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## Website

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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



Common Heath *Epacris impressa* flowering in Tyers Park during the Club's July excursion (Photo: Phil Rayment).

## **Upcoming events**

SEANA Autumn Camp: 16-18 April – Hamilton.

April general excursion: Saturday 24 April – Mathison Park & Billys Creek. Meet 10am Mackeys Rd carpark.

Botany Group: Saturday 1 May – Fungi at Blue Rock Dam.

Bird Group: Tuesday 4 May – Drouin area. Meet 9am Picnic Point Reserve, Princes Way, Drouin West.

Bird Group: Thursday 20 May – EA Wetlands survey. Meet 9am onsite.

May general excursion: Saturday 29 May – Fungi at Lyrebird Walk. Meet 10am onsite.

Bird Group: Tuesday 1 June – Uralla Nature Reserve. Meet 9am onsite.

Botany Group: Saturday 5 June – Botanical terminology. Details TBC.

June general excursion: Saturday 26 June – Glenmaggie. Details TBC.

Botany Group: Saturday 3 July – Asteraceae keys in VicFlora database. Details TBC.

## Report on Bird Challenge Count 2020

*Birds Counted – TICK ✓ .... Well done us!*

Because COVID-19 restrictions were more liberal in country Victoria, our Club's annual bird count was able to go ahead, even though Birds Australia had cancelled the official event.

Over four days at the beginning of December 2020, Club members and friends set off to survey 13 main sites and two more in-between locations. There were 23 bird counters, with several people contributing their time on each of the four days.

The survey found 116 species and 3,133 individual birds, a satisfying result for most participants. Because the number of observers and the time spent at each site varies from year to year, our data isn't scientific, but it is interesting to us and to others who enjoy watching birds in our region.

*Bulk birds or a diversity of species?*

To see the most birds at one site, heading to the Moe Treatment Works was the most rewarding, although the industrial nature of the site is not the general image that people associate with birdwatching. That group found 543 birds with 47 species represented. One rare species, a Little Egret, put our Club's telescope, and those of several members, to good use. Much time was spent trying to work out if the bird in question had black legs or was just a bit grubby. At least it kept still!

Bird numbers weren't as high at the Energy Australia (EA) wetlands at Morwell Bridge, but the number of species was higher in the more varied habitat at that site. The EA wetlands group identified 57 species, the highest species count for any site in this year's survey, and counted 239 birds.

There was also a hefty total of birds on the journey between sites for the group surveying Yarragon South and Trafalgar; their total of 504 birds and 25 species included 97 Australian Magpies, 115 Common Starlings and 121 Australian Wood Ducks.



Photos: Little Egret at Moe Treatment Works (David Stickney), and its habitat (Jay Duncan).

The same group identified 52 species at Yarragon South comprising 380 individual birds. That group listed their day's highlights as follows:

- A large number of Brown Gerygones at Uralla Reserve in Trafalgar, which were both visible and highly audible
- An Olive Whistler, heard at Uralla Reserve, had not been recorded since 2008
- Four Eastern Whipbirds at Uralla running up into a bush. "We seemed to have lots of males calling without females answering."

The group that went to Traralgon Railway Reserve and Wirilda Environment Park near Tyers had the second highest daily species count after the Yarragon and Trafalgar blitz. They saw one more bird species than the Moe and Lake Narracan crew. The highlight at Wirilda was:

- "To see all the honeyeaters in one tree while we were having lunch!"
- A Rufous Fantail that flew under Marja and Joëlle's noses along the track

The site with the lowest species recorded was Lake Narracan, where the Friday group was definitely flagging after lunch. Remember, they had just spent quality time at the Moe Treatment works counting ever so many birds and squinting at the Little Egret.

