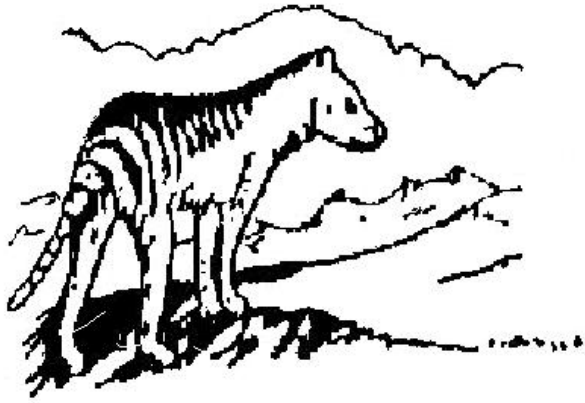
THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Issued to members of the Launceston Field Naturalists Club as a contribution to club activities.



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

Volume XLVI I I No. 6 August/September 2015

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

PROGRAM

OCTOBER

Tuesday 6	**AGM Dinner Meeting ~ Kains Restaurant, Riverview Hotel, Launceston ~ 6 for 6.30pm**
Wednesday 7 - Sunday 11	**Flinders Island trip**
Sunday 25	**Skemp Day ~ Water Monitoring**

NOVEMBER

Tuesday 3	**Guest Speaker ~ Ralph Cooper ~ *Wading Birds of the Tamar River***
Tuesday 17	**Field Trip ~ Saltmarsh monitoring (contact Prue Wright if interested in this activity)**
Saturday 23	**Skemp Day ~ Spring Clean**

DECEMBER

Tuesday 1	**Member's Night ~ Photographic Competition and *The Year That Was***
Saturday 12	**Christmas at Skemps**

To see the full July to December 2015 program visit

http://www.lfnc.org.au/meetings.htm

COMMITTEE/GENERAL MEETING

Skemp Report ~ Noel reported that the new woodshed had been filled as there had been quite a few fallen trees that the volunteers had cut up and stored. The outside toilet/shower block was damaged by a falling tree recently. As the block was designed to be towed to another site at sometime in the future it was easy to move it away with the help of Murray and his tractor. Rob cut up the tree and Grant, John and Noel removed the wood to storage and generally tidied up. Noel also asked members who walk on the property to monitor the condition of the tracks and to report any invasive species they see and blockages.

Puggle

August ~ Tom T asked members for the scientific name for the platypus. No member was able to come up with the full name. Tom stated that it was originally known as *Ornithorhynchus paradoxus* and was now *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*. He used the magazine *Australian Heritage*, Winter 2006 as a reference.

September ~ John asked members whether his image shown on the screen of an Australasian shelduck was of a duck or a drake and to give a reason for the answer. Prue suggested that it was a duck because it had more prominent tail feathers. John stated that she was correct although it was the white around the eyes that distinguished it from a drake.

Sightings

August ~ Tom T reported seeing an eastern spinebill, musk lorikeet and an adult male butcher bird, he then showed members a spider he found at Skemps. Simon Fearn confirmed it was the cave spider *Hickmania troglodytes*. John had seen shelducks in a paddock between Nunamarra and Myrtle Bank recently. Tom T and new member Stephen have seen two dogs roaming on the Skemps property.

September ~ Peter R saw Cape Barron geese on Cormiston Road, Tony saw an echidna near Devils Gullet and a raptor at Liawenee, while Rod saw 5 deer near his home which is on the Tasman Highway. Tom T was one of many who, on more than one occasion, saw a scarlet robin attacking its own image on mirrors and windows of cars parked at Skemps. He had also seen a swamp harrier on Targa Hill Road, a family of skinks in the wood at Skemps and, elsewhere, quite a few green rosellas and one eastern rosella.

Library Report

Tina reported that the Club had received the Running Postman, the Tamar Estuary 2015 Report Card and newsletters from both the Burnie and Tasmanian Field Naturalists Clubs.

General

Members were reminded that the Annual General Meeting was approaching, that all positions would be declared vacant and requested nomination forms to be submitted to fill the vacancies. The dinner meeting would be held at Kain's Restaurant at the Riverview Hotel in Launceston and that members should put their name on the list if intending to be present.

New Members

At the August meeting we welcomed Stephen and Elaine Grieve to the Club as well as Rodney Johnstone with Rachel and Jade Wollaston as a new family group. We look

forward to them joining us at future meetings, field trips and at the Club's property, Skemps.

Help map Wombats in your local area

WomSAT is a new resource for communities to record sightings of wombats across the country. Australia's unique wombats are in crisis, their numbers are declining and your help is needed to protect them by recording where you see wombats and their burrows in your local area.

Every sighting you upload will instantly appear on a national map! Building a national database of wombat information will help to increase our current understanding of wombat populations and the factors affecting them. By contributing to the WomSAT project you can help play a key role in monitoring wombat populations and ultimately, contribute to their conservation.

