



NEWSLETTER: JUNE 2016

Birding at Cranbourne Botanic Gardens 4th April

Instead of our usual practice of starting at the Stringybark picnic area we decided to begin at the Australian Garden, planning to walk through the bushland section in the afternoon. As it turned out most of the birds were in the Australian Garden, including quite a few honeyeaters, Dusky Woodswallows, Eastern Spinebill, and ducks and grebes on the lakes. A bandicoot was spotted lurking under a bush, but reluctant to come out into the open. Thornbills, Fairy-wrens, Pardalotes and Scrubwrens were also spotted.

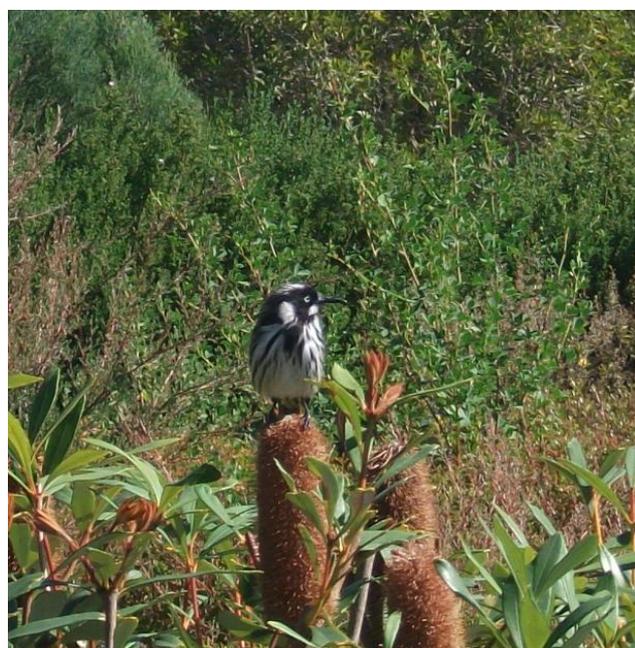


Photo – Velimir Dragic

A walk across the hill on the Trig Track to the Possum Gully Track and on to the Wetland Walk yielded very few birds, but quite a few Swamp Wallabies. On the wetlands themselves we added a few new bird species – Hoary-

headed Grebe, Swampheens and Moorhens – but the Australian Garden remained the most bird-populated section for the day.

One thing we noted was the absence of Bell Miners. They were once found at the Stringybark picnic area, then moved to the works depot adjacent to the Australian Garden. Now they have move on, to who knows where.



Photo – Velimir Dragic

Birds aside, the Australian Garden has come on remarkably in the last ten or twelve years, and has proven to be very popular with visitors. In particular we enjoyed the Spike and Gynea Lilies (*Doryanthes palmeri* and *D. excelsa*), the Queensland Bottle Tree (*Brachychiton rupestris*), the several species of WA Grass Trees, the impressive display of Cycads, and the WA Christmas Tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*), billed as the “world's tallest mistletoe”, whose propagation is particularly challenging.

A final bird tally of 40, including nine honeyeaters, was considered a reasonable tally. – **Lee Denis**

Bird List For Cranbourne Botanic Gardens 4th April 2016				
Pacific Black Duck	Masked Lapwing	Red Wattlebird	Eastern Spinebill	Australian Magpie
Australasian Grebe	Common Bronzewing	Little Wattlebird	Eastern Yellow Robin	Little Raven
Hoary-headed Grebe	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	Noisy Miner	Grey Shrike-thrush	House Sparrow
Australian White Ibis	Eastern Rosella	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Magpie-Lark	Red-browed Finch
Straw-necked Ibis	Superb Fairy-wren	White-eared Honeyeater	Grey Fantail	European Goldfinch
Purple Swampheens	Spotted Pardalote	White-plumed Honeyeater	Willie Wagtail	Welcome Swallow
Dusky Moorhen	White-browed Scrubwren	White-naped Honeyeater	Dusky Woodswallow	Common Blackbird
Eurasian Coot	Brown Thornbill	New Holland Honeyeater	Grey Butcherbird	Common Myna

French Island – Orchids and Wildlife
Chris Chandler 13th April

Chris considers French Island ecology to be a conglomeration of enigmas. The fauna has surprising omissions compared to the surrounding mainland – no possums, kangaroos, wallabies or bandicoots. The only original mammals are long nosed potoroos. Koalas were introduced in the 1890s, and being disease free and without predators (there are no foxes on French Island) and with a 28% population growth per annum, have bred up and eaten the local Eucalypts to death.

