bars. I found the numbers of birds in each party interesting because the normal clutch size for these birds is 3 to 4 eggs so there must have been a number of clutches this season or the numbers made up from immatures from the previous breeding season.



Flame Robin (photo: David Stickney)

They are altitudinal migrants and will migrate to lower altitudes during the winter months. Some birds reportedly migrate from Tasmania but, according to HANZAB, this has not been proven.

Probably the most ubiquitous birds were the White-eared Honeyeaters, which could be heard continuously on all our walks. They are considered to be monogamous, territorial and sedentary but the populations in the high country would be partial altitudinal migrants.

The Olive Whistler was less common but seen on several occasions, often in the company of the other two common species. Most of the birds that I saw were juveniles or immatures, where their white throat was not as fully developed and they had a browner head and breast. They are considered sedentary but the alpine population are partial altitudinal migrants.

Bird List

Australian Raven	Olive Whistler	Striated Pardalote
Blue-winged Parrot	Pied Currawong	Welcome Swallow
Crimson Rosella	Red Wattlebird	White-browed Scrubwren
Flame Robin	Australian Pipit	White-eared Honeyeater
Grey Currawong	Rufous Fantail (J Rejske)	White-plumed Honeyeater (J Rejske)
Grey Fantail	Silvereye	

David Stickney

Dragonflies and damselflies of the Latrobe Valley

The night Reiner Richter screened his photos of dragonflies and damselflies, the audience gasped aloud with nearly every shot. His subjects were so beautiful, and the photography so clear. We all know how small and how active these creatures are, and yet on screen Reiner was able to show their every wing vein and dot of colour. Minute details of their tiny frame could be seen and studied.

Reiner talked to us about the Odonata order. It is not an overwhelmingly huge order and yet he said it took him five years of photographing and studying to learn the names and features of each Victorian species. He used a couple of texts, and the online forum BowerBird was a helpful resource for identification. The differences between species can be very subtle; some diagnostics can only be done during dissection.

The commonly understood distinction between dragonflies and damselflies is that dragonflies rest with their wings outspread and damselflies rest with their wings folded back. Reiner explained that this is true for the UK, but not Australia. Here, there are dragonflies that fold their wings back, and damselflies that sit with their wings outstretched. The real differences are in the wings and the eye structure. Dragonflies have eyes that touch along the centre of their face, or at least at the top. Damselflies have eyes separated by a section of face. They also have front wings that are equal in size and shape to their back wings, whereas dragonflies have wings that differ front and back. Their family names express this: the suborder Zygoptera (*zugos* being Greek for 'even', and *ptera* meaning 'wings') refers to damselflies, and Anisoptera (*anisos* being Greek for 'unequal') refers to dragonflies.

In Victoria there are around 75 species, with about 30 found in the Latrobe Valley. Reiner talked to us about the Latrobe Valley species he had photographed. He showed us the key diagnostics to look for. Distinguishing between male and female is fairly easy because the end of their tails differ. The female has a bulkier tail tip, muscled to enable her to bury or deposit eggs. The male has pincers to enable him to grab the female. Colour and size provide the biggest clues for distinguishing between species, but the differences between some species and others is difficult to determine, especially without a camera. Furthermore, juveniles, adult females and adult males from the same species display differing versions of their colouration. Reiner showed us the areas on the dragonfly or damselfly's body to look at to enable identification – mainly the markings on



Aurora Bluetail damselfly (photo: Tamara Leitch)

the thorax or the tail. One insect might have slightly bigger coloured or black splotches than another, or more or fewer colour bars. The strong and iridescent colours of these creatures are stunning when seen live with the naked eye, but the vibrancy of the markings was really astonishing when seen blown up on screen. Reiner explained that he used a macro lens, and showed the effect of using a flash. He said the Odonata order is not much affected by flash photography; they will fly away unbothered afterwards. Consequently he uses a flash often, unless the day is bright enough.

Reiner's camera is hand-held because these insects are so active - there is no chance to set up equipment. Early mornings or early evenings are the best time to photograph a still dragonfly or damselfly, when they are cold and not ready to fly or move around.

Excursion 27.02.2016

We looked for dragonflies and damselflies with Reiner the next morning at the Traralgon Railway Reservoir Conservation Reserve. This reserve has a number of water bodies and Reiner directed us to an area with good edging vegetation and less exposure to the waterbirds that gather at the pond near the park's entrance, where people throw bread. Reiner recommends wearing a pale-coloured top when looking for dragonflies and damselflies, as they tend to flee from an oncoming dark shape.

