

THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Volume L No. 3 February / March 2017

The aim of the Launceston Field Naturalists Club is to encourage the study of all aspects of natural history and to support the conservation of our natural heritage

- Patron : Professor Nigel Forteath
- President : Mrs J Handler, 52 Entally Rd Hadspen, 6393 6603
- Secretary : Mrs P Wright
- Hon. Treasurer : Mrs K Manning, 46 Robin St Newstead, 6344 2277

Meetings 1st Tuesday of month, Feb-Dec at Scotch-Oakburn College, Penquite Rd Newstead

Program:

April ~

Tuesday 4 - General Meeting guest speaker Simon Fearn, *Will the real Christmas beetle please stand up: what is a Christmas beetle and why big mandibles matter.*

Friday 14 to Sunday 16 - Weekend at Ben Lomond - Hosted by Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

Sunday 30 - Skemps Day - Water monitoring

May ~

Tuesday 2 - John Skemp Memorial Lecture guest speaker Dr Eric Woehler, *Resident shorebirds*

Sunday 7 - Field Trip - Cluan Tier fungi hunting

Saturday 20 - Skemp Day - Fungi and snail hunt

June ~

Tuesday 6 - General Meeting guest speaker John Harris, *Wombats*

TBA - Field Trip with John Harris to look at wombats in the West Tamar area

Sunday 25 - Skemps Day - Tree maintenance

For further program details visit <http://www.lfnc.org.au/meetings.htm>

Skemp Report, February – March 2017

A dry February has seen less growth in the grass and not as much mowing although bracken and weeds are still a problem. John has been working on foxglove and has found some to spray on most Tuesdays of late and other members worked on them in the Watergate Track area last Skemp Day. It was great to see that the foxglove has been removed along the far side of Myrtle Bank Road at the back of Skemps. The plants had been dug out and I assume it was the fellow who owns the property over the road from the boom gate.

Holly is an ongoing problem with five more trees found recently, which have been dealt with. There is a difficult holly on the road near the settling tank which may have been cut down in the past as it covers a substantial area. Some fallen limbs have layered and there seems to be many suckers and it is on a steep section of bank and is hard to get at.

Rob removed a major blockage in the middle of the Fern Gully, but there is another waiting for us further down as well as other falls on the Forest Nature Trail.

After some hard work by Grant, John, Rob and myself, we were able to hoist two dumped lounge chairs up and out of the Fern Gully. They were placed at the old fire shed with other rubbish and removed by the Launceston City Council during the recent hard waste collection. Thanks to Claire for suggesting the hard waste collection as a method for their final removal.

Future tasks apart from the foxglove removal, includes maintenance on the trees planted along Skemp Creek by removing guards and trimming them back to reduce the damage from grazing animals. This will be done on Skemp Days and National Tree Day in the middle of the year.

Noel Manning

Puggle

March ~ Lynne Mockridge showed four large cue cards, with the names *Dacelo novaeguineae*, *Acacia baileyana*, *Bombus terrestris* and *Petaurus breviceps* on them. Her question was “what did they have in common?” John Elliott answered saying they were all introduced species.

Dacelo novaeguineae, laughing kookaburra
Bombus terrestris, bumble bee

Acacia baileyana, Cootamundra wattle
Petaurus breviceps, sugar glider

Sightings

February ~ Tina had seen the Australian fur seal in Penquite Road on Boxing Day. Noel reported that during the crowded leek orchid monitoring in Surrey Hills, he had seen this rare orchid many times. Daphne saw cape barren geese at Mt William National Park. Prue had seen hyacinth orchids everywhere and stated that she thought there were not as many cicadas this year as 2 years ago. Peter L had seen a mountain devil at Woolnorth Wind Farm and an eastern spinebill laying down on bare earth sunbathing. Tina and Peter W both saw hardhead ducks at Queechy Lake.

March ~ On the Nile Road, Tina had seen a dead male devil which had no obvious tumours, also a dead wombat which had no signs of mange. Sarah had seen a white swan at the Riverside Lake. During saltmarsh monitoring, Prue had seen 329 black swans in the bay at Middle Point, Rowella.

Library Report ~ Tina has received several newsletters from other field naturalists clubs and also the Running Postman. She mentioned an article in the TFNC newsletter that she found interesting about 5 different bird species raising young cuckoos.

A Guide to Flowers & Plants of Tasmania ~ Preparations are underway to review and update the content in the Club's book. We would like to hear from members who would be willing to help with this work which will be ongoing until the next printing. It will involve checking that scientific and family names have not changed, using the *Census of the Vascular Plants of Tasmania* and other resources, and confirming information included with each

plants description.

We would also ask that members have a look through the guide and if you have better images of any plants please submit them for consideration as a replacement for the one in the book. Photographers are acknowledged in the book for their images. Please contact Karen on 6344 2277 if you can help with the guide update or would like to submit images.

New Members ~ At the March general meeting we welcomed Robyn Bresciani to the Club. Robyn visited Ben Lomond with members in February and has been to Skemps. We look forward to her participating in future activities.