There are 115 orchid species on French Island, which is an extraordinary concentration of orchid species, many of them with surprising stories. For example, *Caladenia latifolia*, which was not seen for 28 years, then found again, and *Caladenia clarkei*, which is usually only found east of Yarram. *Caladenia insularis*, the French Island spider orchid, is endemic to French Island, and not prolific, but more appear after fires.

Other flora species have surprising distributions too – for example *Pomaderris lanigera*, which is more often found in the hills, and *Patersonia glabrata*, the nearest colony being at Wilsons Promontory.

There are 220 birds listed for French Island. Reptiles include tiger snakes and copperheads, blotched blue tongue lizards and jacky lizards.

There does not appear to be much historical Aboriginal occupation of French Island – there are very few middens, and little evidence of burning.

The Australian government has chosen 5 islands to be predator free, with a view to becoming wildlife refuges. French Island is the only Victorian island chosen, and work has started on controlling cats. So far 1200 cats have been removed, and all domestic cats have been sterilized. There are still lots of cats to be controlled, but already rabbits are breeding up with fewer cats to control their numbers, so rabbits have to be controlled at the same time. There were 197 wild goats, now there are 20 left. Wild domestic geese and peacocks are also on the list for control.

One of the aims is to introduce Eastern barred bandicoots, but this is contentious, as their original habitat was west of Melbourne.

Chris also told us that Lois Airs, who has transported us around French Island many times over the years in her bus, has retired and there is currently no tour bus operator over there. We have very fond memories of Lois – her expertise and her scones and jam – and we will miss her greatly. – **Judy Smart**

Devilbend Reserve
16th April



Photo – Lee Denis

This excursion was planned to take advantage of the recent opening of the Reserve to walkers. Seven members met at the Graydens Rd carpark, from where two cars were driven and left at the Bittern Reservoir carpark. Then we all set out on the trail that follows Devilbend Creek, which essentially follows the levee bank of the catch-drain that was installed to prevent uncontrolled inflow to the reservoir from the surrounding land.

This trail is not particularly interesting for a field naturalist, especially as the day was cool and breezy, with intermittent light showers. This trail also mostly does not give views of the water. A few bush birds were observed, such as Eastern Yellow Robin, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas, Fairy-wrens and Kookaburras.



Photo – Lee Denis

After some distance we moved down to the lake shore, from where we saw a few water birds such as Black Swan, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, and three species of Cormorant (Little Pied, Little Black and Great). A Black-fronted Dotterel was observed along the water's edge. The carapaces of several quite large Eastern Long-necked Turtles (*Chelodina longicollis*) were found on the mud. The water level in the reservoir seems to continue to fall, since there are no inflows and no recharge takes place. There are plans to open the catch-drain to flow into the reservoir to give some recharge.

The reserve is unfortunately home to a great number of invasive weed species, including pine trees, spanish heath, pittosporum, boneseed, agapanthus, pampas grass, African

blue star iris, and many others. The Friends group has a lot of work ahead of it!

Several interesting fungi were found, including some edible Agarics, what we think were *Scleroderma* species (puff-balls), a specimen of Australia's largest fungal fruiting body *Phlebopus marginatus*, as well as the pathogenic *Gymnopilus junonius*.

After rejoining the trail – through some open Eucalypt woodland – we crossed Hodgkins Rd and continued to the Bittern Reservoir. Here we observed more birds, including Musk Ducks, Great Egret, Hardhead and six Freckled Ducks. The weather growing bleaker, we then called it a day. – **Lee Denis**

SEANA Camp Queenscliff 8th to 11th April



Aeolian calcarenite, "The Bluff", Barwon Heads
Photo – Heather Ducat

The Geelong Field Naturalists Club hosted field naturalists from all over Victoria at Queenscliff over the weekend of April 8 – 10. There were excursions to Mud Islands on offer, but I wanted to go to as many lakes as I could, so I signed up for Lake Victoria and Lake Lorne on Saturday, and Lake Connemara and the Barwon Estuary on Sunday.

The highlights of the lakes were – Lake Victoria – a flock of banded stilts, plus red-necked avocets, red-capped plovers and red-necked stints (lots of red there). Lake Lorne, next to the railway station at Drysdale, had a surprisingly large flock of freckled ducks as well as 2 pink-eared ducks and the usual water birds. Swans were abundant everywhere.

The best was saved for last - at Lake Connemara we saw 3 brolga in the distance, a rare treat indeed.

