Tasmanian Parrots

Colin Spry, guest speaker at the General Meeting on Tuesday 7 February, told us that the Green Rosella or Broadtailed Parrot as it is commonly referred to, is the Tasmanian icon of the bird world. It is an endemic bird, found statewide and is visible on a daily basis.

Tasmanian parrots fall into four broad categories: Cockatoos, Lorikeet, Broadtailed Parrots plus the Grass, Swift and Ground Parrots. There are nine species of native parrots in Tasmania, about half of them migratory, four species are sedentary to Tasmania for most of their breeding life. All our native species of Parrots lay white eggs. They are protected under the Wildlife Regulations 1999 and the Orange-bellied Parrot and two other vulnerable species have special protection.

Cockatoos: the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo is represented by one species in Tasmania, *Calyptorhynchus funereus*. There are five species on the mainland. It is fairly common and found statewide. It is known as a harbinger of bad weather in lowlands which appears to hold true, as well as for the highlands. It has a raucous call, a strong sharp beak and is 52 to 59 cm in length.

The Sulphur-crested White Cockatoo, *Cacatua galerita*, is thought to be aviary escapes. It can be very destructive in newly sown paddocks.

The Pink and Grey Galah, *Cacatua roseicapilla*, is also thought to be aviary escapes. (Although not mentioned, other records include the Gang Gang Cockatoo, *Callacephalon fimbriatum*, the Cockatiel, *Nymphicus hollandicus*, the Little Corella, *Cacatua pastinator* and the Long-billed Corrella, *Cacatua tenuirostris*.)

Lorikeets: One native species, the Musk Lorikeet, *Glossopsita concinna*, found in the central north, midlands and eastern Tasmania to Bicheno. It is small and compact and is often mistaken for the Swift Parrot. They follow the flowering Eucalypts through their range and love fruit. (There are also records of the Rainbow Lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haemotodus* and the Little Lorikeet, *Glossopsitta pusilla*.)

Broadtails: The Green Rosella, *Platycercus caledonicus,* found statewide is the only Tasmanian endemic rosella. It is easily hand-reared.

The Eastern Rosella, *P. eximius*, is distributed throughout southeast Australia. The Tasmanian representatives have brighter plumage than their mainland counterparts. It is found in the north, east coast and northern midlands.

Grass Parrots: The Blue-winged Parrot, *Neophema chrysostoma*, is found mainly in

the top end of the midlands to the west and east coasts. Most migrate to the mainland. It is often mistaken for the Orange-bellied Parrot on the west coast.

The Orange-bellied parrot, *N. chrysogaster*, is probably the rarest parrot in Australia, perhaps second to the Fig Parrot. It migrates between the west coast and the mainland via King Island. It has similar colouration to the Blue-winged Parrot. Starlings are its greatest threat, as they are to all native Tasmanian parrots, as they are extremely aggressive in nesting and maintaining nest sites in tree hollows.

The Swift Parrot, *Lathamus discolor*, another migrant, follows the flowering eucalypts from the north of the state southwards.

The Ground Parrot, *Pezoporus wallicus*, is found in the southwest and on the west coast. Their decline is probably mainly due to feral cats and to a lesser extent fire regime. They are listed as a threatened species.

(The only other species not mentioned is the extinct Red-fronted Parakeet, *Cynoramphus novaezelandiae*, which became extinct about 1890 after having occurred in great numbers. The main cause is thought to have been predation by sealers and cats).

Club Social Evening

A Club social evening was held on Monday 13 February at the Abel Tasman Motor Inn. Nearly 30 members turned out for a memorable social occasion with good food and great company.

Land for Wildlife Open Day at Skemps

Land for Wildlife Open Day on Sunday 18 February was a great success. What a response! About 60 people arrived to take part in the walks and generally enjoy the company and the property itself. A bus load of Field Naturalists came from the North West Coast as well as members from Central North and Northern Group Australian Plant Society as well as our own Launceston members.

The President Al Pegler welcomed everyone and Jeff Campbell and John Simmons lead several walks both before and after lunch. As well some people walked to the wetlands and ponds and others inspected the growth of the Federation Corridor plantings. We were pleased to welcome a representative from Land for Wildlife, Iona Mitchell who travelled from Hobart especially for the day. She took part in walks after lunch and was much impressed by what she saw.

Jim Nelson delivered the highlights for the day and our only sighting of any wildlife. He collected first of all a beautiful specimen of the local freshwater crayfish

Astacopsis franklinii, a very active and handsome animal that was quite happy to crawl out of the container so we could all see it properly.

In the afternoon Jim collected another specimen, this time our own Mt Arthur Burrowing Crayfish, *Engaeus orramakunna*, a tiny crustacean that is listed as a threatened species and which is totally protected. *Engaeus* are most easily identified by the way they hold their claws, holding them vertically. They live in burrows dug in the ground near water creating chimneys made of mud pellets above where they live. Both specimens were returned to the spots where they were found which is of utmost importance. They were kept in water in containers in the fridge during the day to keep them cool.

The two barbecues were at full stretch at lunchtime and we all appreciated having the additional use of the new gas-fired unit. Everyone brought their own lunch and members supplied morning and afternoon tea.
A small group of regulars vacuumed, washed out and cleaned up all areas in readiness for the next visit or event. Our thanks to all those who assisted during the very successful day.

Marion Simmons

Weather

Brendon McMahon, Guest Speaker at the General Meeting on Tuesday 7 March, spoke to us about weather. He told us that weather forecasting requires lots of information and if one is not aware of current conditions there is no hope of forecasting future conditions. We live at the bottom of an ocean of air; it is similar in the atmosphere to depth in the ocean in that it is necessary to establish what is happening at various levels, not just at ground level. Information required to help an estimation includes temperature, water vapour and energy levels, etc. Weather forecasting is like trying to complete a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle with the pieces constantly moving around.

