



NEWSLETTER: JUNE 2012

**Devilbend Reserve Bird Count**

For our April birding excursion we joined the monthly bird count conducted for Devilbend Reserve by Birdlife Australia, led by Roger Richards.

Meeting at the Graydens Rd picnic ground we surveyed the water down the centre of the reservoir, counting both water and bush birds. A total of 54 species was reached, with by far the most numerous being Eurasian Coots.

Highlights for us were White-bellied Sea-eagle, Brown Goshawk, Musk Ducks and Red-browed Finch.

Non-bird sightings included Swamp Wallaby and an unfortunate White-lipped Snake that had been run over by a truck.



Photo – Lee Denis

Thanks to Roger for the list below. Lee Denis

Devilbend Reserve Bird Count – 3 April 2012 (Courtesy Roger Richards, Birdlife Australia)							
Musk Duck	20	White-bellied Sea Eagle	2	Brown Thornbill	4	Willie Wagtail	4
Black Swan	10	Brown Goshawk	2	Red Wattlebird	2	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	6
Australian Wood Duck	2	Purple Swamphen	4	Little Wattlebird	7	Laughing Kookaburra	1
Pacific Black Duck	9	Dusky Moorhen	1	White-eared Honeyeater	4	Grey Butcherbird	3
Hardhead	4	Eurasian Coot	600	New Holland Honeyeater	2	Australian Magpie	20
Hoary Headed Grebe	10	Masked Lapwing	43	Silveryeye	6	Magpie-lark	19
Australasian Grebe	4	Common Bronzewing	1	White-fronted Chat	3	Little Raven	8
Darter	1	Spotted Turtle-Dove	1	Spotted Pardalote	5	Red-browed Finch	10
Little Pied Cormorant	26	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	2	Noisy Miner	1	European Goldfinch	2
Little Black Cormorant	22	Eastern Rosella	4	Eastern Yellow Robin	4	Welcome Swallow	35
Great Cormorant	5	Crimson Rosella	6	Grey Shrike-thrush	3	Common Starling	20
Australian Pelican	2	Pallid Cuckoo	1	Golden Whistler	3	Common Mynah	3
White-faced Heron	5	Superb Fairy-wren	14	Rufous Whistler	1		
Australian White Ibis	3	Striated Thornbill	2	Grey Fantail	29		

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**Ian Wacey & Ray Barber, “250 Victorian Waterfalls” April 11, 2012**

Ian & Ray, who are brothers in law, set out 7 years ago to research and visit Victoria’s waterfalls, with a view to a book of 100 Waterfalls, as they thought that would be all that

there were. They found two existing publications – a State Rivers & Water Supply Commission 2-page list of 70 falls, found to be inaccurate & inadequate, and Dacre Smyth’s *Waterfalls of Victoria* book, with paintings, poetry and information on 128 waterfalls, but out of print. Department of Sustainability & Environment had

a list of 168, as did the Victorian Place Names Register.

Using all the above plus old maps, tourist & bushwalking information and other research, Ian and Ray have so far visited, photographed and recorded co-ordinates for 350 waterfalls. Many are on private land, and so unsuitable for publication, many have very difficult to impossible access, and many were un-named. Ian and Ray have suggested names for 116 to the Victorian Place Names Register, based on the creek name or locality and a few Aboriginal names. There were a surprising number which are close to roads and easy to access, but which were unrecorded.

The heights of waterfalls are not recorded in their book, as they would need to be surveyed properly to be accurate. The exception to this is the Dandongadale Falls, near Cheshunt, at 255 metres high, which makes them the highest in Victoria. They were surveyed in 1990, at the instigation of the Benalla Bushwalking Club. A number of other falls are locally claimed to be the highest in Victoria, but this is wrong.

There was discussion about the definition of a waterfall, as compared with a cascade. The general definition is “a sudden descent of water”, but Ian and Ray used “if a native fish can’t swim up it”.

Another question was whether Dights Falls on the Yarra near Melbourne qualified as a waterfall, being little more than a weir these days, after much modification over the decades. It had to be included being well known and of historical significance.

Ian and Ray’s book *250 Victorian Waterfalls* is well designed and laid out, with beautiful photographs, clear directions for access and interesting information. Their aim was to get their readers to get out and visit waterfalls, and promote tourism and bushwalking in Victoria, and the book makes you want to get out there and find them.