Photos for Club Calendar ~ John Elliott gave a short presentation at the March meeting regarding the specifications for photos being submitted for the calendar for 2018, which are:

- **Picture size** - For a good A4 print, the photo has to be at least 12 megapixels and preferably 25 megapixels. If the photo looks good when it fills a 34 cm laptop screen, it should be ok to print.
- **Orientation** - Landscape (long side horizontal), not portrait.
- **Aspect ratio** - 3:2 (eg 30 cm x 20 cm) is closest to A4. Other aspect ratios will be cropped to 3:2. Leave some more space around the subject so this can be done.
- **Framing** - More or less fill the frame but leave some room for cropping.
- **Composition** - Generally the main object of interest should be off-centre rather than dead centre. For smaller flowers or fungi, a group of, say, 3 is usually better.
- **Subjects** - Animals, birds, plants, fungi or geology that occur naturally in Tasmania. Introduced species or garden varieties will not be accepted.
- **Identification** - You must identify the subject of the photo.
- **Text** - You need to provide up to 3 sentences about the subject. If I don't get the identification and text, I will not use the photo. You can, however, leave the identification and text until I ask you about a particular photo.
- **When photos are required?** - By the June meeting.
- **How?** - Email them to the Secretary or john_elliott_10@hotmail.com or give them to John on a flash-drive.

Photos for The Year That Was (TYTW) ~ For the benefit of new members, TYTW refers to a power point presentation usually shown at the December meeting, although last year shown at the Christmas function at Skemps. The presentation is of photos from Club activities held during the year that members have taken.

Peter Ralph has kindly agreed to put this presentation together for 2017. If you have photos you would like to contribute, please submit them to him as soon as possible after the occasion. They can be emailed to Peter at pralph@intas.net.au or handed to him on a USB.

FIELD TRIP ~ Ben Lomond National Park ~ Friday 3 to Sunday 5 February 2017

As we climbed away from Launceston the temperature dropped from 20+ to around 11 at the ski village, although Peter had a warming fire going on this sunny, windy and at times foggy Friday start to our Ben Lomond weekend.

Some showed prospective member Robyn around the village and afterwards our family walked a partially refurbished trail on the ridge to the north then down to the road followed by a leisurely walk back to the village.

Members Tina, Tom and Irmgard returned to Launceston while Claire, Karen, Karl, Noel and Peter and visitors Debra, Erica, Lucy, Prue and Robyn socialised after their evening meal before turning in, mostly using the 8 double bed, double bunks of the Borrowdale ski lodge.

On Saturday morning the well equipped kitchen was a hive of activity as we all sorted our breakfast and some prepared a lunch ready for a day of walking.

While Peter attended a reunion in Launceston, Prue took Robyn for short walks while the rest of us ventured out onto the overland ski trail to the south east of the village to return late that afternoon tired but happy after such an adventure. Only the first quarter of the journey provided relatively easy walking while for the remainder we had to pick our way, as best we could, over the uneven rocks while trying to avoid the small water holes or the prickly shrubs such as the *Richea scoparia*. There was a constant cold wind making walking more difficult and up on the exposed ridges it was hard to keep your balance with the buffeting winds. From these ridges we had magnificent views to the north sweeping east to south through to the south west, taking in forests and farm land in the valleys below and mountains in the distance.

On the return journey Noel narrowly avoided treading on a white lipped snake which disappeared into the low shrubs. It returned to the open to warm itself on the greenery and was seen and photographed by about half our group before again disappearing. Claire spotted a frog in one water hole and she also pointed out another two on the Sunday. The Ben Lomond snow gentian was the only wildflower to be seen at its best. The evening meal was followed by socialising and games, and an early night ready for our last day.

Sunday dawned clear, calm and warm. Preparations were made for shorter walks with the plan to return for lunch. We were soon joined by day visitors, Ash and Rachael, Lois and Peter, Stephen, Jill and Taylor, and much later in the day Tom T who had difficulty leaving another function.

With the threat of rain, only Ash and Rachael joined the walkers from yesterday, the others staying in the lodge to socialise until the weather looked better.

The wind started up as we walked along the higher ridges above the village and we were rained on intermittently. Although we all had wet weather gear, some chose not to wear it as it wasn't cold. The walk took us over large boulder fields and rocky outcrops which we took advantage of to get a better view of the area before moving on. The low grasslands and wet boggy areas were interesting and slow to transverse on our return journey.

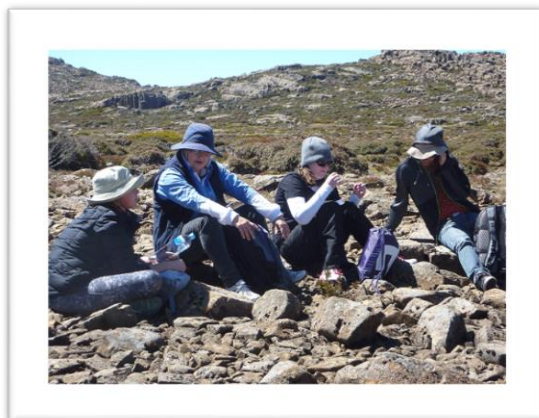
As we finished the shorter overland ski run we met Jill and Taylor just setting out for a short walk. They returned just before the heavy rain and reported some hail during part of their walk.

After lunch we spent about two hours packing and cleaning up leaving about 3:30 pm with Peter and Prue staying to let the water out of the pipes and to lock up. Another great weekend on Ben Lomond although too late for most of the wild flowers.