One bird only was seen of these species:

- One White-necked Heron, at Trafalgar Treatment ponds
- One Royal Spoonbill, at Moe Treatment Works
- One Little Egret, at Moe Treatment Works
- One Latham's Snipe, at Traralgon Railway Conservation Reserve
- One Whistling Kite, at Moe Treatment Works
- One Brown Goshawk, at Crinigan Rd Reserve in Morwell
- One Australian (Nankeen) Kestrel, at Yarragon South
- One Brush Bronzewing, between Yarragon South and Trafalgar
- One Australasian Pipit, at Yarragon South
- One Large-Billed Scrubwren, at Uralla Reserve
- One Olive Whistler, at Uralla (heard)

It's interesting to observe that most of the sites where these singleton birds were seen are inside or just on the outskirts of town boundaries in Trafalgar, Morwell and Traralgon. It's also great that we are able to get permission to watch birds at the Moe and Trafalgar Treatment Works and the EA wetlands. Thanks are due to Gippsland Water, Energy Australia Yallourn and to Joëlle for organising it all.

The birds most likely to be seen were:

- Grey Fantails – observed at every site except the Moe and Trafalgar Treatment works and Bank Street Traralgon (12 sites, 78 birds)
- Yellow-faced Honeyeaters – observed everywhere except the two treatment works and Edward Hunter Reserve in Moe (12 sites, 56 birds)

- Pacific Black Ducks – 260 were seen at 11 sites, making this the species with the most individual birds counted. Unfortunately its nearest rival in numbers was the introduced Common Starling; 236 Starlings were counted at seven sites, and were in quite high numbers at some locations.
- Superb Fairy-wrens – counted at 10 sites with 46 birds recorded.
- Australian Magpies – all around with 185 birds recorded at 11 sites; and Little Ravens weren't far behind with 93 birds seen at 10 sites.

*Join us to do it all again in 2021 (COVID willing)*

Out of respect for our volunteer bird counters, next year we've cut the total Bird Challenge Count time back by half a day. This was done by separating our regular quarterly count at EA wetlands from the main bird survey count.

We'll still need to look at Crinigan Rd in Morwell but we can do it on the Thursday morning and have the afternoon off.

Diary dates for 2021 are: Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December to Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December

Jay Duncan

### **Excursion to Nangara Reserve 27.06.2020**

Eight members gathered on a very chilly, but sunny, morning at Nangara Reserve near Jindivick.

Features of the reserve include a memorial to the Black Saturday bushfires which burned through the northern section of the reserve in 2009, and acknowledgement of the significant indigenous heritage of the surrounding area. In the 1980s a gravel quarry was established in the reserve; it closed in 1998 and the area was rehabilitated.

Trincas Tramline ran through the Reserve in the 1980s, transporting logs and sawn timber to the mills at Longwarry.

In the carpark, Ken noted a Drooping Mistletoe on a Cherry Ballart – both species are parasitic! As we set off on the Nangara Loop Track, the botany enthusiasts produced two lists from previous excursions and began marking off species as they were identified and adding some new ones.

The tall Messmate, Silvertop Gums, Blackwood and Silver Wattle kept the sun from us but didn't stop us from appreciating the wide variety of ferns and fungi, the *Correa reflexa* with its pale green flowers and the Pink Heath – Victoria's floral emblem. The not-so-common *Boronia muelleri* and *Hakea eriantha* were also identified. The quarry settling ponds provided some variety with Spike Rush and the ratchet calls of the Eastern Common Froglet.



*Correa reflexa* (Photo: Reiner Richter)

Very few birds were seen – a female Golden Whistler, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, a scrubwren, Brown Thornbills and a Pied Currawong. Kookaburras and Yellow Robins were heard calling through the forest.

We shared the reserve with a number of other walkers and a horse-riding group. It was a great opportunity to be out and about again, enjoying the wonderful diversity of the bushland. The walking tracks were in good condition and the sculptures along the way were appreciated.

We finished the excursion with lunch, sitting on the deck in the sunshine at the Jindivick cricket ground and enjoying the extensive view over the valley below.

Later we walked through the well-cared-for artistic community garden which was nearby.