To join the WomSAT project or read more about wombats please visit WomSAT.org.au Any queries email them at womsat@outlook.com

GENERAL MEETING AUGUST

GUEST SPEAKER ~ Simon Fearn ~ ***The European wasp in Tasmania and the saga of the world's biggest wasp nest***

Tom introduced Simon who was to talk on the European wasp and the finding and preserving of the largest underground nest.

Simon told us that his interest in insects started at an early age and that he knew that drones could not sting so he would amaze his school friends by picking them up.

Slide one showed a preserved drone, queen and worker wasp and we learnt that once queens start a nest they do not leave. She lays lots of eggs which turn into grubs which turn into workers and so the colony grows. At the end of the summer season more queens and drones are produced and after mating the drones die and the queens find a dry place to hibernate.

Simon told us that the wasp is not native to Tasmania and blamed the New Zealanders for their arrival here in 1959. They were introduced to New Zealand after WW2 and their natural home is Western Europe north as far as the Arctic Circle. They have colonise Chile, part of South Africa, Ascension Island and quite a few other places Simon could not remember at the time and they are well established in most of south eastern Australia. A single nest was found in southern Queensland but the hot summer sorted that out.

We were told that their success relied on the ability of the queen to hibernate through the winters, especially the harsh northern winter, which includes snow and wet conditions. As the weather warms they leave there and start a new nest, normally underground, not digging the hole, instead using rabbit or rodent burrows, holes where tree roots have rotted away or any other cavity under the ground. All we see is the entrance hole with many wasps going in and out while underground they are digging it out and building a paper nest and Simon had a small one to show us. While stones too big to fly off with will be deposited near the nest the bulk of the excavated material is mixed with moisture and dumped well away from the nest.

In urban areas where ground holes may be scarce the wasps will use roof spaces and wall cavities and a slide showed a nest in a roof space at Ulverstone. These nests can grow quickly as excavation is unnecessary and the next slide showed one on the

floor of a railway carriage being used for storage. Wasps were seen entering and leaving a hole near the door and when opened the nest was behind the door, partially broken, and with many angry wasps streaming out so the door was quickly closed. Simon was disappointed that it was not left another season as it could have been up to 20 feet long.

From the nests he had brought in Simon described the construction technique starting with the paper exterior. The wasps scrape wood pulp from dry seasoned timber, mix it with saliva and smear it on the nest in a fan like shape while inside the bee like honey comb can be seen. The outer paper shell is pulled apart when the wasps expand the nest.

He went on to tell us that in the harsh northern climate the nest only survives for one year and grows to the size of a football. In the milder climate of south eastern Australia the nest can survive in a mild dry winter and during the second season grows exponentially. He also described a large nest found in New Zealand on the side of a tree which was 5.5 metres long and weighed 500 kilograms and another in an abandoned house on the Ascension Islands which was 22 feet long.

Simon stated his passion for wasps and his search for a second year nest although the ones he found were in coastal scrub and impractical to take away. A friend at Karoola complained about the number of wasps on his property in early spring and Simon knew this was an indication of a second year nest. He put off helping with the wasp problem so that the nest would grow finally going on a search in February.

There were so many wasps it was impossible to trace them back to the nest and he failed twice to find it before paying the property owner's young son $20 to look for it. It took him only five minutes to find the nest in a dry creek bank about 100 metres from the house.

A picture of the nest on the day it was found showed that blackberry leaves had been stripped away near the six entrance holes spread over 1.5 metres. Simon told us that there was a steady column of wasps entering and leaving the nest and that standing on the bank you could feel the humming of the nest in your feet.

Wasps can be aggressive if you approach their nest but are dormant at night and do not forage so he returned in the evening and used three cockroach bombs and two big cans of surface spray to kill the nest. Simon was stung nine times on that first day. Next morning there were still as many wasps moving around the nest and he knew that it was big. Plan B was to use wasp and ant powder which took half a day to take effect.

To remove the nest the scrub around it was slashed away and the nest dug out with four slides showing the progress of the work. The next showed Simon standing in the hole where the nest came from with a large pile of dead wasps at his feet. The nest had to be carried out of the bush to the car and it weighed about 100 kilograms and we saw how it was loaded onto a utility in a sling before being taken to a shed at the QVMAG.

Simon pointed out that the nest was full of dead wasps as well as grubs, eggs and pupae which were unaffected by the poison and still hatching. This went on for some time until eventually the nest was taken to a walk in freezer at -20 to stop all the activity. Eventually the dead wasps and grubs in the nest started to compost and the nest was warm to the touch. To save the nest it was hollowed out and filled with expandable foam leaving the exterior intact.

He pointed out that the wasps expanded the nest down to base of the bank until it became damp and then expanded into the bank and up so that part of the nest was growing into the vegetation.

We learned that nest will not stay active for a third season although it is not known why. Simon speculated that the nest grew too big to cope by the end of the second year and finally died out.