Noel & Karen Manning



Ben Lomond snow gentian



Walkers having a well-earned rest

Flora ~ *Abrotanella forsteroides*, Tasmanian cushionplant; *Acaena montana*, mountain buzzy; *Astelia alpina* var *alpina*, pineapple grass; *Bellendena montana*, mountain rocket; *Brachyscome spathulata*, spoonleaf daisy; *Carpha alpina*, alpine strawsedge; *Celmisia asteliifolia*, silver snowdaisy; *Cotula alpina*, alpine buttons; *Craspedia glabrata*, little alpine billybutton; *C. macrocephala*, alpine billybuttons; *Drosera arcturi*, alpine sundew; *Euphrasia collina* subsp *diemenica*, eyebright; *Ewartia catipes*, diamond cushionherb; *Gentianella diemensis*, Ben Lomond snowgentian; *Geranium potentilloides*, mountain cranesbill; *Leonema montanum*, mountain wax-flower; *Melicytus dentatus*, spiky violetbush; *Olearia obcordata*, heartleaf daisybush; *Orites acicularis*, yellow bush; *Ozothamnus rodwayi* var *kingii*, silvery alpine everlastingbush; *Pentachondra pumila*, carpet heath; *Richea*

scoparia, *scoparia*; *R. sprengeioides*, rigid candleheath; *Senecio gunnii*, mountain fireweed; *Stylidium graminifolium*, triggerplant; *Wahlenbergia saxicola*, mountain bluebell.

Ferns ~ *Blechnum pennamarina* subsp *alpina*, alpine waterfern; ? *Polystichum proliferum*, mother shieldfern.

Mosses ~ *Lycopodium* sp., clubmoss; *Sphagnum* sp., moss.

Birds ~ *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, Australasian pipit.

Mammals ~ *Macropus rufogriseus*, bennett's wallaby; *Vombatus ursinus*, common wombat.

Reptiles ~ *Drysdalia coronoides*, white-lipped snake; *Niveoscincus* sp., skink.

FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

Prior to our guest speaker's talk, Noel gave a short talk on the orchid monitoring he and other club members were involved in during January, which was carried out at Surrey Hills with Phil and Robin Collier from Threatened Plants Tasmania group. He showed slides of the Trowutta Arch, an interesting place he visited on the way to Guilford, then spoke on how the research transects were laid out and the search for *Prasophyllum crebriflorum*, looking for tagged plants from previous surveys in a few different locations, one of which was the Vale of Belvoir.

Prof. Nigel Forteach ~ Birds here and there

Judith introduced Nigel who was to speak on a variety of birds seen both in Tasmania and on the mainland. The talk covered five types of honeyeater plus wattle birds, cuckoos, robins, doves and pigeons, ducks and grebes and all the pictures in the slideshow were taken by him. During the talk we heard of the difficulty in acquiring many of the images contained in his slideshow.

Nigel started with the Wallace line describing it as a biogeographic line running down near Borneo and through Indonesia with distinctive fauna on either side. To the east of the line, in Australia and New Guinea, there are 182 honeyeaters in 42 genera.

Nigel went on to describe the adaptations of the honeyeaters to process their favourite foods. On the end of these bird's tongue is a brush for sucking up the nectar from flowers while the upper beak is designed to remove the nectar. The alimentary tract pushes the nectar past the stomach and straight into the gut yet the stomach still processes insects which are also an important part of their diet for protein and honeydew. The birds also have a mechanism to prevent nectar from getting into the nasal cavity to keep the pollen out and all of this is what Nigel called this a superb example of convergent evolution and described it as a fantastic adaptation to their way of life. Some Tasmanian honeyeaters like to feed on the tree *Eucalyptus gunnii* because it gives off a very sugary substance.

The beautiful firetail was mentioned next which nests close to the ground and has a funnel entrance which Nigel said stops all but the smallest of the cuckoos invading the nest. Then followed various honeyeaters from the mainland, the singing honeyeater is found west of the great divide and down into coastal areas of South Australia, sings half an hour before dawn and it eats snails. The varied honeyeater found in northern mangroves eats Crustacea and is known for seeking partners from other species. The loud white-eared honeyeater is found high in mainland canopies of eucalypts and a small yellow-faced bird is found in the coastal areas south of Brisbane to Adelaide. Nigel told us that the male Tasmanian yellow-throated honeyeater establishes a territory and the female moves in to mate and they nest in extraordinary places such as burnt out logs and tufts of grass. As the male is protective of his territory, cuckoos do not cause any problems. With many species mature males have little to do with building nests and not all feed the young, while immature males from the previous season will be involved in feeding the new hatchlings.

The noisy miner is Tasmania's largest honeyeater and is known to nest in groups which split into smaller ones and may involve unrelated birds. Nigel next spoke about the small wattled honeyeaters starting with the mainland black nape, followed by the brown headed honeyeater (known for lining its nest with fur from black and white or white horses and cattle yet not brown animals and using its rather short beak to break bark off trees), the

Tasmanian strong-billed honeyeater which uses its short strong beak to strip bark from eucalypts for fibres and insects, and lastly the black-headed honeyeater, a communal nester where the juveniles help raise the new young.

We were also told that when talking about wattlebirds, you could not avoid mentioning cuckoos as they lay eggs in wattlebird nests. Cuckoos are the only bird able to eat hairy caterpillars and wherever you go in the world cuckoos feed on them. Nigel said that cuckoos will lay their eggs in the nests of honeyeaters, fairy wrens, pipits, skylarks, green finches and black bird. The fan-tailed cuckoo is a small bird which moves sneakily and you won't notice it until it moves, they stick to the low areas of the bush and arrive here in August, however Nigel said you don't really see them until October. Pallids sit on telegraph wires watching for mother birds to leave their nest so they can move in and lay an egg. Nigel said he recently became very excited as he thought he had seen a horsfield's bronze-cuckoo. It was actually a baby fantail, recently emerged from the nest, which can be confused with the horsfield's bronze.