Our thanks go to Wendy for leading a very enjoyable and informative excursion.

Meryl Cracknell

### **A plethora of yellow corals**

During the COVID-19 'Lockdown', I was surprised to find myself with so much free time on my hands. I spent a lot of it adding sightings to iNaturalist, where I now have almost 1000 species logged for our property. Observations have come from light-trapping for invertebrates, setting motion-sensing cameras, and generally looking and listening, including getting down on hands and knees to hunt for cryptic fungi.

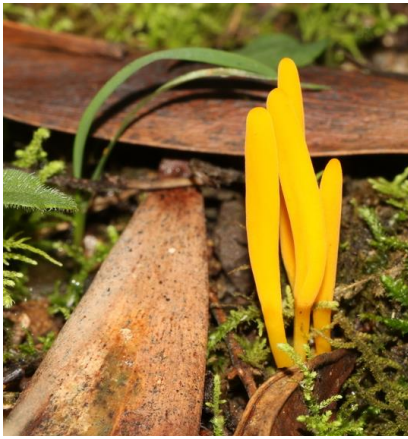
The Lockdown coincided with the best fungi season that I can remember. Things I would usually find a few of were about in huge numbers, while many other new species were added. One surprising thing I noticed was the number of yellow 'corals' that I was finding, a few of which were only known to me from the glossy photos in books or from other people's pictures online.

I have five families here that contain species many refer to as 'corals' or 'clubs', those being Auriscalpiaceae, Clavariaceae, Clavulinaceae, Gomphaceae and Hericiaceae. I will, however, list the species in alphabetical order, rather than by family. There are a few more that can be yellowish, or show hints of yellow here and there, especially as they age, but I had to draw the line somewhere.

*Clavaria amoena* (Clavariaceae) – Variable but usually a simple yellow club to around 100 mm tall, it is usually cylindrical but can also be oval or flat in cross-section and occasionally can be multi-branched. Usually yellow but can be slightly orange, this one pops up in vast numbers.

*Clavulinopsis depokensis* (Clavariaceae) – It can appear very similar to *Clavaria amoena*, however it tends to be flat in cross-section, often twisted and branched, and will have pointed tips that brown with age. It gets to around 80 mm tall and has a very short stipe of around 5 mm, usually hidden below leaf litter.

*Clavulinopsis fusiformis* (Clavariaceae) – This one is easy to pick as it will form dense clumps of individuals, all arising from a common white base. It gets a bit bigger too, reaching 150 mm and has pointed tips, often browning with age.



*Clavaria amoena* (left), *Clavulinopsis depokensis* (centre) and *Clavulinopsis fusiformis* (right) (Photos: Matt Campbell).

*Phaeoclavulina ochracea* (Gomphaceae) – Growing to 55 mm tall, it has a stipe that arises from a white mycelial ball, which in turn starts branching at around 30 mm above ground. The branch divisions are usually dichotomous (dividing in 2) with the branches being very upright and delicate with a fine point.

*Ramaria flaccida* (Gomphaceae) – Coloured like mustard, this one, while having a stipe, usually branches very close to the ground, with the stipe and mycelial ball often buried. The branch tips tend to be dichotomous with fine points and paler than the branches.

*Ramaria lorithamnus* (Gomphaceae) – Very bright yellow, this one can reach 100 mm in height and has dichotomous branch tips which are very short and blunt and tend to be paler than the main fruit body. It can have a whitish stipe, although it is usually buried, and will bruise wine-red.



*Phaeoclavulina ochracea* (left), *Ramaria flaccida* (centre) and *Ramaria lorithamnus* (right) (Photos: Matt Campbell).

*Ramaria watlingii* (Gomphaceae) – Much like *R. lorithamnus*, this one can reach 120 mm and tends to be paler, but it is easy to distinguish as its dichotomous branch-tips tend to divide at right angles, and it will not change colour if bruised.