At this stage Simon asked for questions about wasps and prompted by a question he told us that people have been killed by nests collapsing. A school groundsman in Victoria was killed when a wheel of his tractor broke through a nest. Simon stepped into the nest on his first night with it and his torch woke the wasps which then attacked him. A further 10 minutes of questions followed and much information on hornets which are as yet not in Australia.

Following the question time Simon moved onto another QVMAG project which was to collect an inchman (ant) nest. Having found a suitable nest on a bank plaster was poured in and he was surprised at how much went into the nest which was much larger than anticipated.

A front end loader then dug the nest out and the bits carefully labelled as the plaster tended to break. It took the best part of a day to complete and Simon told us that the best material for future nest collecting of sugar ants and jack jumpers would be molten aluminium. Slides showed the progress of the job ending in one with the nest on display at the museum and being shown to a group of school children.

Following questions Simon told us of how little we knew about ants including that we did not know how many species there are in Tasmania. There are three known jack jumper species and probably another six which will only be identified by genetic testing.

While answering questions on ants Simon told us of a leaf cutter ant nest in Argentina into which hundreds of litres of a rubbery resin was pumped in. The nest was the size of our meeting room and there was a YouTube clip of it.

Judith gave the thanks and asked members to show their appreciation.

Noel Manning

FIELD TRIP ~ GADS FALLS & ARM FALLS - Saturday 15 August
Aka BIG KIDS DAY OUT

With 2 weeks of reports that the Lake Parangana Road was closed due to the recent snow falls, this field trip was almost a non-starter. Preparations for an alternative were being made when last minute word came through - the road had re-opened. Eleven members ventured out, with only Jill, Tony and Christine knowing exactly where we were going. A pit stop at Mole Creek, then on till we turned south onto the Mersey Forest Road. The sealed road was very good, but further south were signs of the recent cleanup. Fallen trees and smashed branches littered the roadside and it seemed like a tornado had passed through.

Soon we were travelling alongside Lake Parangana, a Hydro dam fed from the Mersey River (via Lake Rowallan), Arm River and Fisher River. On the right a steep ridge separated us from the Borradaile Plains, from where Gadds Creek drains. We pulled over at a sign to Gadds Falls and checked the roadside vegetation while having our morning tea. Myrtle, cheesewood, sassafras (in bud), celery top, – all we need now is some leatherwood and oh, there it is. Boots on and coffee'd up we were soon ready to go; Tony slipped away ahead, but returned shortly with the news that the track was impassable due to fallen timber. From the roadside Tina pointed out a tantalizing view, high above us through the trees, there was part of the waterfall. Disappointed, we wandered up a short vehicle track into a quarry, but still could go

no further. A variety of plants kept us busy for a while, and the charred remains of a burnt out tent created a diversion and discussion around possible (and highly improbable) causes.

On we headed, turning onto Maggs Rd toward Arm Falls, and found ourselves in the car park of the Arm River Forestry Education Centre. The track to the falls begins here and again we were confronted by fallen branches and even whole trees across our path. The heavy snow and winds had smashed not only wattles and hakeas and the like, but many eucalypt branches as well.

Determination prevailed, "on and on" said Tina and, assisted by the men in the group, with constant detours, we eventually won through and arrived at a short but quite spectacular waterfall. With the river squeezed into a narrow gorge the water rushed past us and dropped into what was like a giant surging washing machine, and then pushing back to the right it escaped through a gap and on its way. With plenty of botanising and camera clicking both there and back, it was after one when we sat down to lunch in a shelter at the Centre.

Having missed out on Gadds Falls, we decided to take a 14km detour to Devils Gullet on the Lake MacKenzie Road. The vegetation here was slightly different in that there were Bedfordia salicina all along the roadside. Climbing higher we soon came to a little snow along the top side. Then more snow . . . and more. Pretty, so we stopped for photos and a play. Flying snowballs soon had us ducking for cover (why should kids have all the fun?) and Tom's camera was busy.

Nearly there, the cleared area of road diminished, the front vehicles stopped, and "the snow lay all about". While discussing whether or not to continue the last 1.5km on foot the mist increased and we decided there would be no views to see anyway. Someone had left a snowman that needed repairs, so Tom T. enhanced its features with a pink dummy - not sure why he carried that with him. Large boulders were covered in interesting patterns of lichen. A couple of pretty spots to photograph down the road, then it was "on and on" to the Pepperberry Cafe in Mole Creek for hot drinks, Devonshire teas and yummy chocolate cake.