From here Nigel moved to the robins, saying that Tasmania had some fantastic robins but people get them a bit muddled up. He started with the scarlet and talked about the lores, the white in the front of the head, as an important identification feature. The scarlet has a prominent lore and the back is black while the flame robin has a restricted lore and a grey back. The endemic dusky robin was grey lower down rather than white and has no lore, a bird which can be mistaken for a female flame or scarlet. Nigel had an image of the mainland yellow robin that he had a lot of trouble finding to photograph.

Doves and pigeons were next. Nigel said the introduced turtle or spotted dove is becoming more common, however he wondered at the use of the word common in the name of the shy common bronzewing pigeon. With patience he got an excellent photo of them eating seeds. He then described the beauty of seeing the brush bronzewing when the sun shone on their wings. The crested pigeon was an amusing bird with its googly red eyes and crest. Nigel was told that the plump and rare wonga pigeon would be difficult to see and photograph, but he eventually found one near a pond at a Victorian winery and wondered how ground dwellers such as this and the emerald wing pigeon of NSW and Queensland survived against predators.

Nigel told us he had read a fascinating paper about legumes consumed by these pigeons which contain 1080 poison and the writer had suggested that it could kill a fox which ate the bird and that perhaps the foxes had finally worked this out and avoided eating them. John told us that the wonga eats berries and tastes like mothballs and as a result people do not eat them. The colourful fruit pigeon is sometimes seen on Tasmania's east coast, although mainly in the rainforests and thicker woods of the eastern mainland and there is also a white-headed pigeon with red eyes, beak and feet, and yellow tips on the toes and the end of the beak.

The first duck Nigel spoke about was the Australasian shoveler, a wet season breeder, with its broad beak which is ideal for filter feeding in our wetland shallows. The beautiful blue-billed duck followed which Nigel told us could be seen on the Trevallyn Lake at present, and we learnt that the females have to come to this solitary male animal that will have nothing to do with the young.

The chestnut teal was next and Nigel had a superb picture of one. We were told that the hard headed duck was named by a taxidermist who had difficulty with the head and that this duck is the only true diving duck in Australia and closely related to the Northern Hemisphere pochard group of birds.

Nearing the end of the talk we were introduced to the grebes starting with the Australasian grebe and we learnt that grebes have floating nests. The picture of the hoary headed grebe showed the bird in full mating colours with the incredible feathers on the head. The great-crested grebe, is also found in Europe and was almost driven to extinction as its head feathers were much sort after for ladies hats in the late 19th and early 20th century. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds was established to protect this bird.

The final bird for the evening was a summer visitor, the satin flycatcher and Nigel told us that there were two pair in the Kate Reed Reserve. Nigel finished the talk by telling us that he had set himself the task of photographing all the birds in the gorge. He had 76 images which included imports such as black birds and sparrows and all these images would be included in his book called *Birds of the Gorge and Surrounds*.

After a short question and answer time Peter Ralph thanked Nigel and asked members to show their appreciation.

Noel Manning

FIELD TRIP ~ Saturday 18 February ~ Hollybank Pond for bird watching

It was a warm sunny morning at the Hollybank Reserve where seventeen members and a visitor from the north east club met up with our field trip leader, Prof Nigel Forteach, as a follow up to his February general meeting talk.

We would be visiting small ponds in the reserve to observe the birds that flock there to feed and drink during the warm weather and Nigel said that during his many visits he had noted 32 different species of bird.

Nigel talked about the park, the route we would take between the pond areas, the birds we might expect to encounter and he also asked us to keep an eye out for the Red Spotted Lichen Moth that is found in the area, a small black moth with red spots on the wings.

The short stroll to the first pond allowed us to inspect the latest adventure attraction, the recently installed Tree Ropes Course Experience, a large and varied obstacle course for children of all ages. We passed an area thick with red hot poker plants popular with the visiting birds, especially the eastern spine bill, and many were to be seen flitting about and using their long thin beaks to reach the nectar in the long, drooping bell shaped flowers. The secluded pond was surrounded by tall trees, shrubs and ferns and a low stone wall provided a seat to watch and photograph the birds. A small group of members stayed here with cameras at the ready while the majority of the group headed to a pond on the other side of the reserve. We passed another small pond, next to the first which was very low on water, and not as popular with the birds as there is little foliage nearby for shelter and to use as a perch.

The surrounding forest towered over us as we walked along a track that took us back to the ring road of the reserve which would take us to another pond. We passed through areas of 20 year old thriving pine plantations as well as regrowth eucalypts, most of which were dead.

At the River Track we entered a dogwood forest and this is where Nigel told us we might see the bassian thrush, a bird around 28 cm in length with a mottled brown plumage making it hard to see in the leaf litter were it forages. This bird was not seen by the group, although John thinks he saw one near the first pond.

Looking carefully in the bushes as we walked along, we spotted a group of small birds playing in ferns and after a long time observing them these were identified as brown thornbills. Turning right onto the Walk of Change track, we were entertained by a fantail dancing along a branch while fluttering its tail feathers. When we finally got to the Ecology Track, seven members were lagging well behind Nigel and the others, due to our continual stopping to try and identify the birds seen. As well plants and fungi were inspected and photographed adding to our tardiness.

Arriving at the end of the Ecology Track where Noel had last seen Nigel, we found that the main group had returned to the carpark along the higher part of the looping track and had passed us unnoticed. We were the last back to the carpark although in time to lunch with the others out the back of the Hollybank Centre on the tables and chairs and in welcoming sunshine.