Sources used include people to provide information on visibility, cloud cover, direction of wind movement etc., barometers, rain gauges. There are about 56 automatic weather stations and 418 rain gauges around Tasmania. A wind profiler machine is installed at Western Junction. Weather radar looks at water droplets, as opposed to satellite images which are infra red or visual.

Information is obtained from ships, aircraft, buoys, remote sensing devices and individual people. Information is used for climate research and other uses. Worldwide standards are used, e.g. air temperature is measured at a height of 1.2 metres.

Brendon then moved on to photographs and information about various isolated weather stations where he had worked. The first was at Giles in Central Australia. It was set up in the early 1950s to collect information for atomic tests. Air passing over Australia is severely modified as it travels from the northwest of Australia down to South Australia. Giles helps provide information on this. He moved to Davis Station in Antarctica where he was involved with various other programmes including biology, marine, weather etc. Everyone on station have multi-faceted jobs. The area has clear atmosphere with good visibility, the average elevation is about 3 km, most of it ice. There is a huge temperature inversion during winter with warmer temperatures at higher altitudes. Davis station itself is a dusty, gritty environment. The next station was at Macquarie Island which is similar to southwest Tasmania with westerly winds. It is considered a calm day when winds are about 20 knots, it needs winds of at least 25 knots to be considered windy. The average elevation is about 300m. There aren't any vehicles so one has to walk everywhere. The west coast is extremely rugged. The environment is usually boggy underfoot during summer, but it freezes during winter. The pelagic study includes checking rubbish along the coast. Brendon's next move was to Willis Island in the Coral Sea. It was set up to provide tropical cyclone warnings and to ground truth satellite data. Tropical cyclones need a sea temperature of 27 degrees.

Skemp Day

Originally scheduled as a Weed Day with Jamie Cooper, the revised Skemp Day on Sunday 12 March saw 15 members turn up, ten by morning tea time, the rest by late lunch. Following a leisurely morning tea we went down to Neil's Nemesis and Bob's Big Bog to check on the rock for the overflows delivered the previous Tuesday. Not satisfied with looking, we began the task of installing the rock in the overflows, in the first instance merely be standing at the heap and throwing the rock at the overflow. Needless to say, rock went everywhere! Nevertheless quite a bit was moved by lunch time with everyone grateful for the break.

Some other tasks were undertaken during the afternoon although some members returned to the rock pile. The ride-on mower was removed from the shed and set to work creating fire breaks around the outbuildings and thistles around Campbell's Corner received not too gentle attention from mattocks. Following a leisurely afternoon tea it was time to pack up and head for home, a very enjoyable day.

Australian Naturalist Network Get Together

The ANN Get Together 2006 was organised by the South East Australian Naturalists Association and held in the Victorian and NSW High Country from 16 January to 2 February 2006. Some 90 naturalists participated.

The Victorian section was based at Harrietville with accommodation at the Feathertop Chalet. This is modern, comfortable accommodation with a good set up. The programme was designed to accommodate two buses usually on turn-about excursions, either daily or alternate days.

Events included bat trapping at Harrietville, a Beechworth History Tour, A Trust For Nature talk and visit to Mount Pilot, a visit to Wandiligong and Bright, walks near Mt Hotham, a walk to Dicksons Falls, a walk to Mahomets Tomb, Mt Buffalo, a talk on the management of Mt Buffalo National Park, Bogong High Plains visit, a display of animals caught at Mt McKay and walks on Bogong High Plain.

During the evenings following the evening meal we were treated to talks by Noel Schleiger on geological features of the High Country, Leon Costermans spoke on environmental influences on vegetation, Meredith and Roger Briggs on Mt Buffalo pre, during and post 2003 fires, Dean Heinze the biology and ecology of the Mountain Pygmy Possum in Victoria, Dr Ruth Lawrence on the cultural history of the Bogong High Plains, Clyde O'Donnell and orchids of northeast Victoria and Glenise Moors and Jan Orr spoke about their project on Flame Robins in the Big Hill Range at Sedgwick near Bendigo.

On 26 January we all boarded the two buses and set off for Jindabyne. En route we had morning tea at Murray No 1 Power Station, a stream side picnic site stop for lunch and afternoon tea at Thredbo. Accommodation was at the Jindabyne Winter Sports and Recreation Centre. This was not as modern or close together as the Feathertop Chalet, with cabins set scattered about and quite a walk to the dining hall. My cabin suffered from a false fire alarm two nights in a row before the problem was fixed.

Excursions included a walk from Charlottes Pass to Blue Lake, a visit to Cooma, a Jindabyne and Thredbo River excursion, an excursion to the summit of Mt Kosciuszko, a mammal trapping and visit to Guthega hydro works trip and walks around Perisher and Saw Pit Creek.

Evening talks included a talk on Australian alpine animals by Ken Green, Keith McDougall spoke about Australia's highest vegetation, Kosciuszko landscapes and flora were presented by Colin Totterdell and Allan Maguire spoke about working on the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme.

2 February saw the end of the Get Together. The participants with cars had a separate smaller bus to return them to Harrietville whilst the remainder travelled a different route back to Tullamarine Airport in Melbourne. It was an early breakfast and start to

get people to Melbourne in time to catch buses and planes. The Harrietville bus retraced the same route travelled on 26 January with a detour to Beechworth to drop off two King Islanders. Our hosts at the Feathertop Chalet offered us afternoon tea before we left, an offer gratefully accepted.

The next Get Together will be held in Darwin in August/September 2008. About 45 participants in this Get Together indicated their intention of participating. The 2010 Get Together may be held in Queensland. An approach has been made with various suggestions to Queensland Clubs.