On the way to this wetland, we spied birds and insects of various kinds, including native bees that were roosting on the seedhead of a tall grass. Two members of the Friends group that cares for the reserve walked with us and spoke about the tree planting and the weeding that had occurred.

We soon saw a dragonfly, and it was tiny compared to the giant versions we had studied on screen the night before. It was laughable to think that this speeding dot of colour could be identified without the help of a camera, but actually Reiner and others could pick out the likely species; they knew from its Latrobe Valley location, colour, size and behaviour. We saw several species, all beautiful and all busy. At one point, a female of one species could be seen feeding on a male, a sight that Reiner said was quite unusual.



Roosting native bees *Megachile* sp. (Photo: Reiner Richter)

Rose Mildenhall

Regeneration of the Strzelecki Gum – Harley Schinagl 18.03.2016

Identification

Prior to 1976, the Strzelecki Gum was considered an ecotype somewhere between *Eucalyptus brookeriana* and *E. ovata*. Ultimately, *E. brookeriana* was described as a Tasmanian species and it wasn't until 1992 that *E. strzeleckii* was first described in its own right.

Further confusion arose in 2012 when another of the swamp gum family of eucalypts, *E. bunyip*, was isolated. This tree is also easily mistaken for *E. strzeleckii*, except that its habitat range is strictly limited to a small part of the Bunyip State Park where the 4,000 trees identified are considered secure. There is also the possibility of some Bunyip Gums existing in Golden Gully Rd – more research is required.

A note of caution – *E. strzeleckii* and *E. ovata* often require the identification of more than one attribute in order to positively separate them.



Juvenile leaves of Strzelecki Gum (Photo: Harley Schinagl)

Like all swamp gums, the leaf of the Strzelecki Gum often has a wavy margin. It is lance-shaped, concolorous (same colour on both sides), glossy and dark green. The juvenile leaves are sometimes a good identifier/seperator for *strzeleckii* and *ovata* – juvenile Strzelecki Gum leaves are red with sometimes silvery patches on them, whilst Swamp Gum juvenile leaves are distinctly golden.

The oil glands in the Strzelecki Gum leaf are more numerous (giving it a distinct and strong eucalyptus odour), whilst there are fewer oil glands in the leaves of the Swamp Gum (producing a more subtle apple-like odour).

E. strzeleckii is a medium-tall forest tree, 15 to 40 metres, that tends to inhabit floodplains and creek-lines. New growth (from Aug to Nov) is silvery, which pertains to one of its common names, Wax-tip. *E. ovata* is more of a woodland tree, 6 to 25 metres tall.

The smooth, partly ribbony bark of the Strzelecki Gum is described as having red-tan tonings over cream to yellow. Swamp Gums *E. ovata* have somewhat more ribbony bark, which is often described as grey-brown over cream. Both species will often have a more rough and fibrous bark for the first 2 or 3 metres.

The buds of the two species may not always be a reliable identifier. Strzeleckii buds are generally considered to be more rounded than the more diamond-shaped buds of *ovata*.

Conservation

E. strzeleckii can be locally common and developers, farmers, etc are often surprised and mystified by its protection.

There are 45 national parks in Victoria and Strzelecki Gums are known to grow in just 2 of them – Morwell National Park and Great Otway National Park.

Ken Harris reported that *E. strzeleckii* have been planted in the Billys Creek section of Morwell National Park and that some remnants in the area could be the same species and further research is recommended.

The trees in the Great Otway National Park would seem to have been introduced by forestry machinery in the past rather than being locally endemic to the park.

In 2006 the National Recovery Plan for *E. strzeleckii* listed habitat loss (clearing for cropping, grazing, etc), weed invasion (blackberry, ivy, *Phalaris*, thistle, etc), grazing, lack of recruitment, changes to hydrology, increased nutrient levels, loss of genetic diversity and climate change as the principal threats to the species. *E. strzeleckii* does usually regenerate well after a fire event.

The entire distribution of *E. strzeleckii*, apart from the isolated small patch in the Great Otway National Park, is restricted to an area of Gippsland little more than 100 km wide. There exist natural barriers to migration of the species – the Alps to the north, urban Melbourne to the west and the coastal habitat to the south.

In 1998 it was estimated 3,300 to 4,500 *E. strzeleckii* existed and in 2006 the estimate was approaching 15,000. More recent research and updating of records have confirmed at least 1,800

sites containing trees and the total population is probably around 100,000. The majority of sites with confirmed numbers occur within Baw Baw Shire. Unpublished data suggests that, as of this year, over 4000 'desktop locations' of one or more tree exists.

State laws require that for the removal of one protected remnant tree, another 4 remnants of equivalent size must be secured. At the Commonwealth level, the offset is 10 for 1.

