



NEWSLETTER: SEPTEMBER 2020

This is our second Covid-19 lockdown edition of the newsletter—unfortunately probably not our last. We got off to a good start in June, with the easing of Stage 3 restrictions allowing some group activities. Meetings were not possible, but we could meet in the field in groups of ten or less. We managed four excursions in June and July before we were shut down again.

So this newsletter has fewer activity reports than usual, but with the help of some contributors I hope it still has something to interest everyone. The June edition included a report on Heather Ducat's talk on her visit to New Caledonia; unfortunately in the rapidly changing circumstances at the time none of her photos could be included, so the report is repeated in this edition, with pictures.

At time of writing we are in Stage 4, which prohibits travel more than 5km from home for exercise/recreational purposes. Some of us are fortunate enough to live within 5km of bushland; for me this radius includes the Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve and Frankston Nature Conservation Reserve as well as Sweetwater Creek, some smaller areas of bushland, and of course Frankston beach,

so I have been able to look for orchids at Langwarrin (Nodding, Trim and Tall Greenhoods; Mosquitos; