



NEWSLETTER: JUNE 2014

**A Change of Seasons
Waterfall Gully 12th April 2014**

After a long dry summer it seemed that the season had well and truly changed when eleven members and friends gathered at the Seawinds car park, as a cold south-easterly wind made conditions a little uncomfortable. In the shelter of the track to Kings Falls things were more pleasant, but the theme of change could be seen all along the track, from sightings of the summer visiting Rufous Fantail together with the overwintering Flame Robin, to the signs in the vegetation. Some very late blooming Hyacinth Orchids (*Dipodium roseum*) sat near early flowering Cranberry Heath (*Astroloma humifusum*). Wirilda (*Acacia retinodes*) and Yellow Hakea (*Hakea nodosa*) were also in flower.

Meanwhile the fungi were beginning to emerge, including the tiny red buttons of *Cruentomyces viscidruenta* in leaf litter; the mycorrhizal *Phylloporus rhodoxanthus* with its reddish cap and yellow gills, in Eucalypts woodland;



Phylloporus rhodoxanthus (Photo: Lee Denis)

Xerula australis, in the grass at Seawinds; *Phaeolus schweinitzii* growing on stumps presumably of conifers, and the common *Gymnopilus junonius* also growing on stumps.



Phaeolus schweinitzii (Photo: Lee Denis)

Just to add to the theme, a dead antechinus was also sighted. There are reportedly two species of Antechinus on the Peninsula – Agile (*Antechinus agilis*) and Dusky (*A. swainsonii*). The males tend to die off in winter after a summer of frenzied mating, leaving the females to bear and raise their offspring. Whether or not that was the fate of this specimen can not be certain, as also the species could not be determined.

After an interesting walk we reached the Falls, which mark the location of the western peninsula side of Selwyn Fault. For once there was an actual waterfall, although far from a rushing torrent. The vegetation near the Falls varies from fern gullies along the feeding creek, with extensive areas of King Fern (*Todea barbara*), to groves of Black She-oak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*) on the slopes leading up to Waterfall Gully Road.

The bird count for the day came to 25, including a few ducks at Seawinds. A few kangaroos watched us go by, and a few late butterflies (mostly Common Browns) were around, as well as (possibly) a Yellow Admiral.

Bird List For Seawinds/ Waterfall Gully 12 April 2014	
Australian Wood Duck	White-eared Honeyeater
Pacific Black Duck	Eastern Spinebill
Chestnut Teal	Flame Robin
Brown Goshawk	Eastern Yellow Robin
Crimson Rosella	Golden Whistler
Eastern Rosella	Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra	Rufous Fantail
White-throated Treecreeper	Grey Fantail
Superb Fairy-wren	Grey Butcherbird
Spotted Pardalote	Australian Magpie
Brown Thornbill	Grey Currawong
Red Wattlebird	Little Raven
Little Wattlebird	

This a very interesting walk through a variety of environments in a relatively short distance, with some interesting views over the southern Peninsula. Back at Seawinds we gathered for lunch before leaving the wedding parties to try to find shelter from the still blustery wind. - **Lee Denis**

Pina Milne, Collections Manager, The Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens
The Work of the Herbarium
9th April 2014

Pina last spoke to our Club in 1998, on the subject of "Bryophytes and Mosses", and on the Saturday after led us on an excursion to Cement Creek to study them. She had recently completed her thesis on Bryophytes and Mosses at the time. She has been working at the Herbarium for the past 16 years, on projects such as cataloguing fungi with Tom May, and the taxonomy of mosses, and is now Collections Manager.

The National Herbarium of Victoria is a collection of preserved plant, algae, bryophyte, lichen and fungi specimens. It is the oldest scientific institution in Victoria, founded by Governor La Trobe in 1853, with Ferdinand von Mueller as the first Government Botanist of Victoria. He was a dynamic botanist, travelling widely and naming more than 2000 plants. Through his own collecting, his network of collectors and by purchases he acquired over half of the present day collection of 1.2 million specimens, of which 800,000 specimens are from Australia, and 400,000 from overseas.