*Ramariopsis cremicolor* (Clavariaceae) – I must admit to knowing very little about this one, having only recently learnt of its existence. I had been identifying them as pale examples of *Ramariopsis crocea*, and was discussing them with Reiner Richter, when somebody made us aware of this species.

*Ramariopsis crocea* (Clavariaceae) – This delicate little coral reaches 50 mm in height and has dichotomous branches that end in fine points and often take on the appearance of antlers. It can be bright yellow to orange in colour.



*Ramaria watlingi* (left), *Ramariopsis cremicolor* (centre left), *Ramariopsis crocea* (centre right) and *Ramariopsis simplex* (right) (Photos: Matt Campbell).

*Ramariopsis simplex* (Clavariaceae) – It looks much like *Clavaria amoena* except that it is shorter, is always a round and simple club, and has a short but very distinct stipe that is an opaque yellow, while the spore-bearing upper section is bright yellow.

Matt Campbell

## Winter birdwatching at Yarragon South

Every year since I retired 13 years ago we have gone away for most of the winter. COVID-19 restrictions on travel changed that. Our booked trip to Italy, Morocco and London to see our daughter and baby granddaughter was replaced by winter at home in Yarragon South.

This was no hardship, I discovered, as I loved being home and could always find plenty to do, and one of the highlights was spending more time on my morning walk birdwatching. There was no rush as there was nothing pressing to do or places to go for the rest of the day during the lockdown. I was amazed at how many birds were out and about in winter – some wet or windy mornings they were relatively quiet, but mostly there were plenty to see and hear.

I took to counting how many birds I noticed as I walked the kilometre and a half along the road to the back corner of our property and back again. I found this exercise made me much more aware of what I was hearing and I spent more time stopping and looking to try and identify all the calls I heard. Although most calls were familiar to me, there were always some that were not easy to place.

Most mornings I expected to record over 20 birds. The first part of my walk along Earls Road from our house was open farmland with some water bodies. I nearly always saw Wood Ducks and Black Ducks, but at one stage there were also a pair of Chestnut Teal and three Grey Teal. White-faced Herons and occasionally Masked Lapwings were seen around the water too. In these open areas I was sure to see Crimson Rosellas, Magpies and Magpie-larks, and would often record Red Wattlebirds, Eastern Spinebills, Grey Butcherbirds and Galahs. Eastern Rosellas were sometimes seen, but they were far more common lower down the hill towards Yarragon.

When I reached the Yarragon South Road, I headed down to the back of our property where the road is lined with trees and there are significant patches of remnant vegetation. This is Mountain Ash forest with fern gullies and the understory species found in Warm Temperate Rainforest. The most regularly recorded species here are Brown Thornbills, White-browed Scrubwrens, White-throated Treecreepers, Grey Shrike-thrushes and Eastern Whipbirds. I spent some time trying to tell the thornbill and scrubwren sounds apart, as although both of them had their signature sounds that I was familiar with, there were many little chirps and peeps that I couldn't decide to whom they belonged. I have only recorded a Brown Gerygone twice, and the second time I got a good look at it, so was able to confirm that I hadn't forgotten its call.



Eastern Whipbird at Wendy's property in 2016 (Photo: Ken Harris)

The extra time I spent stopping to look and listen reaped rewards. For a long while I wasn't seeing Superb Fairy-wrens and I was worried that they'd disappeared, but later I found if I was patient I could spot them most days; there were a couple of groups with a few lovely blue males. I also recorded the Eastern Yellow Robin quite often, but there was no sign of the Rose Robins this year.

Grey Fantails, Golden Whistlers, Kookaburras, Pied Currawongs and King Parrots were also seen here. Lewin's Honeyeaters were heard calling intermittently, and later in winter I recorded a Crescent Honeyeater and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. Each day I heard ravens and mostly they were a group, which I recorded as Little Ravens, but some days as well there was a lone Australian Raven giving the distinctive downward 'aaaah' at the end of its call.