The camps are always a great window into the local environment, being taken around by local experts, and always enjoyable. – **Judy Smart**

Geology of Barwon Heads and the northern Bellarine Peninsula

This was one of the Saturday morning excursions available, lead by Deborah Evans.

Our first location was the lookout on the tip of 'The Bluff' at Barwon Heads, which gave us a grand view of the You Yangs granite outcrop to the north, the lower Barwon wetlands-estuary complex and the long sandy beach between Ocean Grove and Point Lonsdale. To the west was the low rounded profile of Mt Duneed, which was the source of a lava flow that formed The Bluff at the mouth of the Barwon River.

Between 5 – 25 million years ago tectonic activity on various faults elevated the Bellarine Peninsula to its present level. At The Bluff the New Volcanics Basalt (dated from 7 million to about 6000 years ago) is visible as the rocky shore platform and reefs. It is topped by aeolian calcarenite, formed by wind-blown sand. Between 75,000 and 18,000 years ago, formation of extensive icecaps in glacial times and warmer interglacial periods resulted in fluctuating sea levels. 18,000 years ago the sea level was 130 metres lower than at present and much of the continental shelf between Victoria and Tasmania was exposed. High winds during the colder, drier climate carried sediment from the exposed sea bed, to form dunes along the emerging coast. During this time a large sand bar barrier formed across the Port Phillip depression, extending to and including the Nepean Peninsula.

Our excursion group descended to the beach, dashing between the surging waves to view the calcarenite formations showing periods of deposition, with cross-bedding indicating the wind direction when the dunes were forming. Old soil layers of grey-brown sand with root concretions were also visible.

Our next location was Portarlington, on the north shore of the Bellarine Peninsula, with easier access on a sheltered beach. Here we viewed one of the few exposures of Older

Volcanics (dated at about 45 million years old) on the Bellarine Peninsula. The basalt has weathered to a mottled red-yellow clay, very similar in appearance to a small outcrop of Older Volcanics basalt between Frankston and Daveys Bay.



Shallow Marine Sediment and Current Soil, Portarlington
Photo – Heather Ducat

The outcrop at Portarlington is topped by a 4 metre high cliff or Moorabool sandy, gravelly sediments, deposited in a shallow marine environment between 5 and 1 million years ago; the boundary or unconformity between the two formations is clearly visible. The upper layer of this sediment is a fossiliferous, calcareous bed, the fossils are all of living species of bivalves and gastropods. It is topped by the current soil layer of dark grey sand (Ref The Coast of Victoria, Eric Bird, 1993).

Comparison of photos taken on Saturday and another excursion on Sunday afternoon showed that a large chunk of the cliff had broken off and crashed to the beach. Who said geology is boring – timing is everything! – **Heather Ducat**

Lower Barwon Lakes & Barwon Estuary

Downstream from Geelong the Barwon River flows across a former lake basin now occupied by Reedy Lake, and extensive rush and reed swamp, and enters Lake Connewarre via a small marshy delta. Lake Connewarre is a shallow lagoon, up to 2 metres deep, bordered on the north and east by sandstone bluffs and to the south by low-lying country of a wide lava flow from Mount Duneed, topped by low ridges of dune calcarenite.

About 125,000 years ago the sea level was 7.5 metres above present level, and a seaway extended through the lake and north towards Moolap Lowland and Point Henry, indicated by underlying marine shelly sediments. Tectonic disruption, lava flows, dune accretion, erosion and deposition by the Barwon River have all shaped the landscape.

The estuary of the lower Barwon winds for nearly 10 km downstream from Lake Connewarre, through salt marshes and fringing mangroves, to reach the sea at Barwon Heads. Rising tides sweep muddy sediment back into the lake. Normally brackish in summer, the lake is freshened by river flooding, but becomes saline during droughts. (Ref The Coast of Victoria by Eric C.F. Bird – **Heather Ducat**



Basalt Cobble Shore and Marine Sedimentary Cliff, Portarlington. Photo – Heather Ducat

Edwards Point

Edwards Point is a relatively young sand spit extending south from St Leonards into Swan Bay. The vegetation is Moonah woodland, with the twist that there are no Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) left growing there, having all been harvested for firewood last century. The Friends group have recently planted several.

There is a lot of Wirilda wattle (*Acacia uncifolia*), carrying lots of wire-leaf mistletoe (*Anyema priessii*).

The Friends group have been very active in restoring the health of this reserve, with great results. Bridal creeper infests the whole reserve and they control its vigour with rust spores. They collect bridal creeper when the rust spores are ready, soak it overnight in water, and the next day Parks Victoria spray the reserve with the water. This doesn't kill the bridal creeper, but reduces its vigour so the natural vegetation can flourish. It is a very exacting and time consuming control.