The earliest specimens are from India, dating from the 1690s. The collection is a historical as well as botanical resource, as botanist collectors travelled with the explorers. From Cook's voyage of 1770 there are 350 collections by Banks and Solander, from Flinders voyage around Australia from 1801 to 1805, there are 2000 specimens collected by Robert Brown, Ludwig Leichardt's collection from the 1840s, before he vanished, John Dallachy from the 1840s to 1860s, Hermann Beckler's collection of 500 specimens from the Burke and Wills expedition of 1862 and Central Australian specimens collected by explorers Elder and Charles McDougall Stuart. There are stories attached to the collections, for example, during the Burke and Wills expedition, King learnt from the Aborigines how to process the nardoo plant (*Marsilea drummondii*) to make it edible, and survived. Burke and Wills did not learn this, and its toxicity contributed to their deaths.

The majority of the foreign collection came from the Otto Wilhelm Sonder herbarium, purchased by von Mueller in 1883, and containing plants from all over the world. The collection is always growing, with additional collections such as the 25,000 bryophytes collected by Ilma Stone in the 20th century, plus exchanges of specimens with other herbaria, donations from other agencies and new collections by Herbarium staff. Pina was a member of a Herbarium expedition to the Simpson Desert in recent years.

A type specimen is the designated specimen to which a taxon name is permanently attached, and is used as a reference for naming, DNA, distribution and other data. The first of a species to be collected is the holotype, and a second type specimen is sent elsewhere as a backup (in von Mueller's case, to Berlin). Specimens are used extensively by botanists when researching plant classification, for example some botanists are re-classifying Callistemons as Melaleucas, Eucalypts have been split into three genera (Corymbia, Eucalypts and Angophoras), and some botanists are re-classifying orchids. The Herbarium is central to this research.

One of the difficulties of the Herbarium is pest management, such as silver fish. Specimens used to be treated with methyl bromide, and are now sterilized by 2 days in a freezer at -24°. Partly because of the danger of contamination, plus lack of space there is no access to the collection for the general public, but the public are encouraged to use the resources listed below. - **Judy Smart**

RBG website <http://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/>
 Australia's Virtual Herbarium <http://avh.chah.org.au/>
 Atlas of Living Australia <http://www.ala.org.au/>
 Plants at JSTOR (images of type specimens) <http://plants.jstor.org/>

Cranbourne Botanic Gardens
7th April 2014

Our birding excursion for April was to Cranbourne Botanic Gardens. Meeting at the Stringybark carpark we followed the Manna Walk, Wetlands Walk and Wylies Creek Track to the south boundary, where we have seen Flame Robins in the past – no luck today. Red-browed Finch and Mistletoebird were noted, with numerous Grey Fantails.

Crossing through the Wylies Creek Wetlands – where a number of grebes, ducks and moorhens could be seen – we returned to the Trig Track and paid a visit to the perched swamp, which has been dry for quite a while. Apart from some New Holland Honeyeaters in the surrounding bush the birds were scarce.

Returning to the picnic area for lunch we sighted a few additional birds including Brown Goshawk, Wrens, Bronzewings and a few honeyeaters. Some Bell Miners had returned to the picnic area.

After lunch we visited the Australia Garden where there were numbers of New Hollands and Dusky Woodswallows. Coots and Chestnut Teal were to be found on the waterways.

Although the weather was mild, with little wind, the birds were not out in great numbers, with our final count being limited to 30.



*New Holland Honeyeater in the Australia Garden
Photo: Yvonne Incigneri*

Bird List Cranbourne Botanic Gardens 7 April 2014	
Pacific Black Duck	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Chestnut Teal	White-eared Honeyeater
Australasian Grebe	New Holland Honeyeater
Brown Goshawk	Eastern Yellow Robin
Dusky Moorhen	Grey Shrike-thrush
Eurasian Coot	Magpie-Lark
Common Bronzewing	Grey Fantail
Superb Fairy-wren	Dusky Woodswallow
Spotted Pardalote	Grey Butcherbird
White-browed Scrubwren	Australian Magpie
Brown Thornbill	Little Raven
Striated Thornbill	Red-browed Finch
Red Wattlebird	Mistletoebird
Little Wattlebird	Welcome Swallow
Bell Miner	Common Myna

Seaford Wetlands 12th May 2014

We regularly visit the Seaford Wetlands at this time of year to observe Flame Robins, which arrive around April. Last year about 10 were sighted in total, but this year we spotted only one male on the Wells Rd side of the swamp. We had heard reports of numbers on the grounds of the Primary School on the other side but were unable to see any over there either. Nevertheless our total number of species (54) was greater than last year (47).