The highlight of birdsong most mornings was a male Superb Lyrebird calling long and loudly in the 30 acres of bush on Jackie and Geoff Tims' place, which they have protected with a Trust for Nature covenant. Its repertoire included a Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Magpie, Grey Shrike-thrush, Pied Currawong, Whipbird and even a Pilotbird – this is one bird that I have not heard here, but it was heard by Rohan Bugg in this gully during one Bird Count Challenge; this area is the first part of our annual survey route. Another lyrebird which I sometimes hear calling on our property has incorporated the sound of a steel fence-post being hammered into the ground into its repertoire.

One completely new bird song puzzled me for a week or two. I had never heard it before, and had two glimpses of the bird: the first time it appeared thrush-sized and grey underneath, and the second time it flew away down the gully and appeared brown on top with a longish tail. Finally I spotted the mystery bird calling in a Blackwood and it was a Bassian Thrush. I'd only seen them skulking on the ground before and never heard them make a sound, but a phone call to David Mules confirmed that this is what they do in the mating season.

Also on my list were Spotted Pardalotes, Little Wattlebirds, Welcome Swallows and a Willy Wagtail that returned in late winter from who knows where. The only introduced birds I got were Blackbirds and the horrible flying rats, Common Mynas, which have just recently decided to stay around; in the past we'd only see them occasionally. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of August I heard my first Fan-tailed Cuckoo for the season, a sign that spring was on the way.

Wendy Savage



## Ferns at Glen Nayook 04.07.2020

The Botany Group's second excursion, since the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions, took place on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July, and was to look at the plentiful ferns in Glen Nayook Reserve, about 10 km north of Neerim South. We had a list of 30 for the reserve and we ended up seeing 23 of them.

Six hardy (or foolhardy) souls met in the carpark on a cold and wet morning, well rugged up for the forecast conditions. Glen Nayook is a 9 hectare reserve of remnant Mountain Ash forest and a fern gully on the east branch of the Tarago River. There is a 1.5 km loop track which descends steeply to the gully, follows the river for a while then ascends on a gentler gradient.

At the start of the descent, the ferns were those found in drier areas: Bracken *Pteridium esculentum*, Mother Shield-fern *Polystichum proliferum* and Rough Tree-fern *Cyathea australis*.



*Sticherus urceolatus* showing angle of the pinnules to the rachis (Photos: Tamara Leitch)

About halfway down was a patch of fan-ferns, with fronds characteristically fanning out like fingers. I had with me 'Ferns and Allied Plants of Vic, Tas & SA' published by Betty Duncan (Jay's mother) and Golda Isaacs in 1986, and keyed out the fan-ferns to *Sticherus tener*. Later, consulting the online Flora of Victoria revealed that in 1998 taxonomists revised aspects of the genus *Sticherus*. The fern that Duncan and Isaacs, and the 1994 version of 'Flora of Victoria', described as *S. tener* is now named *S. urceolatus*. One of the main features distinguishing the species of the genus *Sticherus* is the angle of the pinnules to the rachis on the ultimate branches of the plant. These angles were about 60° in the fan-ferns we saw, and they keyed out to *S. urceolatus*; *S. tener* has pinnules angled at 75° - 80° and is restricted to the Powelltown area and the Otways.

The Long Fork-fern *Tmesipteris obliqua* is a fern we don't see often, and we found some on a tree-fern. It has hanging pinnate fronds which to me look a bit like the fronds of a conifer such as the Wollemi Pine. It is called a fork-fern because the fertile fronds have forked appendages with two prongs.

As we descended towards the gully, the track zigzagged repeatedly, and near the bottom it was cut into the hillside creating high banks which were clothed in ferns. Here we found our first filmy-fern, Austral Filmy-fern *Hymenophyllum australe*. Small, almost transparent fronds were covered in droplets of water and, growing amongst abundant mosses, they clothed the banks in greenery.