During lunch I asked Nigel if he could identify a moth I had found in the carpark when we first arrived and he laughed as it was the elusive Red Spotted Lichen Moth. I had picked it up from the ground at the back of my car on arrival and hadn't connected it to the one Nigel described, as in death the colour of the spots had faded to orange. At least we saw one and under the lens the creature revealed its feathery antennae.

Judith thanked Nigel for leading this field trip, for his informative walk and talk, and also sharing some of his favourite bird viewing spots with us.

Karen Manning



Ecology Track at Hollybank



***Cyathea australis*, rough treefern**

Birds ~ *Acanthiza ewingii*, Tasmanian thornbill; *A. pusilla*, brown thornbill; *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*, eastern spinebill; *Cacatua galerita*, sulphur-crested cockatoo; *Calyptorhynchus funereus*, yellow-tailed black-cockatoo; *Dacelo novaeguineae*, laughing kookaburra; *Platycercus caledonicus*, green rosella; *Rhipidura albiscapa*, grey fantail; *Sericornis humilis*, Tasmanian scrubwren; *Strepera fuliginosa*, black currawong; *Zoothera lunulata*, bassian thrush

Dicots ~ *Acacia dealbata* subsp *dealbata*, silver wattle; *A. melanoxylon*, blackwood; *Acaena novae-zelandiae*, common buzzy; *Beyeria viscosa*, pinkwood; *Bursaria spinosa*, prickly box; *Clematis aristata*, mountain clematis; *Coprosma quadrifida*, native currant; *Cyathodes glauca*, purple cheeseberry; *Exocarpos cupressiformis*, common native-cherry; *Lomatia tinctoria*, guitarplant; *Notelaea ligustrina*, native olive; *Olearia argophylla*, musk daisybush; *O. lirata*, forest daisybush; *Phyllanthus gunnii*, shrubby spurge; *Pimelea drupacea*, cherry riceflower; *Pittosporum bicolor*, cheesewood; *Pomaderris apetala* subsp *apetala*, common dogwood; *Sambucus gaudichaudiana*, white elderberry; *Senecio* sp., fireweed

Ferns ~ *Blechnum nudum*, fishbone waterfern; *Cyathea australis*, rough treefern; *Dicksonia antarctica*, soft treefern; *Microsorium pustulatum* subsp *pustulatum*, kangaroo fern; *Polystichum proliferum*, mother shieldfern; *Pteridium esculentum*, bracken

Insects ~ *Asura cervicalis*, red spotted lichen moth; *Gastrimargus musicus*, yellow-winged locust; ? *Heteronympha penelope* Waterhouse, shouldered brown butterfly; Dragonflies

Monocots ~ *Dianella tasmanica*, forest flaxlily; *Dipodium roseum*, rosy hyacinth-orchid; *Drymophila cyanocarpa*, native solomon's seal; *Ficinia nodosa*, knobby clubrush; *Gahnia grandis*, cutting grass; *Lepidosperma* sp., swordsgedge; *Lomandra longifolia*, sagg

Fungi ~ *Fuligo septica*, dog vomit slime mould

Fauna ~ *Tachyglossus aculeatus*, echidna

SKEMPS DAY ~ Saturday 25 February ~ Social day and insects

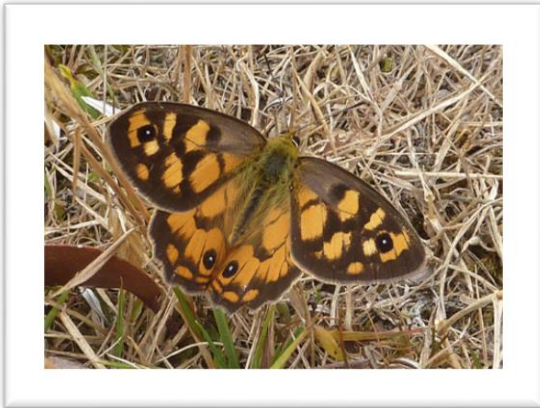
It was an overcast morning heading to Skemps, the temperature lower than in Launceston and we were pleased to find that Peter had arrived early and had the fire going, and the Centre was warm and inviting.

Four members went for a walk and found five holly trees of different sizes and quite a few thistles. We also watched echidnas burrowing for ants on the grasslands for some time, they were not fazed by our presence. Before heading back to the Centre, we picked some mountain pepper and the caught up with Tom, Tina and Irmgard who had arrived with visitor Robyn. As it was Robyn's first visit to the property she was taken for a walk before lunch and after lunch Tina took her on a walk to the Interpretation Booth at the old homestead site and then to the Top Pond.

At lunch the BBQ was lit as usual. Tom had been cooking his lunch when he called us out to have a look at a rather large huntsman spider which had an interesting pattern on its abdomen. The spider didn't like having an audience and disappeared under the property map fixed to the wall, disappointing a few photographers.

Following lunch, the weather cleared and it became quite warm. Tom and Karen cut back the fronds on the *Dicksonia antarctica* along the rear of the building. Claire and Vivien helped by moving the rubbish away for composting and Noel removed the holly trees located earlier in the day.

Shouldered brown butterflies were seen on the grassland toward the Top Falls and the yellow legged locust was seen in the old homestead site. Tom reported seeing an Australian Painted lady butterfly and Taylor had caught a wingless grasshopper while photographing insects with her Nan, Jill. Noel & Karen Manning



Shouldered brown butterfly



Wingless grasshopper

MARCH GENERAL MEETING

Guest Speakers ~ Helen and Mick Statham ~ The Cultural and Natural History of Melaleuca

Judith introduced Helen and Mick Statham who were to talk on the Melaleuca area. Helen introduced the talk and told us that Mick would start with the history as he was better with dates. The talk was backed up with an excellent power point presentation featuring a map of the south west corner of Tasmania, images of the area, including impressive aerial shots, mining equipment, huge tailing mounds, buildings and native plants, birds and other animals.