The Freckled Ducks of last year were not sighted, but Pink-eared Ducks were in numbers, as were both Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Great Egret, Cormorants of two kinds, and a number of raptors including what looked like a family of Black-shouldered Kites.

Covering the bike path through Downs Estate to Eel Race Drain and circumnavigating the Wetland back to the Armstrong Rd entrance enabled us to see a good assortment of bush and water birds. Highlights included Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, an unusual White-faced Heron which had large white areas on its rump and wings, and some wonderful views of Golden-headed

Cisticolas perching on the tops of reeds. - Lee Denis



Golden-headed Cisticola. Photo: Diane Peters

Bird List For Seaford Wetland 12 May 2014				
Black Swan	White-faced Heron	Silver Gull	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Australian Wood Duck	Great Egret	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Noisy Miner	Grey Butcherbird
Pacific Black Duck	Royal Spoonbill	Crested Pigeon	White-plumed Honeyeater	Australian Magpie
Grey Teal	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Rainbow Lorikeet	New Holland Honeyeater	Red-browed Finch

Chestnut Teal	Black-shouldered Kite	Eastern Rosella	Eastern Spinebill	European Goldfinch
Pink-eared Duck	Whistling Kite	Superb Fairy-wren	Flame Robin	Welcome Swallow
Australasian Grebe	Swamp Harrier	Spotted Pardalote	Golden Whistler	Fairy Martin
Hoary-headed Grebe	Purple Swamphen	Brown Thornbill	Grey Shrike-thrush	Golden-headed Cisticola
Little Pied Cormorant	Eurasian Coot	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Magpie-Lark	Common Blackbird
Little Black Cormorant	Black-winged Stilt	Red Wattlebird	Grey Fantail	Common Myna
Australian Pelican	Masked Lapwing	Little Wattlebird	Willie Wagtail	

**Patrick-Jean Guay,
Bird Flight Initiation Distance as a Management Tool for Human Disturbance
4th May 2014**

Patrick was not well, so we appreciated him coming out to talk in spite of that. He started by stating that worldwide, waterbirds are in decline, due to human-caused threats. These include: climate change, wind farms, cats and other feral animals, our waste products, habitat clearance, and also our recreational activities including some that we think of as benign, such as recreational vehicles, bird watching, bush walking, dog walking and cycling.

When we disturb birds, by walking, cycling etc in their habitat, we decrease their opportunities to forage for food, they may abandon nests, and change their location to less productive habitats. The energy used in flight from us, and the time away from foraging, have a high energy cost. Even without flight, physiological effects of our disturbance include increased heart rate and stress hormones. Birds have to weigh up the cost of fleeing (in energy use) and the cost of staying (the increased risk of predation). Their responses to predators and human approach are very similar.

How to protect waterbirds? Buffer zones between human traffic and bird habitat are needed, and the design of buffer zones needs information, such as flight initiation distance and “alert” distance observations. There was little data available to work on – few species have been studied (predominantly shorebirds), at few locations, and much is in “grey literature” – reports by government instrumentalities and other organizations such as Melbourne Water, or honours theses, that are unpublished and hard to

access. Also, most studies are from the East Coast of Australia, and little from the West or Arid Centre.

The report by Patrick and three others was published in The Emu in 2012, and collects the known data on Bird Flight Initiation Distance, under the title “A Review of Flight-Initiation Distances and their Application to Managing Disturbance to Australian Birds”. It can be found on the internet.

Patrick and others conducted some research at the Western Treatment Plant, chosen because the birds there are not habituated to human contact. Birds were tested on their reaction to different human contacts – pedestrian, bicycle, a group of 3 pedestrians, car and bus. Birds were more afraid of pedestrians than of cars and buses. Another factor was the positioning of human contact in relation to the water, which is the birds’ safety zone. Birds would allow humans closer if they could retreat easily to the water. If the human contact was positioned between the water and the bird, they would be more flighty, as their refuge was blocked. Another factor was the body size of birds and their condition and how difficult it was for them to fly. A few FID results were: swans 99metres, cormorants 32 metres, and pelicans 18m. These results would apply to other wildlife such as reptiles and fish.