A great day out, plenty of field natting, lots of laughs and, hopefully, some good photos taken. Prue Wright

Plant List ~

Gadds Falls area ~ *Acacia dealbata*, silver wattle; *Atherosperma moschatum*, sassafras; *Blechnum nudum*, fishbone waterfern; *Cassinia aculeata*, dollybush; *Dianella tasmanica*, forest flaxlily; *Dicksonia antarctica*, soft treefern; *Eucryphia lucida*, leatherwood; *Hakea lissosperma*, mountain needlebush; *Hydrocotyle* sp., pennywort; *Leptecophylla juniperina* subsp. *parvifolia*, mountain pinkberry; *Leptospermum nitidum*, shiny teatree; *Lomandra longifolia*, sagg; *Lomatia tinctoria*, guitarplant; *Nothofagus cunninghamii*, myrtle beech; *Oxylobium ellipticum*, golden shaggypea; *Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*, celerytop pine; *Pittosporum bicolor*, cheesewood; *Richea sprengelioides*, rigid candleheath

Arm River Falls Circuit ~ *Acacia dealbata*, silver wattle; *Acacia melanoxylon*, blackwood; *Billardiera longiflora*, purple appleberry; *Blechnum nudum*, fishbone waterfern; *Blechnum wattsii*, hard waterfern; *Bunodophoron* sp., lichen; *Clematis aristata*, mountain clematis; *Coprosma quadrifida*, native currant; *Dianella tasmanica*, forest flaxlily; *Dicksonia antarctica*, soft treefern; *Eucalyptus dalrympleana,* mountain white gum; *Eucalyptus radiata*, Forth River peppermint; *Eucalyptus regnans*, giant ash; *Eucalyptus* sp snow gums; *Grammitis billardierei,* finger fern*; Hakea lissosperma*, mountain needlebush; *Heterotextus miltinus*,

golden jelly-bells; *Histiopteris incisa*, batswing fern; *Leptocophylla juniperina* subsp. *parvifolia*, mountain pinkberry; *Lomandra longifolia*, sagg; *Lomatia tinctoria*, guitarplant; *Microsorum pustulatum*, kangaroo fern; *Monotoca glauca*, goldey wood; *Oxalis* sp., woodsorrel; *Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*, celerytop pine; *Pittosporum bicolor*, cheesewood; *Pomaderris apetala*, dogwood; *Pseudocyphellaria billardierei,* lichen; *Pseudocyphellaria rubella,* lichen; *Sphagnum* sp., moss; *Tasmannia lanceolata*, mountain pepper; *Tremella fuciformis*, colourless jelly fungus

Arm River Falls Bridge roadside ~ *Daviesia latifolia,* hop bitterpea
Devil's Gullet Road ~ *Bedfordia salicina*, Tasmanian blanketleaf

SKEMPS DAY ~ John Elliott and the Galapagos Islands ~ Sunday 30 August

23 members and one visitor attended Skemps on a surprisingly warm day for late winter. John commented that after going to the trouble to light a fire most people had moved outside with their coffees where a warming sun shone through a cloudless sky. From the buzz of conversation it was obvious that those present were fully indulging in the social aspect of the day.

Some small tasks were done including archiving of Club records by Karen, which included moving heavy boxes from high shelves and then returning them later, while the barbecue was prepared for a quick start to lunch.

With a good crowd in attendance we put a sign on the front door to tell late arrivals to use the side entrance and John started his excellent talk and slide show on his trip to the Galápagos Islands and we finally appreciated his efforts with the fire.

He started his talk with maps to show us where the islands are in the eastern Pacific and to show the route he travelled. The early slides were of the city of Quito in Ecuador which straddles the Equator and included the city, the surrounding mountains and volcanoes, the people and the buildings.

The first part of his journey was along a river which leads into the Amazon and it was here that his pictures of the local nature really started. Mountains, flowers, insects and a frog featured while one showed a cayman lurking in the waters into which John and others ventured for a swim for relief from the tropical heat.

The travel lines moved from Ecuador to the Galápagos Islands and the pictures treated us to a fine display of the amazing fauna of the islands with some impressive shots of old lava flows and other geological features.

John had chosen to forgo carrying his diving gear to carry his camera and lens instead and this was evident in the excellent pictures. He acknowledged fellow traveller Roy for his underwater pictures of sharks and turtles and colourful fish and rays which augmented the impressive slide show of John's work.

On land the pictures covered the tortoise, the land and marine iguana, sea lion and fur seal as well as many of the birds. The running commentary gave us some history of the area and most of the birds and animals were named. Many of the birds were compared to those found in Tasmania and we could see much that was familiar. John claimed that while many animals and birds are the Galápagos whatever a picture showed what he claimed was the world's best petrel. It was of cause Elliot's storm-petrel and he was certain that it was the Magnificent Frigatebird that he had also photographed. An indistinct picture of a whale in the distance and a blurry shot of a large furry animal, featuring the ear and rear only, were the only ones you could mark down.

Tom thanked John for the work he put into the presentation and those present showed their appreciation.

Following lunch John and Prue sorted through the submitted images for the Club's 2016 calendar while many members took advantage of the fine weather to go for walks. Later when Prue was available, we took a walk down to the wetland area along the creek checking plants as we went. Back at the Centre tidying and packing up was in progress in readiness for our imminent departures. Noel Manning

GENERAL MEETING SEPTEMBER
GUEST SPEAKER ~ John Duggin ~ ***Wetland Ecology and Restoration***

Tom introduced John Duggin who was to talk on the Tamar Wetlands.