Morwell River Wetlands Project

Indigenous Design has been involved in the protection of approximately 5,000 remnants and has planted more than 15,000 in the Latrobe Valley region. Some plantings have survived well, others are struggling. Floods and fire have impacted new plantings to a considerable degree. Within the proximity of the deep channel of the artificial diversion, it may be that the new plantings are too far above river level. *E. strzeleckii* is a floodplain species that enjoys periodic inundation. It is thought that *E. ovata* might cope better with the conditions in that zone.

Research

Simple observations by Indigenous Design, plus a study done by Moxham and Dorrough, indicated that the removal of ground level vegetation under remnants was sufficient to encourage natural recruitment.

Limited self-funded research, in conjunction with Dr Wendy Wright and Dr Philip Rayment of Monash University, implied that revegetation standards from 50/ha in woodland areas up to 200/ha in damp wet forests would be relevant.

Some further implications drawn from the research include: recruits tend to make up 8-14% of healthy remnant populations, fire and flood episodes correlate closely to *E. strzeleckii* recruitment and fire, litter, habitat score and density of intermediate trees are significant explanatory variables. Outcomes of this research indicate that recruitment is likely to be enhanced by reduction of ground storey weeds and periodic reduction of litter.

At this point, much discussion ensued on the pros and cons of roadside clearing and easements for pipelines, power lines, etc.

Effects of Climate Change

Factors relating to *E. strzeleckii* that may be compounded by climate change include the very limited range of the species, its floodplain niche, its fragmented habitat in Gippsland, the existing natural barriers and the genetic resilience of the species. Species distribution modelling done in conjunction with Monash and James Cook Universities suggest that *E. strzeleckii* might be suited for areas around Monbulk and Gembrook just east of Melbourne, some locations in Tasmania and a small zone along the south-west coast of Victoria.

Conclusions

Keeping in mind 'prevention is better than cure', it would seem judicious to build resilience in existing populations through connectivity corridors and increased numbers for genetic diversity, improve protection by increasing the numbers within the reserve system and enhance patch quality to encourage recruitment.

Thank you to Harley (Senior Environmental Consultant and Project Manager at Indigenous Design) for a most informative and professionally delivered presentation.

Peter Ware

Visit to the Wonthaggi Desalination Plant 19.03.2016

Harley Schinagl led the 15 or so of us around the rehabilitated reserve of 263ha, surrounding the Wonthaggi Desalination Plant. He is a senior consultant at Indigenous Design, monitoring and reporting on this site.

Harley described the building we could see, one of 29 on 83ha (www.aquasure.com.au). The lower level is a laboratory and the upper level a management area. In all there are about 50 employees.

The roof cover looks green, and is doing well. It supports coastal vegetation with occasional fertilisation. There is no access there for us at this time. The roof is reinforced to carry the weight. The larger, heavier plants are trimmed to help with this. There are nesting boxes and birdlife, which may become an interesting population in the mini-environment of the fairly constant conditions there. There are glass inspection boxes to monitor the biomass. Fido Gran monitor and maintain this from Melbourne but with a local man working here.

The water intake valves for the plant are 200 metres offshore. These consist of pipes with a series of inlet holes, all the way inshore, avoiding suctioning of debris by keeping the difference in pressures low.

The waste outlets are 1.5 km offshore. The saline water from the plant is heavily diluted out here where there is a strong undertow. The sea life growing on and around the stainless steel pipes is monitored regularly. This might have more meaning when the de-sal plant has been working a while. Fifty gigalitres is to be produced from March this year to supplement the 1000GL currently in reservoirs.

In the plant, the initial filtration reduces the brine. The main energy consumer is the reverse osmosis process. The water produced is 'too clean' so minerals are added to make it potable.

The freshwater pipe from the plant to Melbourne is covered with a styrofoam type material. A thin layer of sandy soil is laid on top of this lighter material. The plants growing there have to manage with less than elsewhere in the reserve.

Harley worked for Gippsland Water in 2008 when water shortages threatened supply to Melbourne. Since then it has been costly not being used. It seemed to Harley that specialists, rather than politicians, were making decisions about the building and commission of the plant.

David added that 90% of our water use is industrial and agricultural, rather than household. The whole system is connected so that this water will contribute to water usage in the Murray Valley.



Vegetation growing on the roof of the building (Photo: Peter Ware)

The question arose of uses for the salt extracted. Port Augusta has the sunshine to evaporate the water more economically. The matter of nano-particles of plastics in sea water was also touched on.

Wes Dobson gave us an account of the coal mines opened in 1909 just to the north of the Reserve, and closed in 1968.