Patrick would like to see more research conducted in the future using volunteers. - **Judy Smart**

**The Gurdies
18th May 2014**

The Gurdies Nature Conservation Reserve is located on the eastern side of Western Port Bay not far from Jam Jerrup. It has an entrance on the Bass Highway, and another further east on Dunbabbins Road, from which good views over the Bay can be obtained. There is a gravel pit in the middle of the Reserve, and a creek runs through a deeply incised valley across the Reserve and out to the Bay.

The vegetation is similar to many areas on the Mornington

Peninsula: largely open Eucalypt woodland dominated by *Eucalyptus obliqua* (Messmate) and *E. radiata* (Narrow-leaved Peppermint) with an open understory of Acacias (*A. verticillata*, *A. stricta*, *A. melanoxylon*, *A. retinodes*, *A. suaveolens*; and *A. dealbata* rather than the *A. mearnsii* that is found on the Peninsula); *Leptospermum laevigatum* and *L. continentale*, *Kunzea ericoides*, *Lomandras* (*L. longifolia* and *L. filiforme*) *Lepidospermas* and *Dianellas*.

Our group of seven members started at the car park on Dunbabbín Rd and followed the track down to the creek. The first thing noted was a group of the large bolete *Phlebopus marginatus* in the paddock across the road.



Small Mosquito Orchid – Photo: Yvonne Incigneri

The track into the Reserve was lined with orchids, including *Chiloglottis reflexa* (Autumn Bird Orchid), *Acianthus pusillus* (Small Mosquito Orchid), *Pterostylis*

nutans (Nodding Greenhood) and *P. grandiflora* (Cobra Greenhood). Unfortunately we were missing our best orchid fanciers and some fruitless discussion ensued over the identities of several other species.

Although a fine and relatively mild day, there was a cold wind, especially at the top of the hill, and birds were not much in evidence. A Scarlet Robin was the most interesting bird, along with the usual Grey Fantails, Magpies, Wattle Birds etc. An array of interesting fungi was found, especially along the creek banks. Some of the fungi identified were *Amanita xanthocephala* (a mycorrhizal species growing under Eucalypts), several pore fungi one of which was tentatively identified as *Boletus barragensis*, *Mycena cystidiosis* (notable for the masses of sterile stipes through the leaf litter around the delicate fruiting bodies), *Hypholoma fasciculare* on fallen logs near the creek, and an emerging group of white fungi tentatively identified as *Leucoagaricus naucinus*.

After lunch we drove around to the Bass Highway main entrance and walked through the main track back to Dunbabbín Rd. The vegetation on the Western side is slightly different, but still generally open woodland. We were able to add White-throated Treecreeper and Crimson Rosella to our bird list, along with Eastern Yellow Robin and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, but our bird list for the day only amounted to 15. There were few orchids on the Bass Highway side of the Reserve, and the traffic noise made this part much less appealing than the eastern side where we started our walk. - **Lee Denis**

Marysville Camp – 2-5 May 2014, hosted by Upper Goulburn FNC (By Judy Smart and Pat Gomm)

Five of us went to the Marysville Camp – Judy, Pat, Linda, Doris and Brenda. The theme was recovery after the 2009 fires. The old Marysville village of guesthouse fame almost disappeared under the firestorm, and the rebuilding of the town in the five years since is good to see.

The excursions were to many and varied natural sites in recovery, such as Lake Mountain, Cathedral Ranges, Buxton Silver Gum Reserve and Steavenson Falls. The three speakers covered different aspects of the recovery process, starting with Mary Kennealy, of the Marysville Historical Society. As the fire approached they had loaded their trailer with the contents of the Museum, but had to leave it all behind and only just saved their lives as they were some of the last to leave town. Since 2009 donations of memorabilia have arrived from all over Australia, and the museum has re-opened. We were astonished to learn that this energetic and inspiring woman is in her 90s.