At the bottom in the gully we walked up some of the small tracks to find a clump of Austral Lady-fern *Diplazium australe*, which is a large soft fern growing from a clump with fronds a little like tree-ferns', which can be up to 1.5 m long. Necklace Fern *Asplenium flabellifolium* was growing on some granite rocks, so named because of its long narrow fronds with little fan-shaped pinnules. Myrtle Beeches grew down here and Marja pointed out a tall Southern Sassafras.

The track along the creek was a lovely garden of ferns: Mother Spleenwort *Asplenium bulbiferum* was plentiful, and superficially to me resembled the equally plentiful Shiny Shield-ferns *Lastreopsis acuminata*. They both grow in a clump, and were on the ground or on the trunks of tree-ferns or fallen mossy logs. They have shiny, triangular, twice-pinnate fronds which taper to a long narrow apex. They were easy to tell apart by flipping over the fronds to see if the sori were shaped like sausages as in the spleenwort, or were round as in the shield-fern. You could also pick the Mother Spleenwort if it had bulbils or little baby ferns on the end of the fronds, as do the Mother Shield-ferns we saw at the top of the track.

The Leathery Shield-fern *Rumohra adiantiformis* was also on our list, but I was not able to find it. Ken Harris told me when we emerged at the top of the track for lunch that he saw plenty of them, but as I was so far behind (social distancing, of course!) he couldn't show me. I went back down by myself after lunch to try and find them but was again unsuccessful. They are similar to *Lastreopsis acuminata* in having round sori and fronds of similar appearance, but like a Hare's-foot Fern, they have a creeping rhizome with the fronds spaced along the rhizome. As the base of all these ferns was hidden below the hanging fronds or deep in moss and leaf litter I had to keep plunging my hands in to feel the base of the fronds, which I always found to be growing from a clump. And for my trouble I got a leech between my fingers. I only discovered it hours later back home when I was doing a crossword by the fire. It was nice and fat by then and I was able to give my grandchildren a lesson on the safe removal of a leech with some salt. They were most impressed with all the blood oozing from the bite.

Wendy Savage

*A full list of ferns observed during this excursion is available in Appendix I.*

Please note that annual club membership fees were due on **1<sup>st</sup> March 2021.**

*Latrobe Valley Naturalist* is the official publication of the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists 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 (May/June): 24 May 2021**

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**APPENDIX I – List of ferns observed at Glen Nayook 04.07.2021 (W. Savage, M. Rowe & M. Bouman)**

<i>Asplenium bulbiferum</i>	Mother Spleenwort
<i>Asplenium flabellifolium</i>	Necklace Fern
<i>Diplazium australe</i>	Austral Lady-fern
<i>Blechnum cartilagineum</i>	Gristle Water-fern
<i>Blechnum chambersii</i>	Lance Water-fern
<i>Blechnum nudum</i>	Fishbone Water-fern
<i>Blechnum patersonii</i>	Strap Water-fern
<i>Blechnum wattsii</i>	Hard Water-fern
<i>Cyathea australis</i>	Rough Tree-fern
<i>Histiopteris incisa</i>	Bat's-wing Fern
<i>Pteridium esculentum</i>	Austral Bracken
<i>Dicksonia antarctica</i>	Soft Tree-fern
<i>Lastreopsis acuminata</i>	Shiny Shield-fern
<i>Polystichum proliferum</i>	Mother Shield-fern
<i>Rumohra adiantiformis</i>	Leathery Shield-fern
<i>Sticherus urceolatus</i>	Spreading Fan-fern
<i>Notogrammitis billardierei</i>	Common Finger-fern
<i>Hymenophyllum australe</i>	Austral Filmy-fern
<i>Hymenophyllum flabellatum</i>	Shiny Filmy-fern
<i>Polyphlebium venosum</i>	Bristle Fern
<i>Microsorium pustulatum</i>	Kangaroo Fern
<i>Tmesipteris obliqua</i>	Long Fork-fern
<i>Pellaea falcata</i>	Sickle Fern

"Protect and enjoy"



**Latrobe Valley Naturalist**

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