The highlights, apart from the beautiful location and vegetation, were Meadow Argus and Chequered blue butterflies on the beach, and a family of spiny-cheeked honeyeaters.

We also found some coast saltwort plants (*Salsola tragus* subsp. *pontica*) on the beach. This rare annual is often mistaken for a weed, being a tumbleweed and prickly. We have previously seen it at Reef Island and Mt Eliza. – **Judy Smart**

Seaford Wetlands 2nd May

As we have been doing for quite a few years, Seaford Wetlands was the location for May. For me, the highlight is the arrival of the Flame Robins, they come down from the high country to spend the winter at the swamp.

Five enthusiastic birdos set off in mild, windy weather, starting at Austins Road. Over summer the lagoon had completely dried up and all the waterbirds moved elsewhere. In mid-March the council pumped water into the lagoon and within days birds had returned; mostly Chestnut Teals and Pacific Black Ducks with a few Purple Swamphens among the reeds. Apparently it was not to their liking and they had again vanished at the time of our visit. A wetland without ducks!



Photo – Heather Ducat

We walked through the Red Gum woodland on the eastern side, with a small number of forest birds seen, including Spotted Pardalote, Yellow Robin, Grey Fantail, Silvereye, Grey Butcherbird and several honeyeaters. The junction of the central track and the perimeter path on the eastern side has been the favourite location of the Flame Robins for a

number of years and we saw 3 males and up to 7 females here. Very windy conditions made it difficult to hear bird calls, we didn't encounter the Little Grassbird or the Cisticola across the central track, which is their usual haunt.

It was notable for what we didn't see on the day, the resident pair of Swamp Harriers and the Black Shouldered Kites were all absent. The only raptor sighted was a Nankeen Kestrel. We completed the circuit past the central pond which retained a low level of water throughout summer. We saw only a few Silver Gulls and White-Faced Herons.



Photo – Heather Ducat

The very dry summer has had an impact on bird numbers, our total for the day was 32 including introduced species. The only one of interest was the Skylark with its musical warbling and undulating aerial display over the grassland.

After lunch we had a quick look along Kananook Creek to the north of Seaford station and along the foreshore track but not much was seen except a glimpse of a M.S.B.B. [Mysterious Small Brown Bird]. Diane and I tried to conjure up a female Scarlet Robin, a possibility as they are occasionally seen in the wooded areas of Seaford Wetlands. Our view was fleeting and obscured, we were not certain enough to include it on the list. – **Heather Ducat.**

Creating Wetlands & Wildlife Habitat Daniel Brindley, Wetland and Wildlife Creations 11th May

Daniel spoke about the work of his company – Wetlands and Wildlife Creations – started by his father Tony Brindley after the battle to save Greens Bush from subdivision. The battle consumed the family's life for 9 years, from when Daniel was 6 to 15 years old, so it had a big effect on his life. He paid tribute to the older members of PFNC who helped with the battle for Greens Bush and contributed to his environmental education.

Tony started using a bulldozer to create wetlands for wildlife, but wetlands are now only 5% of their work; weed control is the major part of their work now, with some re-vegetation. Their clients are 70% private landholders, and the rest government work. Daniel mentioned that wetlands as built by Melbourne Water have an engineering focus, being principally for stormwater filtration. For wildlife habitat wetlands need a soft gradient from land to water, to

aid vegetation and wildlife such as growling grass frogs. Plants need to be protected by netting because birds pull them out. He had photos of a Mt Eliza site, where a client has a racetrack and stables, and a series of filtration ponds are used to collect the horse manure runoff and clean the water.



Serious Blackberry Problem. Photo – Daniel Brindley

Before weed control or other work commences, cameras are used to monitor wildlife present. For example, a thicket of blackberries near Bunyip was sheltering bandicoots. The most effective way of eradicating blackberries is by spraying Garlon, over 3 seasons. Daniel considers bridal creeper to be one of the worst weeds.

WWC started working on the Mornington Peninsula, but now work all over Victoria and Australia. The day Daniel spoke, he had been working on a mine site near Bendigo. *Pittosporum* is a major problem on the Mornington Peninsula, dominating the understory, and WWC remove large amounts of it. But they have done re-vegetation work in East Gippsland (its natural habitat) where they have



planted it, a bizarre experience for the staff. Conservation work is full of trade-offs – for example – tracks created through the bush for public enjoyment and education also help foxes.

