

ARTICLES FROM THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

VOLUME XL No 3 February/March 2007

**6 February 2007: River Willow on the North Esk River**

Well-known identity and leader of the 'Ribbon of Blue' North Esk River Restoration project, Gus Green, presented an enthusiastic and informative talk to members.

Showing us a map of the river system, he told us that the project to date, after sixteen years, has seen the removal of crack willows from the North Esk and provided their replacement with native flora; about 6000 trees have been planted. He said it was the largest urban project ever undertaken in Australia and that there have been 110 people from different Government projects and schemes involved in the work. The outcome is that the project has given a river back to the community who can now use the river walking paths that have been constructed. Gus told us that it would be almost impossible to achieve this result today, even though huge amounts of money were used.

He referred to the fact that the North Esk was fed from a huge catchment area and that he believed Launceston is the only Australian city that sits on three rivers. There are two remaining groups working on sections of the river, e.g. the Charles Street Bridge to St Leonards strip and another from Corra Lyn to Hobblers Bridge where 'ribbon of blue' begins. There is an interpretation centre at Hobblers Bridge funded by the Ford Motor Company. He described how willows were cut, leaving the trunks in the ground where they could be injected to prevent re-shooting. Lack of follow up funding was causing problems in some areas where regrowth had occurred. Also where willows had been chipped, a problem was caused in flood time, when the chips washed down the river the pieces re-shooting very easily.

When all is complete, the hope is that members of the community will be able to walk from Corra Lyn to Duck Reach. MHS

**19 February : Club Evening Meal at Village Motel**

On a warm evening about 20 members met at the Village Family Motor Inn at 6 pm. Some members joining us later at 7.30 pm. From the choice of Roast Lamb or Grilled Fish, with Apple Crumble or Fruit Salad for desert, members enjoyed a great meal with friendly service. Over our meal the conversation turned to the view and the fires burning on the outskirts of town.

As darkness fell and lights twinkled, we made our way down Westbury Road and home. TT

## **2-4 March : Federation Meeting at Deviot Guide Hall**

The Federation get-together was held at "Nindethana", the Girl Guide camp at Deviot, hosted by the Central North Field Naturalists club.

On Friday evening Sarah Lloyd and Ron Nagorcka gave their presentation of Sarah's bird pictures, bird calls and music based on the bird calls which Ron had composed. They will be giving the same presentation to music and student groups in the US and to bird observers in Sweden.

On Saturday the group visited Notley Fern Gorge and Holwell Gorge with Tom May, national Fungimap co-ordinator. Fungihunters can find several things to look at on or under every log and most fallen leaves. We still managed to walk all the way through Notley Fern Gorge and, but for a thunderstorm, would have managed Holwell Gorge as well. Not that the storm discouraged the fungi people, who came out of the Gorge an hour or so after we squibs.

On Saturday evening, Tom May described, and showed pictures from, a field trip to look at fungi in the Tarkine. Tom believed that the Tarkine was a unique ecosystem because such a large area of myrtle forest was buffered from changes that could affect smaller areas of temperate rain forest in other parts of the State.

The Sunday excursion was to Ron and Sarah's property at Birrale. Part of the walk went away from the road to their house, through Pomaderris forest and wetter areas.

The weekend was well attended by this Club and other groups, with plenty of chances to renew acquaintances.

We will be hosting the next meeting in spring this year. At the Federation meeting we suggested that this could be on the East Coast, which seemed to be well received. JE

## **6 March : Gambusia Control**

Grant Scurr replaced Dave Groves to talk to us about the problem of gambusia which is sometimes known as the mosquito fish. Grant has been appointed as the Gambusia Project Officer with Tamar Natural Resource Management, had previously been doing volunteer

work at Tresca and the Environment Centre. Preserved samples of gambusia were passed around for us to look at. They are similar to galaxias, except for their bulging belly and fins.

They were deliberately introduced into Tasmania in 1992 and subsequently made their way into the Tamar Wetland where they were discovered in 2001. So far they have not been found in the East Tamar region. They are mainly found around Tamar Island. Gambusia produce live young, about 50 at one time and can breed 9 times per year. The young females born can begin breeding themselves at 6 weeks.

Gambusia can stand very cold temperatures, but also very warm conditions. They like poor water conditions and thrive in the slow moving water in the drainage ditch at Tamar Island.

The Australian Maritime College are working on a gambusia trap which is a Y shape. They will test for the conditions which attract the gambusia, any other fish caught in the trap will be released, but the gambusia will be disposed of.