Mick started with the map and introduced the various places, their relationship to the rest of Tasmania and the important safe harbours for shipping in the area before telling us that for those who wanted to go to Melaleuca, but not camp, there were day trips by plane. The trip into the area would be along the spectacular coast stopping at Melaleuca and, depending on the weather, there could be a boat trip which would take in Celery Top Island, which Mick said had not been burnt, or one of the nearby beaches.

Mick then told us that Port Davey was discovered by Europeans in 1810 and became an important safe haven for ships which could not enter Macquarie Harbour during bad weather and is still used by fishing boats and cruising yachts for this purpose. It was also used by whalers and for getting the local Huon Pine out.

From Melaleuca it is a three hour walk to Cox Bight, named after an early European explorer, and another explorer, who found the conditions too rough for a boat, went there on foot and found many native huts and it appeared to be a meeting place for local tribes.

Mick told us that there were many fascinating stories of pioneers and prospectors and from his own walking he knew how difficult it was to get there by foot and wondered at how much more difficult it was with the gear available in the early 19th Century. His favourite story was of Critchley Parker, a Victorian, who took it upon himself to explore the south west of Tasmania for a new Jewish homeland. There was an international movement in the early 1940s to establish a Jewish homeland and the Kimberley was one Australian location to be considered.

Lighting a smoky fire was a standard way of communicating if you were having problems or wanted to be picked up. Parker, in Mick's words, 'I don't think he had much good sense', lit his first fire on a cloudy day and burnt half his matches and got the rest wet. He died and was found a couple of months later and was buried there.

The history continued with reference to the early alluvial tin mining around Cox Bight in the 1890s and Mick described the process of obtaining the tin, all done by hand.

We learnt that Peter Wilson, a mining engineer, built a smelter to refine his ore and that the buildings and equipment are as he left them when he retired. The main structure is falling into disrepair and its fate is undecided, try to save it or let it rot away.

The talk inevitably moved onto the Kings, their involvement in the area before WW11 and how Deny mechanised his mining operation when he returned to Melaleuca after his war service. The aerial picture of the

King tin works showed the long areas of parallel channels all running toward waterways. To get the ore he would dig a channel, then when he dug a second one the vegetation went into the first and so on and these channels improved the drainage so that each area of mining was no longer waterlogged but grass. Deny also improved the area for visitors being responsible for the Nissan Hut used by bush walkers and using his tractor he levelled an area for the first runway. This was only big enough for four seater aircraft and was lengthened by Parks to accommodate larger aircraft.

Helen started her part of the talk by telling us about the various views of Melaleuca in the pictures and giving us an overview of the different ways to get there and the types of accommodation available before moving on to the plants of the area.

We were told that it is nothing but green unless you are there in November or December and that since the arrival of the bumble bee the rhododendrons in Deny's garden have been pollinated and are spreading.

From here we saw images of the button grass, golden rosemary, *Melaleuca squamea* and *squarrosa*, pink swamp heath, fairies' aprons (*Utricularia dichotoma*), forked sundew, *Xyris operculata*, Christmas bells and King's lomatia (*Lomatia tasmanica*). There was a photo of this from the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens and the drawing by Margaret Stones as the location of the plant in the wild is known to only a few people. It is a sterile clone so it does not reproduce, spreading by layering or when pieces drop off and take root or from cuttings.

Helen then moved onto the orange-bellied parrot (OBP), described as budgie sized, and she and Mick have been involved in the monitoring for several years and she gave a detailed description of the bird. We saw the new hide and learnt that food is put on the monitoring table, morning and evening, and the birds are watched for two hours each time.

The OBP is not the only bird in the area and the table of food obviously attracts other birds. We were treated to excellent images of the beautiful firetail, green rosella, ground parrot, striated fieldwren, olive whistler, grey shrike-thrush (Deny's favourite bird), bassian thrush, dusky robin, azure kingfisher and a picture of a yellow-throated honeyeater sitting on the hindquarters of a Tasmanian pademelon collecting fur for the nest.

Helen followed up with anecdotes about people and animals in the area and we saw images of the long tailed mouse, eastern pygmy possum, swamp antechinus (*Antechinus minimus*) the swamp rat sharing the food left out for the OBP, spotted tail quoll, Tasmanian tree frog, freshwater crayfish and galaxia (small native fish) and Helen had to rescue them when they washed across the road during heavy rain.

The talk then covered the old bird observation building which had been turned into the museum. She told us a little about it before finishing with an impressive sunset picture.

The question and answer session centred on the best time to visit, the walks in the area and more information on the OBP. Members showed their appreciation after Tom Treloggen thanked them for their talk. He then presented a copy of the Club's *A Guide to the Flowers and Plants* to them as a donation for the library at the Deny King Heritage Museum to be used by visitors as a botanical reference.

Noel Manning

SALTMARSH WETLAND MONITORING

From our Club Roy, Noel, Prue, Ann and Karen participated in the saltmarsh wetland monitoring conducted by NRM North and the local Conservation Volunteer Australia (CVA) group. Some sessions were run by Megan Dykman (NRM North) and the rest by CVA and we were joined by CVA volunteers, including a couple of local residents with the rest being University of Tasmania students, mostly from overseas. The training day was followed by 10 sessions which were held at various locations and times around the Tamar Estuary from George Town to Swan Point in February and March.