John started his talk with the wide mouth frog joke giving it a Tasmanian wetlands flavour by having a copperhead snake as the frog's nemesis. He described the frog's punchline as 'rapid ecological adaptation'.

He then posed the big question 'What is a wetlands?' Members gave their thoughts including that it was swamplands, there was intermittent water and eventually John told us that the water had an influence on the biota with there often being very sharp lines in the environment between the wetland plants and dry land plants.

The serious kind of definition came from the International Convention on Wetlands which took place in Ramsar, Iran and was given as; Any land that is saturated or flooded with water, either seasonally or permanently. The biota is influenced by the presence of water. They can be marine/coastal, inland or artificial. Water can be static or flowing and fresh, brackish or saline. John told us that the original definition from the 70s went to a few paragraphs with a few ifs, buts and ands. He also said that 'at the landward side it is quite an easy thing, the boundary of a wetlands, but how far into water do you go before it becomes a pond and not a wetlands or is the pond part of the wetlands? So there has got to be a definition from the other side.' He went on to talk about the extremes of what could be classed as wetlands, including the definition for the marine environment of 6 metres below the low water line and as he said '…that could really cover coral reefs and a few other things'. At the other extreme is the coolabah country of the western rivers of NSW. The cycle of infrequent flooding in this country leads to the next generation of coolabah trees even though the floods only occur every 20 or 30 years. That is, no floods, no coolabah, therefore this is a wetlands. The Commonwealth secured an allocation of water for these rivers to make sure they could meet the conditions of the inter-national agreement. Wetlands can also be artificial therefore at an international level rice paddies are included.

A slide showed the places which are included in the description of wetlands and included swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, lagoons, rivers, flood plains, saltmarshes, mudflats, mangroves, seagrass meadows, coral reefs, bogs, fens, peatlands, aquifers and ground-water dependant ecosystems. There is an argument that the last of these should be considered wetlands even though the water may never occur at the surface.

In order to set the scene about the subject John said we need to talk about the Ramsar Wetland Convention which is an international agreement signed in Ramsar in 1971 and brought into effect in 1975 and Australia, in 1974, was the first of the 196 countries to sign up. As a signatory Australia is permitted to nominate sites first

put forward by a state or territory and then see that the site is maintained by the Environmental Conservation and Biodiversity Act 1999. This means that the values (criteria) for which a wetland was nominated are maintained or enhanced but not degraded.

Of the 65 sites in Australia listed as at 2010, covering a total of 8.3 million hectares, only Coburg Peninsular and Kakadu National Park of the Northern Territory were nominated before Tasmania's 10 sites. A slide listed the sites and John suggested that it was bird people who chose the Tasmanian sites.

John told us that the criteria for listing a site are not just about the environment. It is also about the people, the economy and politics as well as the environment and that the focus might be different for many people in considering an area to be listed.

He also noted that as the Commonwealth provided no ongoing funding for the sites that the Tasmanian Government will not entertain further nominations. He and other volunteers at the Tamar Wetlands have a vision to have the wetlands listed as a world heritage Ramsar Site. A diagram showed vision and planning with switching points as different aspects became more important and we were impressed by an example of vision and planning he showed us. His 6yo step grandson had written an illustrated letter to a young girl asking her to marry him when they grew up. John saw this as an example of a vision requiring long term planning.

The talk moved onto Tamar River Conservation Area (TRCA) covering the 4,500 ha of water area from the Batman Bridge in the north to the Kings Avenue and Charles Street Bridges in the south and the crown public land along the shoreline which has been gazetted as reserves. In the early nineties land around Tamar Island was acquired and added to the TRCA and is the Tamar Island Wetland Centre (TIWC) and the talk moved on to this and John said he would cover the background, the Board Walk and Centre and the reserve.

What you see in the Tamar Valley is influenced by three timelines, the 65 million years of geological time, the 30-40,000 years of aboriginal time and the 220 years since European occupation.

The end of the cretaceous saw mass extinctions and 50 million years ago (mya) in the early tertiary there was a lot of tectonic activity in the Tamar Valley with the fault lines producing a horst and graben field. The horst are blocks which go up forming hills and mountains while the graben go down forming the valley. About 30 mya there was a lot of volcanic activity and the lava flowed into the valley blocking it near the Batman Bridge and forming a lake which extended back to Longford or perhaps even Cressy.

The next geological influence was the ice age around 10 mya when the sea level was 100 metres lower than today and this resulted in the increasing depth along the Tamar. Three or four metres at Launceston, 10 to 12 at Rosevears, 55 at the Batman Bridge and 75 at Low Head.

And that brings us to aboriginal time of which we know little. John stated that the wetlands along the Tamar would have been important for food and resources for the aboriginal inhabitants although there has been no evidence found. The next timeline is the 225 years of European occupation and this changed the landscape significantly.