A roadside area in Red Hill was cleared of 50 year old pine trees, leaving tree stumps and bare ground, and criticism from locals. There was no natural revegetation, so the site was planted, new growth flourished, and now the locals are happy again.

Daniel showed us photos of a revegetation site with strong fencing – to keep out the swamp wallabies, who eat roughage in the form of Casuarinas as well as grass. Deer numbers have exploded, and they are now the biggest problem for vegetation. Control is very difficult, they cannot be baited for instance, and the shooters who released them are being asked to help control them.

Some innovations in work practices – when working in blackberries, workers wear 2 pairs of pants so they can walk through. They now provide a healthy lunch for staff, which improves productivity and lessens staff turnover. There is also a gym set-up, to improve staff fitness and hence productivity.

Daniel was too modest to mention it, but WWC have won many awards for their work, such as at Waterways at Mordialloc, a favourite birding spot for us. He was also part of starting the Habitat Restoration Fund, (www.hrf.org) which attracts private donations and grants, and does restoration work on the Mornington Peninsula. We visited one of their sites last August, which was impressive.

For more information visit the websites, with great photos and information – www.awwc.com.au for WWC and www.hrf.org for Habitat Restoration Fund. – **Judy Smart**



Revegetation of a site on Pt Leo Rd: before and after. Photos – Daniel Brindley

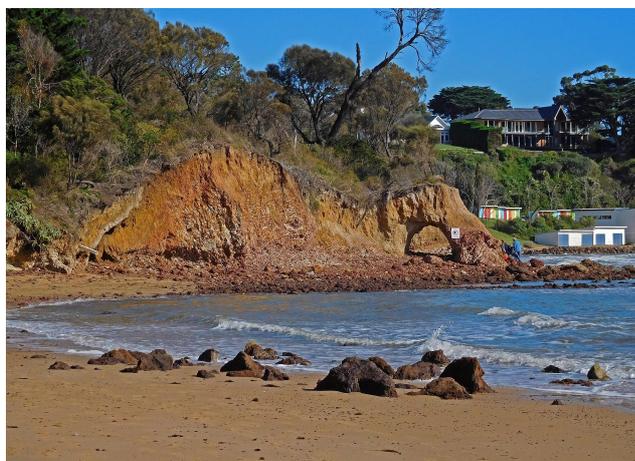
Port Phillip Bay Coastal Geology 14th May

Our May excursion, led by Leon Costermans was enjoyed by a big group in sunny but very windy conditions. Fellow rock-hounds gathered for a rare excursion where geology was the theme; it was an opportunity to see 'interesting exposures (of the geological kind) at the local nudist beach, Sunnyside.



*Baxter Sandstone at Pelican Point.
Photo – Heather Ducat*

The first location was Pelican Point, south-west of Daveys Bay, Mt. Eliza, where Baxter Sandstone forms a prominent headland. This hard, coarse-grained rock was laid down by rivers between 6 – 4 million years ago. The cliffs display red and yellow mottled and banded minerals including iron oxide. The boulders on the shore platform are dark red/brown, caused by iron oxide being drawn to the surface as the rock is in continual wet and dry conditions. Baxter Sandstone is the upper terrestrial unit of the Mornington Peninsula sedimentary formations and forms headlands at Red Bluff and Schnapper Point, Mornington.



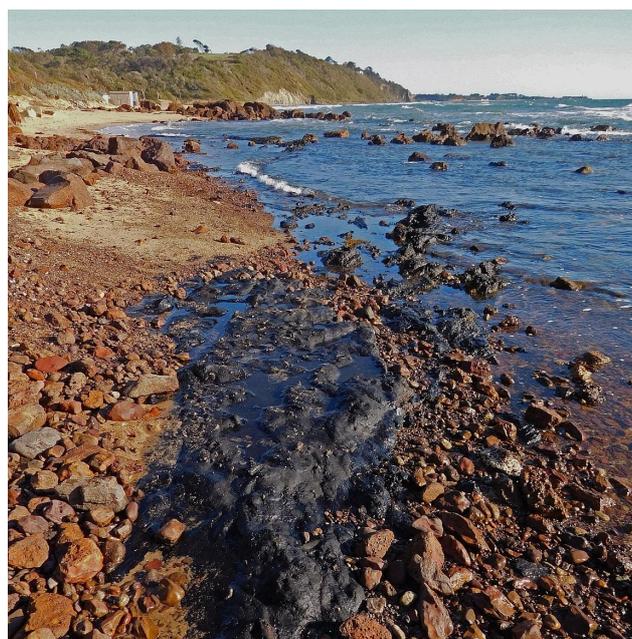
*Cliff Collapse and Arch in Gellibrand Marl, Daveys Bay
Photo – Heather Ducat*

