

THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Volume LVII No.2 December 2023/January 2024

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 : Prof. Nigel Forteath
President : Andrew Smith, 0402 893 378
Hon. Secretary : Noel Manning, 0458 030 767
Hon. Treasurer : Karen Manning

Meetings 1st Tuesday of month, February-December (except Jul & Aug) at Scotch-Oakburn College, Senior Campus, Penquite Rd Newstead

Program:

February

Tuesday 6

General Meeting – Future Planning for the Club -- Supper: Tina McGlynn

Saturday 3

Field Trip – Meet with Nigel Forteath at 10.30am at Four Springs Lake to look for dragon and damselflies

Thursday 8

Monthly Short Walk – Dragonflies and birds. Meet at the carpark under the Perth Bridge for a walk along the river

Sunday 25

Skemps Day – Insects at Skemps

March

Sunday 3

Community volunteering – Clean-up Australia Day – Newnham Creek – 3.30 to 5.30pm contact Karen on 0419 596 261 if you would like to assist, all equipment supplied

Tuesday 5

General Meeting -- Guest Speaker – To be confirmed -- Supper: TBA

Thursday 7

Monthly Short Walk – Birds in the Gorge. Meet at the Trevallyn carpark

Day/Date

Field Trip – To be confirmed

Sunday 31

Skemps Day – Removal of remaining fence and plant guards in the Federation Corridor

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

General Meeting - Tuesday 5 December – Club night – *The Year That Was* and Andrew Smith's presentation

The last meeting for the year turned out to be very interesting and not just because I won the Puggle. With questions over the suitability of the Club relying on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) instead of a proper contract for our involvement in the publication of Nigel's book, Andrew and Rod gave their thoughts on the matter before a vote decided that we would proceed based on the MoU.

Andrew asked what a shadow had to do with rainbows and I correctly answered that your shadow would be in front of you as you looked at a rainbow as the sun needed to be behind. I also noted that I had seen a Glory, a rainbow from an aircraft which can be a complete circle although I cannot remember if I saw a full circle. With his research into rainbows Andrew had discovered how interesting these were and gave an informative talk on rainbows. Your shadow would be longer than you to see a rainbow as the sun must be 42 degrees below the horizon or less. The talk was accompanied by impressive pictures of rainbows and diagrams of the optical effects that caused the rainbow. We learnt when a second rainbow is seen with the colours reversed and that the sky is lighter inside the rainbow than outside. I think only an obsessive compulsive would go to such detail about the optical effects involved, but who am I to judge?

Next came the carefully prepared slide presentation for *The Year That Was* accompanied by background music. What memories as we relived all the wonderful activities of the year with pictures of the more interesting plants, animals, fungi, seaweed, ocean critters and birds seen during that time as well as images of our participation in various activities.

Andrew thanked us for our attendance before inviting us to supper and closing a most interesting meeting.

Noel Manning

Monthly Walk – Thursday 7 December – Tamar Wetlands

Six members met at the Tamar Island Wetlands Centre on a warm summer day for a bird observing walk to Tamar Island. It was near maximum high tide at the start of this four kilometre round trip and a much lower receding tide on the return journey allowing the opportunity to see the birds at a high and low tide.

Geoff Shannon had his tripod and spotting scope which allowed him to see further away to identify birds in the distance. With workers slashing the Phragmites next to the board walk we did not expect to see any snakes though birds were in abundance with 32 species seen with a few stand outs worth noting.