Local footnote: another of Dacre Smyth’s publications was *Bridges of the Kananook Creek*, paintings and details of the bridges in Seaford and Frankston. - **Judy Smart**

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**May meeting: Karen Simonsen, (Heather Ducat’s daughter) “Life in a Drop of Water (Freshwater Algae)” May 9<sup>th</sup>**

Karen is a senior biologist at ALS Water Resources Group (who contract to do water testing for Melbourne Water and many other water authorities) and based her talk on her lecture to first year botany students.

She started with the two major groups of cellular organisms:

- prokaryotic, which includes bacteria, cyanobacteria (also called 'blue-green algae') and Archeans, which do not have a true nucleus and which reproduce by binary fission (splitting).
- eukaryotic, which have their DNA contained in a nucleus, reproduce by binary fission or sexually, and which include most algae, fungi, protozoan,

animal and plant cells (including human).

Another division of living organisms is between autotrophic, which make their own food (e.g. by photosynthesis), and heterotrophic, which need to eat something else to make energy.

Respiration: the division is between aerobic, which require oxygen for respiration, and anaerobic, which respire only without oxygen, for example fermentation of wine or beer.

The aquatic environments algae live in vary from:

- Oligo to mesotrophic freshwater – low algae presence eg tapwater
- Eutrophic freshwater – high nutrient or stratified (warm & cold water in strata in water body)
- Brackish – salty water such as inland lakes
- Estuarine – saltwater from sea, mixing

- with freshwater from river or lake
- Coastal – marine
- Acid bog & stagnant – eg Fraser Island lakes
- Extreme – hyper saline such as hot springs
- Ephemeral ie puddles

Algae are in almost every aquatic environment – the positive is that they form the basis of food chains. The negative is that they can be toxic (such as blue-green algae) or a nuisance (fouling boats, damaging water infrastructure).

Phytotoxins cause confusion and are believed to be involved in whale beaching events. Blackwater events, where a billabong is flooded into a river

and the black water kills fish in the river, are caused by anaerobic conditions in the billabong creating sulphides.

Algae have wide uses many of which have not been discovered yet, but an example of which is their role in reflective paints.

Karen then showed us photos of individual algae, which were intriguing and some were quite beautiful.

She also brought along water samples from golf courses, ornamental lakes and waste water treatment, some of them green, for us to look at, as an example of what she works with. **Judy Smart**

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### May Excursions: Flinders and Greens Bush

Our scheduled field trip for this month was to Greens Bush, but we noticed that the Victorian Field Naturalists Club Botany Group was holding an excursion to look at marine algae at Mushroom Reef, Flinders, on the same day. We therefore decided to join the FNCV group in the morning and then continue to our scheduled excursion in the afternoon.

#### Mushroom Reef, Flinders

We met Mary Gibson, our intrepid leader, and some FNCV members in challenging conditions ie cold and windy, at Mushroom Reef, to learn about seaweed.

Most of us were familiar with the Bull Kelp (*Durvillea potatorum*) and Neptunes Necklace (*Hormisira banksii*), but Mary was able to show us about 20 different species occurring in the relatively small area at and above the low tide mark. Few seaweeds have common names so we were faced with a large amount of new information.

Mary impressed us all by wading into the sea to find examples of all the different seaweeds, while we all shivered, and explaining their various characteristics such as the coralline ones which contain limestone, *Codium pomoides*, which resembles an apple (hence the name), the cup-shaped *Dictyosphaeria sericea*, and *Notheia analoma*, which grows only attached to *H. banksii*, being semi-parasitic on it.

Mary also explained the life cycle and reproductive strategies employed by these plants to survive and flourish in what is a pretty hostile environment.



Photo: Judy Smart

We saw a few birds while we were there, but not as many as we would have expected: Australasian Gannet, Little Pied Cormorant, Sooty Oystercatcher, Red-capped Plover, Silver Gull. - **Judy Smart, Lee Denis**

**Baldrys Crossing, Greens Bush**

We continued on to Baldrys Crossing for lunch, and then walked around the circuit, between showers of rain. Our main sightings were of fungi, although before we left the carpark we admired autumn bird orchids - *Chiloglottis reflexa*.

We saw a good range of fungi, some of which we could identify, such as the common mycorrhizal fungi *Russula persanguinea* which is in a symbiotic relationship with the Eucalypts; the large bracket fungus “White Punk”, *Laetiporus portentosus* (over 300 mm wide, recently fallen from a large Peppermint *Eucalyptus radiata*); the small yellow discs of *Discinella terrestris*, and a species of *Agaricus*.