The impressive TIWC is an interpretation and education centre, built on 25 to 30 metres of sediment which means using pylons for support. As not all the pylons made it to the bedrock some are free floating. The 1.5 kilometres of board walk were constructed using work for the dole labour and includes three bridges and the large one had the same difficulties with the deep sediment.

The first evidence to be seen of European influence is the straight lines of raised

land between the ponds. You rarely see straight lines in nature and the ones seen here indicate drains and levees and if you look close enough you can also see fence lines. The main agricultural activity was grazing although one paddock was used for potatoes.

In the sixties there was a go-kart track and tyres for the track are still embedded in the mud. Duck hunting was another activity in the area and continued up until the 1980s and remnants of hides can still be seen.

A slide showed non-native trees on Tamar Island and John explained that the seeds for these came from Kew Botanical Gardens in the 1890s and were raised in Hobart. Some were given to the Launceston council and the ones on the island were left overs and a slide showed the well known oak tree with the plough embedded in it.

The old hut on the island is of cultural significance as it was used as part of the dredging camp based on the island and we saw a slide of this as well as the remains of the dredging barge Ponrabbel. John told us that when barges were past their use by date some were sunk in the main channel to divert the river. This engineering idea would divert more water to the main channel on the other side of Tamar Island, increasing the volume and velocity of the flow to scour the river of silt. In John's words 'The 1929 flood didn't respect the engineers what so ever and just went straight through it and blew it out. And so that's one for the environment, nil to the engineers…a good result.'

John listed the common plant communities starting with the common reed, *Phragmites*, which covered about 80% of the vegetated area of the wetlands and which visitors often mistake for the invasive rice grass. While the swamp paperbark forest is small it is important as is a threatened ecological community, the species is not threatened, but its ecological community is threatened as the paperbark swamp community of Tasmania is down to 2% of pre European occupation.

The areas of swamp paperbark which only occasionally receive water have no understory while the permanent water areas have sea parsley and jointed swamp stalks.

The introduced tall fescue is well established in the area and a slide showed the clear boundaries between the areas of fescue and *Phragmites* which John told us must be due to a micro habitat difference such as being a little higher and a little dryer allowing that species to come through. The spike rush sedgelands also seem to thrive in areas less dominated by the flood tides. Another slide showed what John described as the fringe communities and environmental gradients, the various plants growing between the wet and dry extremes.

John spoke of the great bindweed which is also a native and again he needs to explain this to visitors who see it as introduced. We learned that the area has some threatened plants, including the Australian gipsywort (*Lycopus australis*) E, great bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*) R, sea clubrush (*Bolboschoenus caldwellii*) R and mud dock (*Rumex bidens*) R (E = endangered and R = rare)

Amphibians and reptiles included the glossy grass skink, green and gold frog and the copperhead snake. Up to eleven individual copperheads have been seen in one day by a visitor. The mammals include paddymelons, water rats, swamp rats, platypus and a quoll. A series of slides showed a quoll on the boardwalk which, unimpressed with the human invader, turned and walked away. Tasmanian devils are on an old list of species seen although John does not think these are there now. Ferals include cats, rabbits, black rats and house mice and John told us that efforts to remove cats had probably been thwarted by visitors releasing trapped kittens.

Thanks to photographs by fellow volunteer Bill Edmondson and colleagues from the West Tamar Camera Club as well as John and the internet, we were treated to some excellent images of the bird life of TIWC. Black swan, purple swamp hen, chestnut teal duck and drake, Australian shelduck, pelican, Eurasian coot with chick (which John described as something only a mother could love as it was so ugly), freckled duck, two magnificent shots of an egret, white faced heron, black-winged stilt, Latham's snipe, spotted crake, hoary headed grebe, royal spoonbill, Caspian terns, crested tern, welcome swallow, fairy wren, little grassbird, sea eagle, swamp harrier, rufous (Nankeen) night heron and Cape Barron geese. There were two sightings of what was thought to be the Australasian bittern and John included an internet photograph of one for his talk.

The talk ended with an explanation of three graphs which is data collected as an ongoing part of the push for Ramsar Site nomination. Most changes on the graphs are related to dry periods in the wetlands.

The first showed the relative numbers of the pest fish Gambusia. John does weekly net sweeps to catch the fish and count both the Gambusia and the native Galaxias. The regular sweeps are done at the same time of the day, using the same sweep action on each occasion and he visits a number of sites in one channel. This does not give the total number present it just indicates the seasonal variation in numbers.

The next graph showed seasonal variations in water temperature and conductivity (a measure of salinity). Low water levels in summer produce high temperatures while flooding during the highest of high tides brings in brackish water which evaporates to give high salinity readings and John has noted a white salt crust on the edge puddles.