A sea eagle and more than one swamp harrier were seen usually being harassed by forest ravens and I saw two harriers interacting although it was too brief an encounter for Geoff to see and comment. Were these two males fighting over



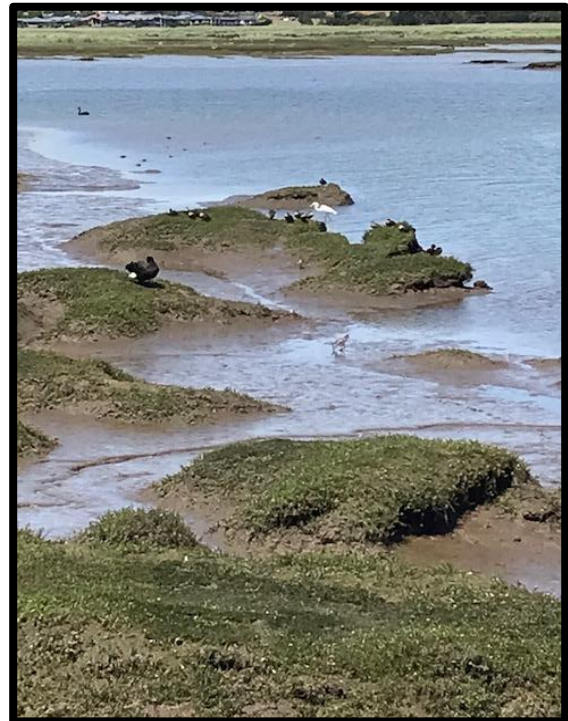


territory or a couple courting? The other stand out for me was a swamp hen jumping onto the board walk possibly to distract us from the tennis ball sized baby in the rushes behind it.

Geoff asked why there were so many non-native trees on an island with no known permanent habitation and as we were leaving I asked the ranger. He told us that the island was a popular picnic spot for people from Launceston who would visit by boat and they had planted trees for shade. He also gave us information about the dredges used on the Tamar confirming that these had been sunk in the side channels in an attempt to increase the flow in the main channel to flush the silt. The remains of these vessels can still be seen and although unsuccessful at removing the silt are a talking point and a perch

for the birds. The island also had a shack for the dredge operators and had been a farm and a small plough embedded in a tree also suggested this farming past. The last permanent resident was Bruno the bull who was moved to a nearby farm in 1994 to allow for the development of the Tamar Island Wetlands.

After over two hours wandering this wonderful wetlands so close to Launceston we bid farewell to three members with other commitments and the rest went for coffee and a light lunch at the Windsor Community Centre after another successful Thursday walk. Noel Manning



Bird List:- Australian Shelduck, Australian Pelican, Australian reed warbler, Australian Wood Duck, Black swan, Black-fronted dotterel, Brown thornbill, Chestnut teal, Domestic geese, Eurasian coot, European Goldfinch, Forest raven , Great cormorant, Great Egret (images above left & right, K Manning), Grey fantail, Grey Teal, Little black cormorant, Little grassbird, Masked lapwing, Pacific black duck, Pacific gull, Purple swamphen, Shining bronze-cuckoo, Silver gull, Silvereye, Sooty oystercatcher, Superb fairy-wren, Swamp harrier, Tasmanian Native hen, Welcome swallow, White-bellied sea-eagle, White-faced heron

Skemps Day – Saturday 9 December – End-of-Year Get-together

Our Christmas gathering at Skemps was attended by 15 people on an overcast and cool day with no rain. Caitlin's Scandi Christmas tree was returned to the Centre to add to the festive spirit. It as a rather laid back affair, with small groups heading off for walks and returning to the Centre for lunch and casual conversation.

More walks were taken in the afternoon with members and visitors hoping to catch sight of a platypus in one of the ponds and we also checked the latest plantings below the Federation Corridor. Among the many bird species seen the welcome swallows darted about probably unhappy with our presence as they prepared their nests for the breeding season. We saw a large echidna, pademelons and a wallaby as well. (Images below K Manning)



More walks followed before treats were put on the table for our shared afternoon tea and further chats, then a quick clean of the Centre before we headed off. Karen & Noel Manning

Microplastic with Tamar NRM – Sunday 21 January – Low Head

Five members attended this interesting training session about microplastic in the ocean including Jon, a very enthusiastic new member. There was a sixth member there, though Kirstin was the main presenter along with Megan on this lovely summer day.

After noting that their main equipment was similar to gem hunting sieves Megan told me that she had looked for sapphires in the Weld River as the field naturalists had done so many years ago. Her efforts were as unsuccessful as ours in finding a large gem stone.