We saw a few birds, though not as many as we would expect. They included Southern Boobook, White-throated Treecreeper, Noisy Miner, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Shrike-thrush, Common Myna. The sighting of the Boobook Owl roosting in a Blackwood was a highlight. **Judy Smart, Lee Denis**



Photo: Lee Denis

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**SEANA Campout, Camperdown**

Five members of our Club attended the SEANA Autumn Camp at Camperdown, hosted by the Timboon Field Naturalists Club.

The focus for most of the excursions was the spectacular landscape of Victoria’s Western District, with numerous volcanic craters, scoria cones and lakes. Most of the volcanic activity occurred between 4-5 million years and 2 million years, with intermittent activity continuing almost to the present. Museum Victoria regards the area as dormant. Mount Napier, near Hamilton, erupted about 7200 years ago and is the youngest volcano in Victoria. The area has three types of volcanoes: Maar volcanoes, Scoria Cones and Lava volcanoes.

Maar volcanoes result from explosive eruptions when hot magma rises through wet sedimentary

rock. High pressure steam explosions shatter the magma and surrounding rocks into ash and small fragments. These fall to form a low rim of tuff (ash) around a wide shallow crater. Lakes and swamps often form in Maar Craters.

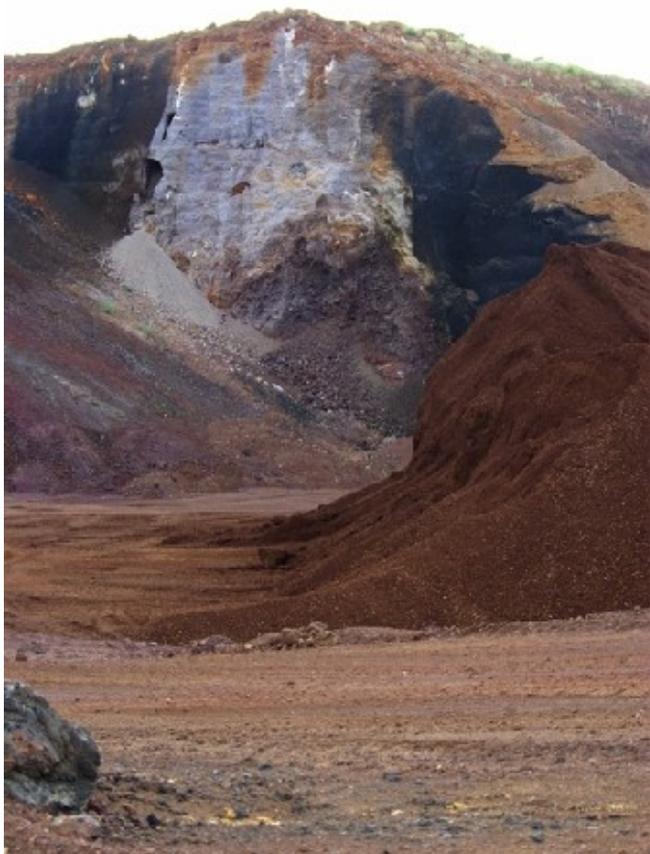
Scoria volcanoes erupted showers of red hot, glowing lumps and bombs of frothed-up lava. The fragments build a steep cone around the vent or crater.

Lava volcanoes – eruptions of very runny lava formed broad low hills and extensive lava plains..

From *Volcanoes in Victoria*: Royal Society of Victoria.

The weather was warm and fine on Saturday morning. A convoy of eight cars or so, filled with people, departed from Camperdown, regrouped at Mortlake and continued north to Mount Shadwell

Scoria quarry (Pic 1), a dormant volcano that is now quarried for its varied quality of stone used for road making, gardens, etc. On the way, we were fortunate to sight three Brolgas, taking off in flight.



*Pic 1 – Photo: Heather Ducat*

We were greeted by Gary Peterson and Dermot Henry, a geologist of Museum Victoria, who showed and explained to the group, how the active volcano erupted 40,000 years ago and threw up rocks, called spindle bombs, of a range of sizes, from 20 centimetres to rocks weighing a ton or more. We found these spindle bombs, which had been exposed as the volcano was quarried. The bombs had the appearance of a rock until when broken open, displayed a core of green olivine crystals. Mount Shadwell is recognized as the best site in Australia for gem-quality olivine called peridot (Pic 2).

The Manager of the quarry showed the group where a pair of Peregrine Falcons nested every year, usually raising three young. Last spring in 2011, a heavy thunder storm struck, and the three

chicks were found dead. The nest was actually a cave in the quarry cliff side which kept dry from rain by scoria, (cellular lava) that drained well. The cliff was allowed to remain verticle because of the nest. Owing to safety regulations, the mounds of the quarried material must be heaped in pyramid style.