On Saturday night Steve Smith of DEPI spoke on the environmental recovery process. One question was whether the 2009 fires were unprecedented in their ferocity. Steve said that the 2009 fires travelled at 4 times the speed of 1983, and followed on from 12 years of severe drought. The

recovery process is slow, for example, after the fires some Eucalypts put out epicormic growth, which then died, but basal sprouting has since taken off. The Myrtle Beech have regenerated, but slowly, and Mountain Titree which were thought to be 400 years old died in the fires. The Buxton Silver Gum were severely burnt, to the extent of exposing lignotubers not previously seen, but have resprouted, and there is prolific new seedling growth.

On Sunday night, Dr Dan Harley of Zoos Victoria spoke on Leadbeater's Possum. There are three sub-groups of LP – lowland, now found only at Yellingbo, but which used to be more widespread, and were around Western Port until the 1920s. They are smaller, more docile and feed on different plant species to the highland groups, which live in sub-Alpine snow gum at Lake Mountain and Mt Baw Baw, and the montane forest group, (living in Mountain Ash, Shining Gum and Alpine Ash) from Powelltown to Marysville and Toolangi. Leadbeater's Possum needs smooth barked gums, dense habitat with Acacias for food, a cold wet climate, and trees hollows to live and breed in. Trees do not develop hollows large enough to live in until they are a minimum of 120 years old, and for a family, 190 years.

After the 2009 fires half of the estimated LP population died, and numbers have reduced considerably more since, due to logging and habitat reduction. On Lake Mountain before the fires there were more than 200 LP – after the fires, there were 7, and after feral cats killed 4 the last 3 were relocated to Healesville Sanctuary, where they are on display. Two more family groups have since appeared at Lake Mountain though. At Yellingbo, a small reserve, due to drainage changes the swamp gums have died, and the LP survive in nest boxes only. The population there has declined by 60%. There is no happy ever after story for Leadbeater’s Possum unfortunately.



Lake Mountain – visibility limited! Photo: Judy Smart

Post script: Lake Mountain trivia – ever wondered where the lake is that Lake Mountain is named after? I always wondered, and it turns out that Lake Mountain is named after Mr George Lake, Surveyor General. - **Judy Smart**

Many varied excursions were offered to camp attendees so I chose four half day walks and I am writing about two of them.

On a very cold Saturday morning with fifteen people, we drove in convoy to the Cathedral Range State Park, to meet

with Moira and Bill Jeffries, members of the Friends of the Cathedrals. They led us around the Friends Nature Trail, about a 2 km walk, along cleared paths, across rebuilt wooden bridges spanning the Little River, through the riparian zone of regenerated eucalypts, and shrubs of the understory that were destroyed in the bushfire. Campers were enjoying quiet campsites found along the river banks. A few birds were sighted including Crimson Rosellas and Grey Currawongs. We found an excellent specimen of ghost fungus. Thanks to the Friends members for a interesting walk.

On a cold Sunday afternoon with intermittent showers, sixteen people visited the Buxton Silver Gum Reserve led by Cathy Olive, a Project Manager with the Euroa Arboretum, and her father Jeff Olive, a former lecturer at the Burnley Horticulture College. Cathy explained about the Buxton Silver Gum (*Eucalyptus.crenulata*), a small tree with markedly glaucous buds, twigs and leaf undersides and which flowers in spring. Endemic to Victoria, the tree occurs naturally on periodically wet flats, only near Buxton and Yering. The reserve was severely burnt in 2009, but has regenerated very well, a tough tree survivor.

We continued on the walking track, which has been recently replanted with native flora. The reserve is also bounded one side by the Steavenson River, with a short loop walk along the bank.

Jeff invited us to see his Buxton property which was burnt in the fire. His house was saved from being burnt, but he had to re-establish the gardens and surrounds, creating a lovely area. Jeff led us to a pocket of bushland on the property to observe the bower of a Satin Bowerbird. The bower was surrounded by blue objects, such as a blue peg, pieces of blue cloth, etc. to entice a female Bowerbird to the nest. The Bowerbird was close by keeping a close watch on us all.