When returning to the car park to look for the last three members to join the hunt I saw an impressive moth (Image right, N Manning) resting on the blocks making up the wall of the ablution block.



With the comprehensive introduction finished we moved to the beach finding a place away from sun bathers to start our survey. After a lengthy list of questions were answered as to the conditions of the survey location we started our task. Along a 50 metre line small sticks with blue flags were placed at random distances in the sand ready for our hunt. Near each a 500 x 500mm frame was placed on the sand and the top 200 mm scraped away and put in the double layer sieve. After a good shake had sieved out most of the sand the job was completed with sea water and the remainder checked for plastic.

As part of the survey some of us scoured the surrounding area for larger, more obvious pieces of plastic with our find placed in a small bag. Having made a cursory search of maybe three square metres of sand all I found was one cigarette butt originally dismissed as not an article suitable for the project. It was eventually added as the filter is an artificial substance that does not break down.

Returning to the shelters we washed the sand from hands, feet and equipment and settled down to examine the find. It was promising to find so little though someone pointed out that we were 20 or so metres from the area where most visitors congregated. Responding to a participant question we learnt that this was only an introduction session and not a full training session to qualify us for future surveys.

Andrew and I noted the irony of so much plastic equipment being used as part of our search for plastic in the ocean.

This part of the day having taken longer than expected it was decided to lunch in the new and impressive shelters before saying our thanks to the presenters and heading off to the nearby headland for the next part of our day, a look at the rock pools during the low tide expected around 3pm.

Noel Manning

Field Trip – Sunday 21 January – East Beach at Low Head for rockpools and shorebird observation

After an interesting introduction to beach side microplastic surveying with Tamar NRM, followed by a late lunch, four members went to the nearby headland for our annual look at the rock pools, passing a squid egg mass on the beach. Though with so many weekend and day time extra low tides occurring this year I hope we will visit a few more times.

Visiting our usual rock pool we noted the variety of sea life is returning to this pool. On our first visit we were rewarded with an abundance of species with a marked decline in the following year followed by a notable increase as the years passed.

With the low tide occurring around 3pm we ventured out to visit our favourite and reasonably accessible rockpool which always has plenty of water no matter how low the tide. Today it had lots of seaweed and seagrass litter, a variety of live seaweeds and the rock pool shrimp could be seen darting around the many small sea stars. In the pool on the rock above our pool, the waratah anemones could be seen though in fewer numbers than previous years.

The rocky area at the low tide was a picture with a large variety of seaweed species and when the right rock was turned over crabs scuttled away while the chitons slid slowly away. The chitons are interesting to watch as these hard shelled creatures move over the rock surface with no discernible body movement and they are difficult to remove.

Karen and Noel Manning



Algae – *Symploca* sp., blue-green algae (forms low hairy irregular patches on rocks); *Rivularia* sp, (forms dark green shiny cushions) *Leathesia* sp., (puffy golden brown algae)

Anemones - *Actinia tenebrosa*, waratah anemone

Barnacles - *Catomerus polymerus*, surf barnacle; *Chamaesipho tasmanica*, honeycomb barnacle

Chitons - *Ischnochiton australis*, southern chiton; *Sypharochiton pelliserpentis*, serpent skin chiton

Crabs - *Petrolisthes elongates*, NZ half crab (i)

Lace coral - *Celleporaria cristata*

Lichen - *Lichina confinis*, circular black and grey lichen; *Symploca* sp (low black hairy irregular patches)

Marine worms and shrimp - *Galeolaria caespitosa*, Polychaeta tube; *Palaemon serenus*, rock pool shrimp

Seastars - *Parvulastra exigua*, rockpool star;

Seaweed – *Amphibolis antarctica*, sea nymph; *Caulerpa brownii*, green algae; *Caulocystis uvifera*, grapeweed; *Corallina officinalis*, tufted coralline; *Cystophora retorta*, open-branched cystophora; *Cystophora torulosa*, club-leaved cystophora; *Ecklonia radiata*, common kelp; *Hormosira banksii*, neptune's necklace;