From 1930, these ran at a loss but produced hard black coal that was needed for trains etc. The town, now Wonthaggi, was originally planned to be built nearby in the region of Webb Road, but mines near here prevented this. The miners came first from the goldfields, St Arnaud and Rutherglen.

References

Arthur Guilford, *The state mine: a pictorial history of the Powlett coalfields*, Wonthaggi, Vic: Gumnut Press, 1977

Philip Harper, *The Wonthaggi coalfields: a story of the men and the mines* / Philip Harper, 1987
Wonthaggi and District Historical Society email: wonthaggihistosoc@dcsi.net.au

The de-sal reserve is five or six years old. The graduated boardwalks and gravel pathways are wide, suitable for ambling, bikes and wheelchairs. Cycling is allowed and horse riding occurs in this peaceful place.



Wandering through the reserve (Photo: Peter Ware)

In 2012, about 2.4 million plants were set out:

Tussock Grasses *Poa sp.*, Mat-rushes, Black

Wattle *Acacia mearnsii*, Coastal Tea-tree

Leptospermum laevigatum, Coast Wattle *Acacia*

longifolia sopohorae, Black She-oak

Allocasuarina littoralis, Drooping She-oak *A. verticillata*, Scrub She-oak *A. palludosa*, Blackwood

(but this is not a good place for it), Golden Spray *Viminaria juncea* and Seaberry Saltbush

Rhagodia candolleana. The planting continues at a rate of 100-120 thousand a year now.

Silver wattles grow along the Powlett River, not on the expanse of floodplain. On the higher parts of these artificial dunes, *Eucalyptus ovata* and Coastal Manna Gums grow with *Banksia marginata*, otherwise known as Silver Banksia, and Coast Banksia *B. integrifolia*. They all take much longer to reach maturity than in the Latrobe Valley.

The water features between the 'dunes' are called bio-retention ponds. A Black-shouldered Kite flew over. Ken spotted 10 Pacific Black Duck, Alix a flock of White-fronted Chats... at first two, then eight, and maybe twice that number. There were many Pipits (or were they Skylarks?), a White-necked Heron, and a Nankeen Kestrel.



White-fronted Chat (Photo: David Stickney)

Then, at lunch, we watched an Echidna walking nearby, quite undisturbed by people, and Alix asked Ken to identify a pale beige – almost translucent – frog, not in the best of health and out of its comfort zone in the carpark. It was a Tree Frog. Alix put it down in a greener place.

We then walked along a section of the seashore at Cape Paterson, where the cliffs, tidal reach and rock pools were fascinating. The birdos, looking in earnest out to sea, attracted some passers-by who asked if they were whale watching. It was seabirds, much to their disappointment.

Elizabeth Buckingham

SEANA Autumn Camp at Queenscliff – early April 2016

The natural environments of Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula were the focus of the Autumn 2016 SEANA Camp, hosted in fine style by the Geelong Field Naturalists Club over the extended weekend of 8-11 April. The YMCA's Camp Wyuna in Queenscliff was an excellent base for the event, with spacious areas for evening talks, meetings and meals for the 95 participants, many of whom were well accommodated in modern, comfortable lodges on site. Eight members of our club attended.

On Friday evening, three Geelong FNC members gave a good introduction to the main camp themes. Graeme Tribe outlined the dynamic coastal processes along the Bellarine Peninsula which include the high two-metre tides between Cape Otway and Wilson's Promontory and the high water velocity through The Rip. Despite losses of forest habitat since European settlement, the peninsula has wetlands of international importance (e.g. Lake Connewarre), coastal vegetation reserves (Edwards Point Conservation Reserve near St Leonards being of particular note) and diverse marine life offshore. Sadly, there are major threats to the natural environment from large-scale residential development. Graeme noted that a proposed Armstrong Creek development envisaged to house 70,000 people is a major current concern. Geelong club president Barry Lingham followed up with an overview of some of the special places included in the camp program, including the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve, Port Phillip Heads Marine NP, Lake Victoria and Lake Lorne. Deborah Evans outlined some of the geology of the region – the Bluff near Barwon Heads was to prove a good site for viewing eroded calcarenite formations which reveal unconformities created during periods of erosion, followed by deposition and cementation of more sand dunes.

A highlight of the talks was Saturday evening's presentation by Parks Victoria marine ecologist Mark Rodrigue, who superbly depicted the beauty and diversity of the region's marine plant and animal life. Then, on Sunday evening, Maddie Glynn focused on the larger marine fauna including whales, seals and dolphins, and Craig Morley showed excellent photos of the local birdlife.