Thanks to Graham Page, President of UGFNC, and his Club members for a busy, interesting and well organized camp. - **Pat Gomm.**

Owen’s Bees

In the 60th birthday edition of our newsletter (Nov 2012), I wrote about one of our Club’s major characters, Owen Dawson, who died in 2005. I mentioned that Owen had a bee named after him. At MEAFEC’s recent AGM Dr Ken Walker of Museum Victoria spoke on Native Bees, and afterwards I asked him about Owen’s bee. He sent us the photo attached, of *Amegilla dawsoni* (Dawson’s Burrowing Bee), which is part of the collection of Museum Victoria.

Amegilla dawsoni was collected by Owen while on service with the RAAF Radar at Onslow in 1944. It is one of Australia’s largest bees, and is solitary, nesting in burrows. It was not used by the Aborigines for honey collection, but they ate the grubs. It is only found in the arid NW Australia. It was described by Tarlton Rayment, who named it after Owen, as *Anthophora dawsoni*. Before and after the war, Owen collected with and for Tarlton Rayment, who was Honorary Entomologist at National Museum



of Victoria, as well as an apiarist, naturalist and author. Tarlton Rayment described 1000 new species of bees, wasps, thrip and collembolla, and had a network of collectors such as Owen, and Cliff Beauglehole of Western Victoria.

Owen collected several species of *Exoneura*, reed-bees, which live in dry hollow stems of reeds and twigs, and do not store honey or pollen, only small individual puddings. They prefer native plants, and Owen collected his from *Juncus*, *Gahnia* and *Xanthorrhoea minor* in the Dandenong and Clyde areas. He gets another mention in Australian Zoologist for his collection of *Nomia australica*, the Green and Gold Nomia, (now *Lipotriches australica*) which is found throughout Australia, but more commonly in NSW and Queensland, and which Owen found in Clyde.

Entomology was only one of Owen’s enthusiasms – he had an encyclopaedic knowledge of fauna, birds, marine life and flora too. - **Judy Smart**

**Devilbend
10th June 2014**

Monthly bird count with Roger Richards, Yvonne Incigneri, Diane Peters, Judy Smart

When we arrived at 9am the fog was so dense we could hardly see the water, let alone the far shore, which made for restricted birding, but the fog lifted after 10.30 and we saw some great sights then, including a flock of 100 plus Hoary-headed Grebes fishing in a tight flock, 3 Great Crested Grebes close to shore, and a Musk Duck. We didn't see the White Bellied Sea Eagle, which hasn't been seen all this year.

Roger has been conducting the monthly bird count at Devilbend for 10 years now, a sterling effort. He welcomes casual participants on the second Tuesday of the month at 9am, Graydens Rd picnic area, contact him first on ornithology3@yahoo.com.au. - **Judy Smart**

Devilbend Reserve June 10, 2014	
Musk Duck - 1	Spotted Pardalote
Wood Duck	White-browed Scrubwren
Black Swan	Brown Thornbill
Pacific Black Duck	Striated Thornbill

Chestnut Teal	Red Wattlebird
Australasian Grebe	Noisy Miner
Hoary-headed Grebe - flock of 100 fishing	Eastern Yellow Robin
Great Crested Grebe - 3	Varied Sittella
Little Pied Cormorant	Grey Shrike-thrush
Little Black Cormorant	Magpie-Lark
Great Cormorant	Grey Fantail
White-faced Heron	Grey Butcherbird
Great Egret	Australian Magpie
Yellow-billed Spoonbill - 2	Little Raven
Purple Swamphen	Red-browed Finch
Eurasian Coot	European Goldfinch
Masked Lapwing	Common Blackbird
Caspian Tern	Common Starling
Superb Fairy-wren	Common Myna

**Graham Patterson
Natural History Highlights of the Port Phillip Coast
June 11, 2014**

Graham laid out the shape of Port Phillip Bay on the floor with a piece of rope, and provided audience members with labels of locations and geological sites to place on the outline, which fortunately we mostly got right. Graham had a project of walking the entire Victorian coast, which he says will take another lifetime, (he has walked from the South Australian border to Wilsons Prom so far), and had the idea of writing his *Coastal Guide to Nature and History – Port Phillip Bay* along the way.