Shells – *Bembicium nanun*, striped conniwink; *Limnoperna pulex*, flea mussel; *Nerita* sp., black crow shell; *Austrolittorina unifasciata*, little blue periwinkle

Sponge – *Dendrilla rosea*, encrusting rose sponge

Ragwort Raid with Tamar NRM – Saturday 27 January – Nunamara area

Six Launceston Field Naturalists joined Nick of Tamar NRM for the 25th annual Ragwort Raid around Nunamara with the cloudy day making conditions so much more cool and pleasant for the hard work ahead. Ragwort is a common environmental weed in Tasmania and is toxic to domestic livestock and humans. It has a head of small yellow, daisy-like flowers and the seeds easily spread the plant.



Roy and Louise chose Bingham's Road and the start of the Mount Barrow Discovery Trail and filled the back of their large vehicle, Nick and Brian did Prossers Forest Road (images left and below left on Hunting Ground Road), while Karen, Jeff and I went to Hunting Ground Road where we knew there was much to be done.

Leaving the car we moved along the road side ditch finding small groups of the plant eventually reaching a large roadside verge which finally defeated us. While some smaller plant could be easily pulled the larger ones were stuck in the rocky ground and the going was difficult even with our diggers.



The cleared area between the road and the regrowth forest on the left had many ragwort plants, out of bounds to us, while the forest remained mostly free of these weeds. There were also many plants in the paddocks on the other side of the road, again out of bounds, just waiting to spread their seeds.

These small groups achieved much and it is worth noting all volunteers were from our Club. After dropping off

our bags we had a quick cuppa and a sausage before heading off to Skemps for the second part of this busy day.

Noel Manning (images)

Skemps Afternoon – Saturday 27 January – visit by Richard & Yim Phillips

Twelve members and our guests Richard Phillips and partner Yim arrived for the January Skemps Day, with the intention to include walks and a possible insect hunt, with outdoor activities cancelled due to strong winds and the occasional heavy shower. Nigel Forteach was there to show us the proof of his book and to meet with Richard whom he knew from his Tasmanian university work days and to help with insects. Following cuppas and plenty of chatter, I began the proceedings with a talk on the lead up to and construction of the John Skemp Field

Centre. Apart from the concreter, plumber and bricklayer, five members did all the construction work, a great effort by a dedicated few. Before I handed over to Richard, I pointed out the property boasts seven land titles.

Richard provided a brief history of how the two Skemp brothers settled on Skemps, taking over a former shingle splitters site with a rudimentary hut on it. Richard regaled us with many and varied reminiscences of his childhood and involvement living next door to John Skemp. His mother introduced him to science and this was augmented by John during visits to the property, discussing science while his father farmed there. It began when he was about 12 years old and he mentioned how lucky he was to live in the bush with a scientist next door.

John was in the habit of visiting the Phillips three times a week, usually hanging around until he received an invite to stay for tea, thereby getting three good meals a week as Richard's mother was a good cook. John cooked rudimentary meals on an open fire the rest of the week.



Following his reminiscences Richard produced three small boxes that John used to illustrate his talks to school children. Whatever was in two of these is unknown, while the third (Image left J Campbell) contained the heads of our three snakes in phials, the tiger, the copperhead, and the white-lipped snakes (known as whip snake back then). He then produced a magnificent old clock that belonged to the Skemps which continued to work after he wound it up, amusing



us as it quietly chimed when it reached the half hour. Richard presented the clock to the Club.

The day finished with more drinks and chatter with the last members leaving about 5pm to end a most interesting afternoon. We are so grateful to receive these Skemp memorabilia.

Jeff Campbell (Image right & above right K Manning)

Skemps Report - December 23 and January 24

Karen and Caitlin did a great job of weeding, cleaning (especially the cobwebs) and sorting the library while Jeff, Rob, Geoff and I moved around the property to clear the many spars fallen over the nature trails. The summer seems to



have added a little strength to the wind and we have been kept busy. Most of these are left where they fall as it is too difficult to get any useful quantity close to where a car and trailer can pick them up. Two falls close to the driveway and with seemingly level trails for a wheel barrow did provide much fire wood though it was hard work.