The sandstone is topped by the current soil layer of grey sand with a large shell midden visible. In 2010 a chunk of the cliff about 20m. long, collapsed almost taking a lookout

and walking track with it. We walked a short distance to Daveys Bay, access to the beach via a sturdy metal stairway to the yacht club. Here the older formation of Gellibrand Marl (formerly Balcombe Clay) outcrops at sea level. This limy clay ranges in colour from white, yellow, red, grey, even mauve and was deposited in shallow marine conditions between 19 – 11 million years ago. The soft clay is unstable and easily eroded, an arch and crumbling cliff were formed in 2015 and coincide with the Manyung Fault, part of the main Selwyn Fault System that defines the west coast of the Mornington Peninsula. Towards Frankston near Kackeraboite Creek, the fault runs parallel with the shore and the effect is apparent with a shear zone and fractured Mt. Eliza granite that outcrops at sea level.

Leon showed us black magnetic sand, eroded from the granite, that forms a contrasting veneer on the narrow beach. The small point to the north of Gulls Way steps is of weathered Older Volcanics Basalt (50–40 million years old) faulted against uplifted granite. In the Daveys Bay area it is possible to see rocks ranging in age from 380 m.y.o. granite to 4 m.y.o. Sandstone! From here we drove to Sunnyside Beach for lunch.

To the south of the carpark near Manmangur Creek the cobble shore is backed by steep bluffs of grey Mt. Eliza Granite. The rock is sheared and fractured with angular pieces set in a partially re-melted matrix of mashed granite, created by stress and heating in the fault zone. A layer of rounded pebbles 2m. above the current shore is evidence of a former beach, about 6000 years ago.



*Coal Seam, Sunnyside
Photo – Heather Ducat*

At low tide a seam of brown coal is exposed; it formed in a swamp about 18 million years ago. The texture and grain in some logs is still visible!

Further north weathered, blobby basalt forms the shore platform and a low embankment behind the beach. At Manyung Rocks the shore platform and low cliffs of Gellibrand Marl have abundant marine fossils including mollusc, sponges, corals, echinoids (sea urchins) and fish. Large calcareous nodules, up to 40 cm. diameter, occur within the marl. The beds of nodules change direction due to the drag of the Manyung Fault, as it again crosses the coast. Leon explained that the nodules sometimes contain fossils; he broke off a small piece and sure enough, it had fossil shells inside.

We had intended to visit Fossil Beach just past Mornington, but ran out of time. The two locations we studied were fascinating, with Leon's maps, explanations and questions giving us a deeper understanding of this complex area. I certainly appreciated the chance to visit Sunnyside, not sure which group found it more confronting – 20 Field Naturalists (many with binoculars), or the nudists enjoying the late autumn sunshine. Our thanks to Leon for giving us his time and expertise, certainly a very interesting day.–
Heather Ducat.

Birding at Mt Martha Park 6th June

On a fine sunny winters morning six members gathered at the “Conifers” picnic ground at Mt Martha Park. Early arrivals noted cockatoos, lorikeets and rosellas at the picnic ground before we set off, but birds were generally scarce.

For the most part the birds were fairly common bush birds of the Peninsula. The most excitement was generated by a sighting of a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, followed by a raptor – possibly a Brown Goshawk. Golden Whistler is always a welcome sight, as are Eastern Yellow Robins.

Recently speaking with a visitor to Australia I was reminded again of how lucky we are in the birds, especially the various species of parrot, that we take for granted (or even find annoying), when visitors are amazed at their colourful displays. This applies particularly to common (to us) birds like Rainbow Lorikeets and Eastern Rosellas. Sometimes in looking for something more exotic we overlook things we should appreciate.

number of smaller species prominent, particularly those that flourish on leaf litter and dead wood.

After lunch we decided to stop off at Mt Eliza Regional Park (aka “Moorooduc Quarry”) on the way home. Here again the birds were not in great numbers but we found ourselves surrounded it seemed by Golden Whistlers – at least two pairs calling loudly on either side of the path, which we observed for some time. A few other birds that we had not seen earlier included Grey Fantail and Red-browed Finch.

No Peregrines were spotted in the quarry, but we did get an extended view of a Brush Bronzewing loitering along the path. These are in my experience normally very wary birds, but this one seemed less concerned than they usually are, and became a highly photographed bird.