He started with the origins of the Port Phillip Bay Sunkland, falling between the Rowsley Fault near Bacchus Marsh and the Selwyn Fault along the east coast of the Bay, south of Frankston. There are four types of rock around the

Bay – Devonian granodiorite at Mt Martha (370 myo); Red Bluff sandstone, found from Black Rock to Mt Martha, which is sedimentary and 5 million years old, and contains fossils at Beaumaris and Mornington; Basalt on the Western shores; and Calcarenite, formed by windblown sand, at the Point Nepean coast.

Fauna includes the rakali, the native water rat, easily seen at St Kilda Pier, and along the coast near creeks such as at Mordialloc, and Safety Beach marina. Today humpback whales were seen at Bonbeach, on their annual winter visit, and seals, dolphins and penguins are readily seen. Birds breeding on the Bay include silver gulls, ibis and pelicans on Mud Islands, gannets at Popes Eye, and white

faced storm petrels on South Channel Fort, as well as penguins. Ramsar wetlands on the Western shore of the Bay, the Heads and Edithvale Wetlands are important for migratory birds.

Intertidal life from sandy shores Graham showed us included lug worms, sand hoppers, soldier crabs, and the crescent shape of the egg mass of the moon shell, often mistaken for a jelly fish. From rocky reefs, we saw blue periwinkles, dog winkle, and Bryozoan coral. Graham pointed out the 4 Marine Sanctuaries around the Bay.

Plantlife - Graham started with seagrass meadows –

Zostera, important for fish breeding and birds such as Swans. Saltmarsh vegetation is found at Altona, Swan Bay and Balcombe Estuary, and includes glassworts such as *Sarcicornia* and *Tecticornia*, saltbush (*Atriplex*) and *Sellieria*. There are only a few mangrove sites, at Altona and Corio Bay (compared with Western Port Bay, where it is common). He finished with Coast Banksia, Sea-box and Carpobrotus – noon flower.

Graham is now working on his Coastal Guide to Western Port Bay, which he plans to have out for next Christmas, and is keenly anticipated, as his Port Phillip Bay book is beautifully produced and informative. - **Judy Smart**

Surveying a Rural Property

Over the past year, some Birdlife Mornington Peninsula members and Lee from the Field Nats, have been surveying Elgee Park to establish a bird list for the property. The property is a mixture of cattle, horse and grape production, but has significant areas of remnant vegetation. Each of the four seasons has seen a group of six to ten birders meet at 8am for the briefing from leader Max Burrows when the team is split into four groups.

One group heads up to a patch of remnant bush in one corner of the property, the second follows Bulldog Creek, the third covers the next creek-line and the fourth group does a transect along the road from one edge of the property to the other. Each season there have been more birds added to the list that reached 68 after the four surveys.

Typical of these rural properties were the numerous introduced species like Common Mynah, Common Starling and Spotted Dove, but encouragingly there were also some great birds that are not so easily found these days, like Latham’s Snipe and Freckled Duck. Birds known to have bred included Purple Swamphen, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Little Pied Cormorant, Wood Duck, Eastern Rosella and Magpie-lark.



Pacific Black Duck, Hardhead and Freckled Duck



Purple Swamphen and Chicks

Photos: Roger Standen

Of the 67 species found, 39 species were seen every survey, four species seen three times, nine species seen twice and 15 species were only seen once. What surprised me was that all seven honeyeaters seen were present every survey. I expected there to be more movement in and out over the seasons.

It is always interesting to me when we do surveys to think of the birds that are missed. For example, we knew that there were King Parrots using the property as one of the workers on the property saw them often, but it was only on the fourth survey that a pair was seen. The group is continuing the survey for another year, so it will be interesting to see what new birds show up. The property has some good regeneration work on a section of Bulldog Creek that is expected to improve in quality and hopefully attract some more birds. - **Roger Standen**

Fingal Coastal Walk 14th June 2014

Fingal is located on the Bass Strait coast of the Mornington Peninsula, just to the north of Cape Schanck. It is notable for its vegetation type (coastal Moonah woodland), its proximity to Selwyn Fault, and its views over the rocky cliffs and Bass Strait.