The last graph showed the pH of the water which produced some surprising results. The northern pond, which is also the most saline, has a high pH indicating that it is alkaline and it is caustic when it has the highest saline concentration. The pond to the south tends to be acid and John explained that the incoming water flowed over sediment he described as a monosulfidic black ooze. The oxygen rich water oxidises the sediment to produce the acid. Two similar ponds yet one is acid producing while the other is alkaline.

There is also a waterbird count done by volunteers in February as part of a state wide bird count. Peter Ralph introduced himself as a member of the West Tamar Camera Club before giving the thanks and asking members to show their appreciation.

Noel Manning

FIELD TRIP ~ MT BARROW INTERPRETATION TRAIL
~ Saturday 19 September

Seven members met at the Inveresk carpark before heading to Nunamara to begin the discovery trail, in weather that was not looking promising. Tom had sent a message to say he would go directly to the shop and when we arrived it was heartening to find five other members and a visitor waiting to join us.

The members included a first time trip for a new family group, including a junior, and a group of 14 eventually headed off up the mountain to our first stop at the information board. The sign had been vandalised so we continued on our way seeing Blackwood, prickly moses, silver wattle and common heath in flower along the road.

Our next stop was at Max's Lookout where there was more vandalism, this time by nature, as a falling limb had damaged part of the rail and board walk. The view was still reasonable, even in the predominantly misty conditions we encountered for most of the day. We passed a sign at Foon's Hill which indicated we were 832 metres above sea level, which, combined with the occasional gusts of wind explained the cold conditions.

Soon after this hill we stopped at a fork in the road to look at an historic site. It was the site of the Tasmanian Board Mills Sawmill Settlement c.1947 and there was a large see-through picture of the buildings in a steel frame. Knowledgeable visitor Wayne and member Rod explained the evidence of the remains of buildings while others had discussions about the identity of plants seen and ticked more off a list recorded during a previous trip.

Along the next part of the journey we encountered large coloured signs indicating nature of interest which could be seen in the area, these included waratah, Tasmanian devil, wedged-tail eagle, brush-tailed possum and mountain pepper. The forest up till then was dominated by small trees with eucalypts, mountain pepper and waratah in abundance, although most were small new growth. Then we entered an area of old growth beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), covered in lichens and moss with a small stream running through it giving it a magical ancient quality.

After a couple more stops to look at more nature and historical sites we headed to the interpretation centre for lunch. While some members gathered sticks and fire wood, Wayne started a warming fire and the gas barbecue was lit for lunch. The interpretation boards on the walls of the Centre provided us with more information and images from the past, which we perused while eating our lunch.

Another group were waiting for the Centre for a late lunch, so we headed up the hill to a restored bush workers' hut and the remains of two table-top landings and Wayne and Rod explained how these worked. We could see that two logs had been placed parallel on level ground about 10 metres apart while four or five deep grooves in each held other logs at right angles to form a bed to store the harvested logs. The table-tops were about the same height as the horse drawn wagons, later trucks, which would move the logs to the mill so it was easy to roll them on. The logs were dragged to the tables by steel cable and we could see pieces of these cables lying about and plenty of evidence of where they had been tied to tree stumps to anchor the haul.

Back to our cars we headed to the Tea Tree Boardwalk, a 20 minute return walk, which weaves through the tea tree and rainforest next to Weaver's Creek. A very photogenic area with lovely ferns, mosses and lichens, and water tumbling over the rocks in the creek. The boardwalk was also the victim of damaged in several places by some very large fallen trees.

Further down the mountain we left the main logging road and were taken to a creek crossing and a small waterfall for some last photos before heading home following an enjoyable day with a bit of history, native plants, views and the usual good company of fellow naturalists. Noel & Karen Manning

Birds

Dacelo novaeguineae, laughing kookaburra; *Strepera fuliginosa,* black currawong

Flora

Acacia dealbata, silver wattle; *Acacia melanoxylon,* Blackwood; *Acacia verticillata,* prickly moses; *Atherosperma moschatum,* sassafras; *Banksia marginata,* silver

banksia; *Bedfordia salicina,* Tasmanian blanketleaf; *Blechnum nudum,* fishbone waterfern; *Blechnum spp*, waterfern; *Correa lawrenceana,* mountain correa; *Cyathodes glauca*, purple cheeseberry; *Daviesia* sp. bitterpea; *Dianella tasmanica,* forest flaxlily; *Dicksonia Antarctica*, soft tree fern; *Epacris impressa,* common heath; *Epacris* sp., heath; *Eucalyptus amygdalina,* black peppermint; *Eucalyptus delegatensis* subsp. *tasmaniensis,* gum-topped stringybark; *Eucalyptus obliqua,* stringybark; *Eucalyptus viminalis,* white gum; *Gahnia grandis,* cutting grass; *Hakea lissosperma,* mountain needle bush; *Leptecophylla* sp, pinkberry; *Leptospermum lanigerum,* woolly teatree; *Lomandra longifolia,* sagg; *Lomatia tinctoria,* guitarplant; *Melicytus dentatus*, spiky violet bush; *? Myoporum insulare,* false boobyalla; *Nothofagus cunninghamii,* myrtle beech; *Olearia argophylla,* musk daisybush; *Olearia lirata,* forest daisybush; *Olearia phlogopappa,* dusty daisybush*; Pelargonium australe,* southern storksbill; *Persoonia gunnii,* geebung*; Pittosporum bicolor,* cheesewood; *Polystichum proliferum,* mother shieldfern; *Pomaderris apetala,* coast dogwood; *Pultenaea gunnii,* golden bushpea; *Senecio* sp. fireweed; *Tasmannia lanceolata,* mountain pepper; *Telopea truncata,* tasmanian waratah