*Pic 2 – Photo: Heather Ducat*

We moved on to Lake Keilambete near Terang which is a 2.4 kilometre, diameter, circular Maar containing a lake. The water is two and half times saltier than sea. Birds bathe for a few days to kill parasites, but do not feed there. The shore crust is formed from volcanic ash that has been cemented by calcium rich ground water.

The convoy continued on to Mount Noorat, Australia's largest dry volcanic crater, standing 310 metres above sea level, 400 metres wide and 159 metres deep which extends below the level of the surrounding plain (Pic 3). We enjoyed an energetic walk to the crater rim. We sighted a Wedge-tailed Eagle circling above. Also of interest in the area are historic dry stone walls.



*Pic 3 – Photo: Heather Ducat*

Sunday's excursion took us to Lake Corangamite, the largest permanent inland lake in Australia. The water is twice as salty as the sea and is fringed with salt tolerant succulent vegetation (Pic 4), more usually seen at the coast.



Pic 4 – Photo: Heather Ducat

The mirror-calm surface was ruffled by flocks of low flying Waders (Pic 5).



Pic 5 – Photo: Heather Ducat

Overlooking the eastern shore, near Alvie, is the spectacular red rock complex, an unusual example of three types of volcanoes – a nested Maar, Scoria Cones and fingers of lava that flowed into Lake Corangamite. This is one of the youngest volcanoes in Victoria, erupting only about 8000 years ago. The lookout provided a grand view across the lake and beyond to Mount Elephant known as the lighthouse of the district.

Our group paused for lunch at the tiny town of Beac, with its interesting windmill museum (Pic 6). We continued north-west, around Lake Corangamite and enjoyed birding at numerous small lakes and ponds. Species included White-

fronted Chat, Cisticola, Little Eagle, Red Capped Plover and numerous other water birds.



Pic 6 – Photo: Heather Ducat

We were informed of various topics by interesting speakers. On Friday night, we learnt about Brolgas in the surrounding grasslands and local frogs. On Saturday night, Dermot Henry of Museum Victoria spoke on the volcanic landscape, explaining features we had seen that day. On Sunday night, Gary Peterson spoke on the Corangamite Water Skink, which is restricted to a very small area of basalt boulders around Lake Corangamite.



Pic 7 – Photo: Heather Ducat

Monday morning excursion included the area around Mount Porndon with the extensive stony rises that flowed into the southern end of Lake Corangamite. Mount Porndon erupted about 300,000 years ago, and the Scoria Cone is capped by a disc of basalt that was a lava lake. We enjoyed birding at Lake Purrumbete, this freshwater lake supports a large number of species including Spotted Crake, Musk Duck, Blue-bill Duck, Little Grassbird and Great Egret

(Pic 7) . All the excursion groups met at Lake Bullen Merri for lunch, our farewells and thanks

to the Timboon club for a wonderful weekend. - Heather Ducat and Pat Gomm.

**Note:** Our club is hosting the SEANA campout in March 2013. The camp will be held at the Uniting Church camp in Merricks, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of March. We are currently working on a programme of events – watch this space.

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**June meeting – talk by Steve Wright on fauna of Jigalong**

Unfortunately our scheduled speaker, Brian Thomas from Coolart, was unable to be with us, but he organised an able replacement in Steve, who gave a presentation on a recent fauna survey of the aboriginal community of Jigalong, in the Pilbara region of WA. This community of the Martu people was made famous in the book and film *Rabbit Proof Fence*.

Steve spent several months in the community, helping to train the local rangers and carrying out fauna surveys along the Canning Stock Route.

The survey was carried out using Elliot and pitfall

traps and yielded a great number of skinks, gekkos, dragons, legless lizards and snakes. Steve's photography was superb, with the animals posed in a 'natural' setting. Some we were familiar with, such as the Thorny Devil, but most were species that we had not seen before.

Steve also had some impressive photos of the landscape, including a massive thunderstorm developing over the red earth, and some of the plants including *Triodia* and *Mulla mulla*.

Steve presented his photos with a commentary on the region and its people, and some of the issues confronting the rangers there, including huge numbers of feral animals, particularly camels and donkeys. - Lee Denis

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**June Field Trip – The Gurdies**

Six members travelled to The Gurdies Nature Conservation Reserve, off the Bass Highway on the eastern shore of Western Port Bay. The total area of the Reserve is about 260 ha, according to the Parks Victoria Visitor Guide. The threatened rain held off until late in the afternoon, but there was a cold wind at the exposed picnic area from where there is a good view of the Bay.