High tide inundation of mud flats at Lake Connewarre (Photo: Phil Rayment)

The excursions program featured three boat trips to the Mud Islands and Popes Eye in Port Phillip Bay, along with a number of land-based activities at sites including those mentioned above and covering plants, birds, geology and ecology. I particularly enjoyed visiting Edwards Point; one plant of interest was the Wirilda Wattle, some specimens of which were parasitised by the Needle-leaf Mistletoe. At Lake Connewarre State Game Reserve near Ocean Grove's boat ramp jetty, the mudflats were very dry when we arrived early afternoon, not having been under water for at least nine months, but as we wandered, they were inundated as the result of a combination of an extreme high tide and a strong wind towards on-shore – an amazing sight! Taits Point Lookout on Lake Connewarre is a good elevated vantage point: even though the waterbirds were not abundant, we enjoyed sighting three Brolgas on a hill across the water and a pair of Red-rumped Parrots

perched contentedly on a low branch of a eucalypt.

It was a pleasure on Sunday night to move a vote of appreciation to our hosts, including president Barry Lingham (celebrating his sixtieth birthday that very day), camp coordinator Deborah Evans and the many other involved Geelong club members for a great camp, which concluded following a beach walk at Point Lonsdale on Monday morning.

Philip Rayment

Birdlife Australia Bird Challenge Count 2016

LVFNC members and friends will be participating in the count again this year. The possible days are Fri 2nd – Mon 5th December. Leaders, groupings of participants, sites to be visited and on which of the days, will need to be worked out in October. For now, please note the days and plan when you can join in.

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING 22.08.2016

Finance

Cash Management Trading Account: \$2,675.42 Term Deposit: \$15,962.71

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

- Thanks to Rose for so competently taking on the Secretary role for 3 months
- September GM and excursion: D Stickney and P Rayment away so K Harris will be Acting President
- Microscope: Used at Botany Group to look at mosses, is working fine.
- Club Spring Camp at Otways 21-25 October: Accommodation \$55 per night, 14 people on list so far for Youth Hostel. Need to organise excursions. Julie suggested evening trip to nearby sugar glider attraction, including treetop walk, and will investigate details.
- SEANA Autumn Camp 2017 at Sale: Working on first circular and registration to be sent out in October and will be due late January, also to include accommodation info. Have organised and scheduled excursions for the weekend. Boat trip includes a bus subsidised by SEANA. Motioned that a \$200 loan be made for preliminary expenses.
- Photographic competition planning: Application forms and labels available from Ken or Wendy. Entries to be submitted between 1 Sept and 31 Nov.
- Friends of Tyers Park via Jim Stranger have asked if we can lead a walk to familiarise the Friends with plants in the park. Will put it on our program for next spring.
- Crinigan Rd request for plant ID walk to be led by K Harris for members. Date to be set in Oct.
- Yarra Gum Reserve: Ken Smith rung by Cr Graeme Middlemiss seeking club feedback regarding a plan to put a walking track through the reserve. Phil suggested it could potentially improve management of the reserve, but has asked for more details.
- Planned Burning Community Collaboration: Pete Sheldon and Kate Hill presented at GM and we will schedule for 2017 program a more detailed presentation and feedback. Booklets of draft 2017 burning schedule shown at meeting were to be sent to club. Will email them to follow up.
- "Caring for Waterhole Creek" campaign being run by EPA and WGCMA, may involve surveying water quality, vegetation and birds. Chris McCormack was to contact D Stickney, so will wait for his return.
- Eulalie Brewster's 90th birthday party celebration at Inverloch was attended by 100+ friends including a number of our members.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER

The Club welcomes Roger Hudson from Warragul. We wish you a long and happy association with us.

Guest speaker for September

Conor Wilson

Conor is a ranger with Parks Victoria who works in the Alpine National Park. He will discuss his involvement in managing threats to the alpine peat bogs such as invasive plants, off-road driving and poorly situated tracks.



Guest speaker for October

Dean Ingwersen

Dean manages Birdlife Australia's 'Woodland Birds for Biodiversity' project. This project is focused on acquiring private land for conservation, as well as implementing recovery actions for threatened species such as the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot.



Latrobe Valley Naturalist is the official publication of the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalist Club Inc. The Club subscription includes the "Naturalist".

Brief contributions and short articles on any aspect of natural history are invited from members of all clubs. Articles, including those covering Club speakers and excursions, would typically be around one A4 side in length, should not exceed 1,000 words, and may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Photos should be sent as an attachment and be a maximum of 1 megabyte in size.

Responsibility for the accuracy of information and opinions expressed in this magazine rests with the author of the article.

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Deadline for articles to be considered for inclusion in the next issue (November/December): 11 November 2016

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