Fungi

Calocera sp., orange branched jelly fungi; *Panellus longinquus*; Bracket fungus; *Tremella mesenterica,* orange brain-like mass

Mosses

Hypoptergium didictyon, umbrella-like moss; *Hypogymnia* sp lichen with brownish apothecia; *Stereocaulon ramulosum,* lichen

Gymnosperms

Lycopodium sp., clubmoss

SKEMPS DAY ~ Sunday 27 September

Members arrived at Skemps today to start some spring tidying of the Centre and grounds. As the morning was quite cool a warming fire was lit and we had a cuppa and a chat prior to the work. Members checked bedrooms and cleaned windows and sills while young Adelaide sorted the blunt coloured pencils from the large collection and tested the sharp ones. The blunt ones were sharpened ready for future visitors. Toys and games were also sorted and those broken, or missing pieces, were culled.

Tina and Noel cleared the *Dicksonia Antarctica* near the windows along the back of the building to give more light in the rooms. They were soon joined by both Toms and we will not name the one who slashed all tops from these plants leaving little more than stumps. As well as admitting more light these plants could be considered a fire hazard with the warmer months upon us. John continued clearing and splitting wood, Noel cut some of the logs with the chainsaw and Claire dragged tree litter down to a pile away from the building awaiting a future bonfire.

The barbecue was lit for an early lunch as we were expecting visitors in the early afternoon who arrived as the washing up was being finished. The St Patricks Rivers Progress Association, led by club member Rodney and his friend Wayne, had brought the Launceston Mayor and other guests to the property for a hot drink and a look around. The Association is showing the council the tourist facilities of the area in the hope that the council will assist with maintaining and improving these facilities to attract more visitors.

After lunch John and Prue had another session sorting and preparing the images for the calendar.

A small group, including Mayor van Zetten, walked the Water Gate Track with Noel. They also went to the board walk at the start of the Zig-Zag Track to look at the many signs remembering past mayors who have assisted the Club and the Green Corps group who had been involved with construction work in the area.

The progress association members and the mayor left soon after with one last place to view while other visitors stayed and chatted with members and looked at books from our extensive library.

Eventually four members were left to tidy up, put tools away and lock up. A successful day with two or three people showing an interest in the Club and we hope the progress association and the mayor were impressed with what we offer Launceston and the Myrtle Bank area in particular. Noel Manning

AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY MEETINGS

LFNC members are welcome to attend APS meetings held on a Tuesday at Max Fry Hall, Gorge Road Trevallyn at 7.30 pm. The next meeting will be on:

October 20 ~ Guest speaker Mark Wapstra, Threatened North East Beauties
November 17 ~ Guest speaker Vishnu Prahalad, Saltmarsh wetlands

Plant Sale:- The APS will hold their spring native plant sale at the Max Fry Hall on Saturday 17 October from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. The plants, propagated by APS members and grown at the APS nursery, are available at very reasonable prices.

QUEEN VICTORIA MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

The following nature photography exhibitions are on show at the Inveresk Museum until 1 November 2015, admission is FREE

The 2014 **Australian Geographic ANZANG Nature Photographer of the Year** exhibition returns to QVMAG. The exhibition celebrates the natural heritage of Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica and New Guinea. The 2014 exhibition images were chosen from 1442 photographs from eight countries. Each photograph in the exhibition shows nature's beauty in new ways. The Australian Geographic ANZANG Nature Photographer of the Year competition is owned by the South Australia Museum.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2014 exhibition is in its 50th year and is the most prestigious photography event of its kind, providing a global platform that showcases the diversity and wonder of the natural world. The exhibition premiered at the Natural History Museum, London in October 2014 before embarking on an international tour across six continents, giving millions of people the chance to see some of the world's most incredible wildlife photography.

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. You need to provide your own food and drinks for the outing unless otherwise specified. Morning tea is normally provided by the bus company on bus outings.
3. When travelling by car in convoy, each driver is responsible to ensure that the vehicle behind is in sight immediately after passing each cross road or fork in the road.
4. When car pooling, 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: Name tags are to be worn at 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. Contact our booking manager, John Elliott on 6344 9303 regarding availability and keys.

Field Centre Phone Number - 6399 3361

Postal Address: PO Box 1072 Launceston 7250

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

E.mail : secretary@lfnc.org.au