Most of us were involved with the monitoring last year and it was interesting to return to the sites a year on, to observe the changes in the river banks following the floods and to see whether the saltmarsh plants had survived or not.

As well as observing and recording the number of birds and the plants, groups were involved in recording what was in a series of one metre by one metre grids along a transect recording the percentage of bare ground, specific grasses, plants and noting unusual things in the transect, such as evidence of crab activity, or other items of interest just outside the transect.

During these sessions we spent one to two hours in the company of some very knowledgeable individuals always coming away with new information.

FIELD TRIP ~ Sunday 19 March ~ Central Plateau Conservation Area

Fourteen members attended this field trip travelling to places in the Central Plateau Conservation Area. Our first stop was at the Steppes Stones to view the bronze sculptures mounted on large boulders which featured highlands wildlife and human occupation. Our visit was kept brief due to the large numbers of mosquitos out for our blood. Noel and Christine walked the track to the Steppes Homestead and we met them there. We were very lucky to find that the Homestead was open as the Friends of the Steppes Wildcare group had opened the building for visitors as they were displaying paintings by members of the Sunny Coasters Painting group. There was also original botanical and avian art work by the late Madge Wilson, the last surviving member of her family at the Steppes Reserve, on the walls of the old homestead. The Friends members provided us with information on the historical site and a display book contained pictures of other art works by Miss Wilson, photographs and other items of interest.

We lunched in the shade of a large tree in the BBQ pit before heading off to visit the Steppes Hall a few kilometres further back towards Miena. The hall was in very good condition and some of the windows were decorated with paintings which depicted life in the highlands, including farmers working the land.

In the hall grounds large boulders featured Lake Country Pioneer Plaques, celebrating different aspects of life in the area for 'YEAR OF THE OUTBACK 2002'. These represented timber workers, hunters and snarers, road patrolmen, rabbit trappers and hunters, Inland Fisheries, police, wardens and rangers, the Hydro Electric Commission, and those who served in both world wars. Many of the plaques noted the contribution of the families of these groups as well. There was also a list of the family names of the area.

Travelling back through Miena to the far side of Great Lake we visited the Thousand Lakes Lodge, the old Bernacchi Antarctic training base. The manager was there and invited us in and showed us around. He told us the history of the lodge, talked about the new facilities and showed us around the lounge and dining areas of the lower floor. Before he dashed off, he recommended that we travel a further 11 kilometres to visit Lake Ada which we all did.

Getting to Lake Ada was a little difficult for Tom and his passengers, when his car decided it wasn't going any further and died on the side of the roadway. Lucky for them, Tony was driving behind him and found, and fixed a loose battery terminal and got them going again. The area surrounding the lake was very flat and shrubby and was popular with fisherman and walkers as the carpark contained many vehicles.

Back on the main road we regrouped at the Lookout above the Great Lake, and what a view it was, "great" certainly describes it. As it was already after 3pm, we had a quick coffee break and then travelled the short distance to the Pine Lake Walk.

The alpine vegetation along the boardwalk included pencil pines, mountain peppers, scoparia, mountain rocket, thyme leaf purpleberry, mountain currant, pineapple grass and cushion grass to name a few. At the lake edge it was very peaceful, the water could be heard lapping the rocks below the viewing platform and the birds were chattering in the trees. The hills around the lake were very rugged, with towering boulder outcrops and scree fields, and shrubs growing amongst them and we sat for quite a while taking in the sheer beautiful of our surroundings.

We arrived back in Deloraine after 6pm and had our evening meals before the last leg of our journey to our homes. Today was very pleasant and those in attendance agreed that there are more places that we could have visited along the way, so there will be a next time, make sure you join in, you won't regret it, the Central Highlands are one of many beautiful places in Tasmania.

Thanks to Tony and Christine for guiding us today.

Karen Manning

The Steppes Stones and Homestead

Dicots ~ *Acaena novae-zelandiae*, common buzzy; *Acacia dealbata*, silver wattle; *Hakea lissosperma*, mountain needlebush; *Hakea macrocarpa*, smallfruit needlebush; *Lomatia tinctoria*, guitar plant

Monocots ~ *Polystichum proliferum*, mothershield fern

Birds ~ *Aquila audax*, wedge-tailed eagle; *Corvus tasmanicus*, forest raven

Reptiles ~ *Niveoscincus metallicus*, metallic cool skink

Great Lakes Lookout/Pine Lake

Dicots ~ *Abrotanella forsteroides*, cushionplant; *Acaena novae-zelandiae*, common buzzy; *Baeckea gunniana*, alpine myrtleheath; *Bellenden montana*, mountain rocket; *Bossiaea cordigera*, wiry bossia; *Coprosma nitida*, mountain currant; *Hakea lissosperma*, mountain needlebush; *Leptospermum rupestre*, mountain teatree; *Nothofagus cunninghamii*, myrtle beech; *Orites revolutus*, revolute orites; *Ozothamnus hookeri*, scaly everlastingbush; *O. purpurascens*, columnar everlastingbush; *Richea scoparia*, scoparia; *Sphagnum* sp., moss; *Sprengelia incarnata*, pink swampheath; *Tasmannia lanceolata*, mountain pepper; *Telopea truncata*, waratah; *Trochocarpa thymifolia*, thymeleaf purpleberry; *Wahlenbergia* sp., bluebell