Poisoning of dams in which they are found, and draining dams has also been tried in an effort to stop the spread of gambusia. There is some experimenting being carried out called "daughterless carp" which if successful could be a possible way of eradicating all the females, therefore stopping the breeding process.

Grant was pleased with the response from our group, and was thanked for coming and speaking to us by Jeff Campbell. RT

### **11 March : Excursion to Tamar Wetlands**

Ten members arrived and were taken to view gambusia (*Gambusia holbrooki*) habitat by the Project Officer, Grant Scurr. The first stop just inside the gate was to view the drain on the lefthand side of the board walk. The water was stagnant and covered with ooze and algae with sheltering reeds and grasses fringing the drain – a perfect place for gambusia to hide and hide they did, we were not able to sight any of them in there.

Land on the right-hand side of the walkway is usually covered with water but at present it is completely dry. When water is present, it is the home and breeding place for the green and golden bell frogs. It appears that here their eggs and tadpoles are free from gambusia predation.

Grant produced a net and tried to catch some gambusia but

nothing at all was caught, neither fish nor water fauna. To see the pest fish we went into the Centre where two of the fish were swimming in a small fish tank. The largest was only about 3-4 cm long; females are larger than the males. Another tank held two native galaxias and the difference in shape between the two types of fish was pointed out to us.

Regular netting of the drain takes places and any gambusia caught are frozen before disposal. This is considered the most humane way of dealing with them.

The party then walked out on the board walk a short distance to a specific drain where gambusia occur and after some discussion of the possibilities and problems of control we parted company. Majority of the group continued towards Tamar Island, others walked to the bird observatory. From there one swan, one swamp hen and one duck were seen.

This was an informative outing; it will be interesting to hear of results of future surveys and monitoring programmes and efforts to control this small fish that is referred to as 'devil of a fish'. MHS

The group that continued on to Tamar Island identified the following birds: Pacific Gulls, Australian shelducks, White-faced herons, Chestnut teals, Purple swamphens, Pacific black ducks, Tasmanian native-hens, Masked lapwings, Silver eyes, Fairy wrens, Pink galahs, Australian pelican, Black swans, Great egrets and Eurasian coots.

Also seen were a skink, dragonflies and brown butterflies. KW

### **18 March : Skemp Day**

13 members and a guest turned up at Skemps on what become a beautifully warm autumn day, following a very cold morning start. After the usual morning cuppa we watched Tom May's PowerPoint presentation on the fungi collecting expedition to the Tarkine, which had been shown at the Field Naturalists Federation meeting earlier this month. Marion and John Simmons and Tom Treloggen had been present at the Federation meeting and were able to explain more about the expedition and Tom's accompanying speech. The photography included in the presentation was amazing, the fungi shapes and colours unbelievable. The CD-ROM is available in the Skemp Library if members would like to view it. After lunch, members went for walks, weeding was undertaken in the Federation Corridor, tracks were cleared and thistles sprayed. A good day enjoyed by all. KW

## **Scats on the mat**

On one of our working Tuesdays about a month ago I was vacuuming away in the Field Centre, giving it a boys clean. Under the left-hand side of the window in the side room with the phone, there was a large scatter of dark specks on the carpet. I vaguely thought a hatch of insects might have died there. I was in cleaning mode, the vacuum cleaner was there and so in they went.

A fortnight later, cleaning again, more specks in the same place. Though still in cleaning mode, I did look a little closer this time. As the last of them disappeared into the nozzle, I thought they looked more like scats than insects.

Next week, more specks. This time I did look more closely. Definitely scats, a little longer, lumpier and lighter than mouse scats. I showed them to John Simmons. He didn't know what they were. Nothing behind the curtain, so back to vacuuming.

I happened to brush up against the curtain, saw something out of the corner of my eye, looked up and there was a bat. Mystery solved.

I showed the bat to John. Naturally neither of us had a camera. I got some gloves and caught the bat. I tried to put it in the possum-box next to the long-drop. It got away, fluttered round, then, I think, relocated itself into the roof of the long-drop. Another mystery is whether the bat was trapped in the Field Centre, living on whatever it could catch in the building or was it roosting there and finding its way out at night to feed. It had been there at least 3 weeks, and, by the look of the scat patches, eating reasonably well during that time. Would there have been enough food in the building? Plenty of blowflies this time of year, and the supply would have been renewed at least each Tuesday but would the bat have caught them if they don't fly at night. I don't suppose we will ever really know. JE