We began at the Dunbabbins Road entrance and walked the loop that took us down to the old quarry and the creek. The vegetation is largely Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) and Narrow-leaf Peppermint (*E. radiata*), with an understory including Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), Prickly tea-tree (*Leptospermum continentale*), various wattles, grasses and sedges. The Common Heath *Epacris impressa* was in flower, with white and pink forms.

The day was chiefly notable for the huge numbers of Greenhoods, and the many different fungi. Bird sightings were relatively few.

We were able to identify the Cobra Greenhood, *Pterostylis grandiflora*, the Tall Greenhood *P. melagramma*, and the Nodding Greenhood *P. nutans*; whilst we were unsure about a fourth species of Greenhood. One other different type of orchid was observed, but as it was well past flowering we were unable to identify it.

We were able to identify 15 species of fungi, including the mycorrhizal species *Russula persanguinea* (bright red caps with white gills and stem), the bracket fungus *Laetiporus portentosus* (“White Punk”), and the striking *Cortinarius austrovenetus*, notable for its green cap and orange-yellow gills and stem (see Photo below).

<b>Fungi at The Gurdies NCR, 16 June 2012</b>
<b>Gilled fungi</b>
<i>Collybia eucalptorum</i> – at the base of <i>E. radiata</i>
<i>Cortinarius archeri</i> - on soil or leaf litter
<i>Cortinarius austrovenetus</i> – on soil or leaf litter
<i>Galerina patagonica</i> - on fallen log by the creek
<i>Mycena</i> sp. On dead wood
<i>Psilocybe subaeriginosa</i> – on soil or leaf litter
<i>Russula mariae</i> – name changed?
<i>Russula persanguinea</i> – red cap, white gills, at base of Eucalypt
<b>Non-gilled fungi</b>
<i>Austroboletus lacunosis</i> – another mycorrhizal species
<i>Coltricia cinnamomi</i> – on soil or leaf litter
<i>Geastrum</i> sp – Earth Stars – wet area near creek
<i>Laetiporus portentosus</i> – large bracket fungus “White Punk”
<b>Coral Fungi</b>
<i>Clavaria amoena</i> – bright yellow, simple clubs
<i>Clavaria miniata</i> – bright red clubs- “Flame fungus”
<i>Ramaria lorithamnus</i> – pale yellow, branched tufts

Several coral fungi were seen, including the “Flame Fungus” *Clavaria miniata*. We also saw a patch of Earth Stars (*Geastrum* sp.), as well as many other “small brown fungi” that we could not identify.

After lunch we moved to the Bass Highway entrance and walked a short loop through more

heathy country, without seeing anything that we hadn't seen in the morning, except for a few birds.



Photo – Lee Denis

Our final bird list was the same length as our fungi list, with only 15 birds seen, the best being a pair of Scarlet Robins.

An enjoyable day, despite the cold weather, and worthwhile to observe the fungi and orchids that you will not see in the warmer months. -Lee Denis

<b>Bird List For The Gurdies 16 June 2012</b>	
Black-shouldered Kite	Eastern Yellow Robin
Crimson Rosella	Rufous Whistler
Laughing Kookaburra	Grey Shrike-thrush
White-throated Treecreeper	Grey Fantail
Brown Thornbill	Australian Magpie
Red Wattlebird	Pied Currawong
Eastern Spinebill	Welcome Swallow
Scarlet Robin	

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### Birdwatching Group

<b>Seaford Wetlands May 7, 2012</b>			
Pacific Black Duck	Swamp Harrier	Crested Pigeon	Flame Robin - 4 female, 1 male
Little Pied Cormorant	Australian Hobby	Rainbow Lorikeet	Grey Shrike-thrush
Little Black Cormorant	Nankeen Kestrel	Superb Fairy-wren	Magpie-Lark
Australian Pelican	Purple Swamphen	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Grey Fantail
White-faced Heron	Dusky Moorhen	Red Wattlebird	Willie Wagtail
White-necked Heron	Eurasian Coot	Little Wattlebird	Grey Butcherbird
Intermediate Egret	Masked Lapwing	Noisy Miner	Australian Magpie
Royal Spoonbill	Silver Gull	White-plumed Honeyeater	Australian Raven
Black-shouldered Kite		New Holland Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow

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### Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Events can be found at our website.

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