A walk over the top of the quarry yielded very few bird sightings – even though we thoroughly scanned the Baxter Flats below. – **Lee Denis**

Bird List For My Martha Park 6th June 2016	
Brown Goshawk (?)	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Spotted Turtle-Dove	White-eared Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Eastern Yellow Robin
Rainbow Lorikeet	Golden Whistler
Eastern Rosella	Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra	Magpie-Lark
Brown Thornbill	Grey Butcherbird
Red Wattlebird	Australian Magpie
Little Wattlebird	Little Raven
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Noisy Miner	Common Blackbird

As usual in winter, fungi were prominent, with quite a



*Brush Bronzewing at Mt Eliza Regional Park.
Photo – Lee Denis*

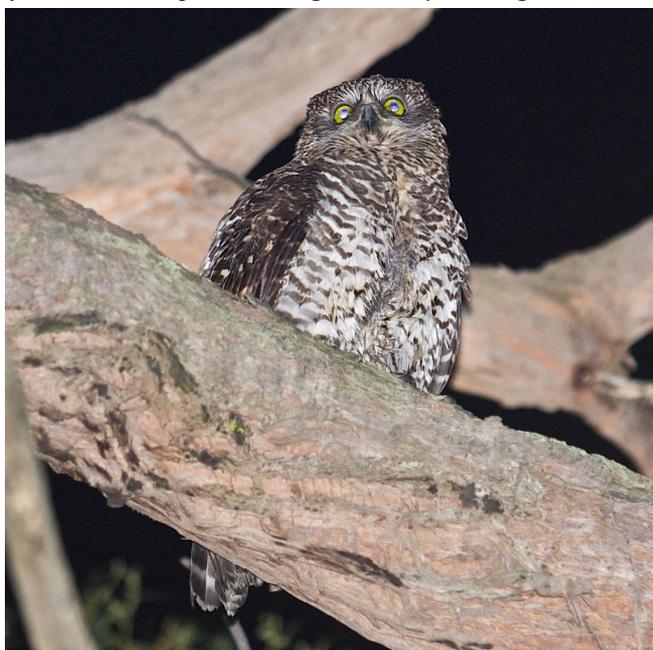
Powerful Owl at Woods Reserve Rog Standen

A couple of years ago Mornington Peninsula Shire conducted some surveys for Powerful Owls in its reserves. A number of us volunteered for this survey, but no Owls were found. One of the reserves surveyed was Woods Reserve at Tuerong, where recently our member Roger Standen went to try out his new camera flash.

“I bought a flash for my camera a week or so ago and wanted to try it out so I was familiar with it before I go up north in a month. So I went to Wood’s reserve on Sunday night as I expected to find a few possums there to practice on. I found some and worked out how to use it. I was impressed with how far it can reach - up to the top of those large trees relatively easily.

After doing as much as I thought I could achieve that night I went back to the car and then heard a ‘whooh hoo’. I stopped and listened and it came again, so I went back toward the call and found the powerful owl way up on a branch at the top of a tree. It kept calling quite a bit even when I had the torch on it. It was a terrific experience – I have never seen a powerful owl at night like that – going about its business as it was preening as well in between calling.

After all those trips out during the survey it was great to know they were there.”



Predator and Prey – Powerful Owl and Sugar Glider at Woods Reserve. Photos by Rog Standen

Paddock to Plains: a Land Restoration Project Near the Grampians **David Archer - 8th June**

David Archer, one of our longest standing members (he started in the Club very young), has a bush block near the Grampians. David bought the block in January 2004, comprising 40 acres of open treed horse paddock, and no buildings. The block is situated between Stawell and Halls Gap, only 200 metres from the edge of Lake Lonsdale (when it has water, which is not always the case).

The vegetation consisted of Yellow Box and Yellow Gum, very little understory, and a good cover of Danthonia (wallaby grass).

After consultation with locals, it was decided to aim for the EVC – Plains Grassy Woodland, which consists of 15% canopy or 15 large trees per hectare, with not much understory. It was decided to add bulokes to the list, in the

hope of attracting red-tailed black cockatoos. In September 2004 there was some direct seeding done, but then in December 2005 a major bushfire burnt the whole block. Most of the established trees survived, and some of the seedlings. After that it was drought conditions for the rest of the decade.

In July 2012 David organised for the block to be ripped, ready for more planting – 6 kilometres of ripline. With the help of Project Platypus, from Stawell, 30 people planted and guarded 3500 trees. There were setbacks – cockatoos ripped up plant guards, seemingly for fun, and kangaroos love to eat bulokes and squash trees. Lots of guards were lost in very windy weather, and painstakingly reinstated by David. The upshot was 1200 trees survived. Of the 200 bulokes planted at different times, 36 survive so far.