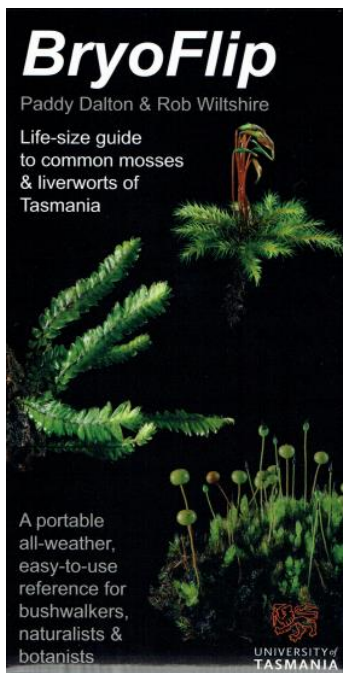
The first Tuesday in December I used the ride on mower for the first time this season and mowed all the car trails out from the Centre. I was back on for the first Tuesday of the New Year to finish the open area in front of the Centre, an important task as this provides a fire break. I also slashed areas near the Centre inaccessible to the mowers.

Perhaps killed with kindness the popular and photogenic Blandfordia out from the kitchen has been replaced by two brought back by Claire after a trip to Hobart. I also cleared the enclosure around the Telstra pillar looking for the pipes and taps supplying water to the barn. Each week I notice that water seems to be leaking somewhere and I suspected these pipes. Alas this was not the case and the search goes on.

While some firewood splits easily much of it does not and Rod has been doing a great job when he is available, not often enough though as he is busy with work. The supplies of fire wood are enough for the next winter and beyond at this stage.

Jon suggested that the electrical system should be better labelled in case there are problems and we spent half a Tuesday doing this. Light switches and power points have been labelled to match those on the switch board. I can understand 'L' for lights and 'A' or 'B' works for the power points and lights that do not go off when visitors turn the power off though why are power points marked with 'H'? 'H' for Hydro maybe for some reason? Karen's Dymo made a tidy job of this task.

Some power points stay on when visitors leave and maybe you are wondering why. In the past we had an alarm system in the Centre and an electric fence around the Federation Corridor. Others in the container and side shed powered the mower battery charger and a light near the outside toilet while another charger kept a car battery going for emergency lighting back when the mains supply was so unreliable.



There are some tasks so easy to forget and one Tuesday I found Karen up a ladder cleaning roof gutters to reduce the leaf litter settling on the sieve at the drinking water tank. It has been suggested we make a list of all these odd tasks so these are not forgotten in future.

Karen recently found Holly, Malva and Cordyline in the homestead site. Is there no end to weeds? The *Eucryphia* near the Centre has been attacked by something so with some difficulty we put a guard around the tree.

If you are free on a Tuesday and are willing to help out at Skemps let your committee know and I will add your name to those on the text message list.

Noel Manning

Petrarch's Bookstore have this new publication from the University of Tasmania for sale at \$13.95.

BryoFlip introduces some of the more common and distinctive Tasmanian mosses and liverworts.

Additional Information

Club Outings:

- Are held during a weekend following the General Meeting. Until further notice, members should make their own travel arrangement to participate, contact the Program Coordinator if you require further details or wish to share a lift.
- Provide your own food and drinks for the outing and wear/take clothing/footwear suitable for all weather types.
- The program is subject to alternation at short notice. Notification of changes to field trips will be advised at the General Meeting prior to the event. Please contact the Program Coordinator to confirm details if you are unable to attend that meeting.

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 the Bookings Officer at bookings@lfnc.org.au or telephone 0458 030 767 regarding availability and keys.

Field Centre Phone Number: (03) 6399 3361

Postal Address: 23 Skemps Road, Myrtle Bank

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

Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/527797787360157/>

Emails: president@lfnc.org.au secretary@lfnc.org.au

program@lfnc.org.au newsletter@lfnc.org.au

treasurer@lfnc.org.au



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