Coastal Moonah Woodland is found in the Gippsland and Otway regions, Glenelg and Bridgewater regions of western Victoria, and on the Bellarine and Mornington Peninsulas. On the Mornington Peninsula it occupies less than 9% of its original extent, mostly in the Point Nepean National Park. A detailed description can be found in a leaflet produced by Claire Moxham, Vivienne Turner, Gidja Walker and Imelda Douglas called *A Field Guide to Coastal Moonah Woodland*, published by the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment in 2010. Check the SPIFFA website (www.spiffa.org) if you would like to obtain a digital copy.



Six members met at the Fingal Picnic Area (known as "The Pines") off Cape Schanck Road, and followed parts of the Coastal Walk along the cliff top towards Cape Schanck and down to Fingal Beach. The Coastal Walk in total is a 30km walk through the Mornington Peninsula National Park from

Cape Schanck to London Bridge near the end of the Nepean Peninsula.

The Moonah woodland at Fingal is co-dominated by Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata* subsp *lanceolata*), Coast Tea-tree (*Leptospermum laevigatum*), and Coast Beard-heath (*Leucopogon parviflorus*). A few Coast Banksias (*Banksia integrifolia*) were also found. The community is largely closed and dense, but a number of understory species can be found in more open areas, including along the track. Species such as Coast Pomaderris (*Pomaderris paniculosa*), White Correa (*Correa alba*), Coast Wirilda (*Acacia uncifolia*), Boobialla (*Myoporum insulare*), Sea Box (*Alyxia buxifolia*) and Seaberry Saltbush (*Rhagodia candolleana*) were common. Other species noted include Thyme Rice-flower (*Pimelea serpyllifolia* subsp *serpyllifolia*), Coast Daisy Bush (*Olearia axillaris*), and down at beach level, Cushion Bush (*Leucophyta brownii*) and Coast Saltbush (*Atriplex cinerea*).

Various scramblers and climbers including Small-leaved Clematis (*Clematis microphylla*), Bower Spinach (*Tetragonia implexicoma*), Coast Swainson Pea (*Swainsonia lessertiiifolia*) Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*) and Kidney Weed (*Dichondra repens*) were noted. The Sword-sedge *Lepidosperma gladiatum* and Dune Thistle *Actites megalocarpa* rounded out the assemblage. That is, apart from the weed species. We were

thus able to record a fair representation of the species associated with Moonah woodland communities.

Weed infestation, principally along the walking track, included Purple Polygale (*Polygala myrtifolia*), *Pittosporum undulatum*, Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) and grasses including Panic Veldt Grass (*Ehrharta erecta*), Hare's Tail (*Lagurus ovatus*) and Rat's Tail Fescue (*Vulpia* sp). Considerable work on clearing weed species was evident.



Photo: Lee Denis

The Coastal Walk affords spectacular views along the cliff-lined Bass Strait shoreline, including a view of the eastern extent of Selwyn Fault, one of the main faults that define the Peninsula. Selwyn Fault crosses the Peninsula to Port Phillip Bay (it can also be seen at Kings Falls, off Waterfall Gully Road near Arthurs Seat). The Peninsula north of Cape Schanck is formed between Selwyn Fault and Bass Fault which runs along Western Port Bay.

The weather was generally fine, despite the dire forecast, except for some light rain back at the Picnic Ground at lunchtime (there is a barbeque shelter there). Birds were few, although we obtained some good views of Kelp Gulls, mingling with Pacific Gulls, from the cliff lookout. In all only 11 species were sighted, including a Bassian Thrush in the undergrowth. Common Froglets (*Crinia signifera*) were heard.

After lunch our party took the track down to Fingal Beach. This track involves a steep descent down many many steps to a narrow sandy beach with rocky outcrops that must be subject to some major wave attack when Bass Strait gets angry. The walk back up the steps is less enjoyable, but was achieved with a minimum of complaint.

This area would be well worth a visit in the spring and summer. There are reported to be orchids to be found, while the bird life is likely to also be more lively at that time. -

Lee Denis



Kings Falls, Mornington Peninsula National Park. Photo: Lee Denis

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 Activities can be found at our website.

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