Fauna – there are no rabbits, but a few hares. A mob of 50 kangaroos crosses the block regularly. Yellow footed antechinus, echidnas and shingleback lizards have been seen. The roadside reserve has good quality vegetation, and some of it, such as lilies and blue devil plants (*Eryngium ovinum*) are creeping into the block.

David’s only structure on the block is a small lean-to shed for cooking under, and he sleeps in his car. He goes up there for the weekend about fifteen times a year. It was very interesting to hear about the highs and lows of working on a bush block. – **Judy Smart**



Photos – David Archer

Quail Island 17th June

Over many years newcomers to the Club have been regaled with tales of the trip to Quail Island, long long ago. The tale assumed mythical qualities. We should go again one day...

Eventually talk turned to action, and Club Secretary Judy, with some help from Chris Chandler from the Friends of French Island, made contact with Parks Victoria ranger Alisson, who not only was keen to provide information on the island, but volunteered to lead an excursion – an offer too good to refuse.

Quail Island lies in the north-west corner of Western Port Bay, and is the third largest island in the Bay after French and Phillip Islands. It has never been inhabited – officially anyway – although cattle were once grazed there. It is easily reached by boat from Warneet, a trip of only a few hundred metres. It is part of the North Western Port Nature Conservation Reserve.

Protection is certainly needed because the island has been a stronghold for the Southern Brown Bandicoot – naturalist Malcolm Legge has recorded a severe fall in their numbers due to the introduction of pigs to the island. It is also an important bird area, with two known nests of White-bellied Sea-eagles; other species including Southern Emu-wren, Striated Field-wren, and (perhaps hopefully) Orange-bellied Parrot have been observed or suspected to be present.



Photo – Lee Denis

It rained most of the early morning but the skies cleared as we gathered at Warneet; twenty participants including members of PFNC, Friends of French Island, and Cannons Creek Management Committee met with Alisson for the crossing. Five trips were required to ferry everyone across, and as we assembled on the shore of the island Alison gave a short introduction to the history and environment, as well as the work that Parks Victoria is carrying out.

We walked along the shore to the north, through salt marsh containing the samphires *Sarcocornia* and *Tecticornia* behind a wide mangrove fringe, with islands of higher ground containing Eucalypts with an understory of Lomandra. Swinging inland we crossed areas of rushes, with thickets of Swamp Paper-bark (*Melaleuca ericifolia*), the occasional Banksia (*B. marginata*), and Manna Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*), Messmate (*E. obliqua*) and Narrow-leaved Peppermint (*E. radiata*).



Photo – Lee Denis

Since we only had a couple of hours either side of high tide (if the tide is too low there is a long slog through mud flats to and from the boat) we only saw a small area on the north-east side of the island, but enough to give an idea of the environment. Striking back to meet the boats we all blindly followed Alisson through Melaleuca thickets so tall and dense that you lost sight of the person five metres in front – thankfully we didn't lose anyone and emerged at the

shore where we went in.

Birds were scarce – no wrens were sighted, nor Sea-eagles, let alone Orange-bellied Parrots, but there were the usual honeyeaters, some Galahs, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Fantails and a Swamp Harrier. Not a particularly bird-friendly day.

Showers began again as we were heading back, so after everyone was safely back in Warneet we were glad for the warmth of the Warneet Boat Hire cafe wood heater and coffee. No doubt future expeditions will be planned, perhaps at a more friendly time of year for flowers and birds, and with a more adventurous agenda. – **Lee Denis**

Quail Island Revisited

Heather and I have been talking about revisiting Quail Island for at least 10 years, but knowing the logistical difficulties we hadn't been able to work out how. We vividly remember the Club's last visit to QI, on 25th November 1995. We were ferried over by Florence Hosking's nephews Robert and David, and led by Owen Dawson, our intrepid life member. We walked along the shore for a while, then Owen announced, "This is the spot", and we plunged into trackless shoulder-height bracken, through which we hacked our way for some time. Snakes were very much on our minds, but the ruckus we made crashing through the bracken kept them away, and we didn't see any. That day we saw more of the southern end of the island, there were some open areas with Stackhousia in flower, and the same tall twiggy Melaleuca forest. With Owen long gone from us, and knowing the rugged terrain and lack of tracks, we have been trying to work out how to get there again, so we are very grateful to Alisson for giving up her time to take us around, and show us some of the area and issues over there. – **Judy Smart**.



Photo – Judy Smart

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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