Gymnosperms ~ *Athrotaxis cupressoides*, pencil pine

Monocots ~ *Astelina alpina*, pineapple grass; *Carpha alpina*, alpine strawsedge; ? *Empodisma minus*, spreading roperush

Ferns and Allies ~ *Blechnum penna-marina* subsp *alpina*; *Gleichenia alpina*, alpine coral fern; *Usnea* sp., old man's beard

Birds ~ *Aquila audax*, wedge-tailed eagle; *Strepera fuliginosa*, black currawong



Steppes Stones bronze sculptures



View across Pine Lake

SKEMPS DAY ~ Saturday 25 March ~ Social day and foxglove hunt

Once again we were arriving at Skemps on an overcast morning. Peter and his grandchildren had arrived earlier and the fire was going. The weather bureau had predicted a 70% chance of rain for today and it was badly needed and it quickly turned to 100%.

We decided to go for a walk along the grassland to observe the wallabies that we could see feeding from the Centre, but it started to rain and continued to do so for a while, so we stayed indoors, chatted and looked at the bits of plants that needed identification following our recent field trip.

Following the rain, John, Roy, Tina, Vivien and Karen headed to the Watergate Track, where John was going to give us an educational tour of the foxglove. He had recently been spraying the plant along the track and what he could see in the bush. Many of the plants we saw were obviously affected by the spraying, however we saw and removed some that John hadn't seen or were in dense bushy areas where it was difficult for him to get in carrying the pressure pack on his back. Roy found a couple in flower and placed these plants in a bag to be disposed of

elsewhere. We covered a large area and finished by walking down along the Federation Corridor and zig-zagging up and down in the bush line until we got back to the Centre. John suggested we needed to check these areas again in a month or so, to see if any further plants had grown.

Arriving back at the Centre we found everyone was lunching and also saw that other members had arrived since we had left earlier in the morning. The rain started once again, so this was a good time to be sitting down, eating and enjoying the company. After discussing places of interest to visit in the future, we got our boots back on with the intention to go bush to find another area to plot a site for tree decline monitoring. We walked along the grassland as far as the Forest Walk exit before heading up into the bush looking to see if any of the eucalypts had evidence of the ginger syndrome. The reason being that the site we were already monitoring, didn't have any affected eucalypts at this stage. The rain started again and all but Prue, Tom and I headed back to the Centre. We continued walking the bush and didn't really find what we were looking for but had a couple of sites that were possibilities.

Back at the Centre, we said goodbye to members who were leaving, before standing around the heater for a while to dry out and warm up. Again we talked about places to visit and made a few plans for later this year.

Karen Manning

SOCIAL EVENING ~ Monday 27 March ~ Golden Brumby Chinese Restaurant

The social evening was organised by Peter W and held at the Golden Brumby Chinese Restaurant which is also popular for take-away meals. Our hostess Suzie had arranged for us to use the big room out the back where we had plenty of room to move about and chat without disturbing other customers. Our group of 23 consisted of 17 club members and 6 family members.

We had the choice of either ordering off the menu which wouldn't have been an easy task with all the mouth-watering selections, having a \$25 all you can eat three course meal or the \$15 special which was a plate of 2 mains from the bain-marie with either rice or noodle. The \$25 all you can eat seemed to win out as favourite.

At the end of the evening, everyone I spoke to had thoroughly enjoyed their meals, saying there was a great selection of dishes and the meals were very tasty. There was also the general comment that Suzie and her staff provided a very friendly service.

Claire Manning

NRM NORTH ~ Saturday 13 May ~ Community Wildlife Monitoring Workshop

Be part of an exciting project that will identify wildlife hotspots in northern Tasmania, particularly for the species eastern barred bandicoot and spotted tail quoll.

Attend the workshop by Matt Taylor from the Tasmanian Land Conservancy to:

- Learn how to monitor wildlife on your property
- Learn how to install cameras and record bird calls on your property
- Learn how to identify the animals caught on the camera

Time: 11.00 am to 1.00 pm

Where: Tasmanian Land Conservancy property on Gulf Road Liffey (adjoining Liffey State Reserve).

BYO lunch. **RVSP:** admin@nrmnorth.org.au any enquires to Alison Hugo on 6333 7788

From: April e-Newsletter can be accessed <http://www.nrmnorth.org.au/read-our-latest-e-news-here!>

Additional Information

Club Outings:

1. All outings depart from Inveresk carpark (near Museum entrance) at 9 am unless otherwise specified. Internet site updated regularly to reflect short notice changes. Saturday all-day parking cost is \$3.00. Sunday parking free.
2. Provide your own food and drinks for the outing and wear/take clothing/footwear suitable for all weather types.
3. When travelling by car in convoy, each driver is responsible to ensure that the vehicle behind is in sight immediately after passing a cross road or fork in the road.
4. When carpooling, petrol costs should be shared between all the passengers, including family of the driver, and based on other clubs the Committee suggested \$11 per 100 km. This is a guideline only.

Name Tags: Please wear your name tags to meetings and on outings.

Tea/Coffee: A levy of 50c is currently charged for supper provided at meetings.

Field Centre: All members have access to the John Skemp Field Centre, but should contact our booking manager, John Elliott on 6344 9303 or skempbookings@yahoo.com.au regarding availability and keys before visiting the property.

Field Centre Phone Number - 6399 3361

Postal Address: PO Box 1072 Launceston 7250

Internet site : <http://www.lfnc.org.au>

Email : secretary@lfnc.org.au

Find us on 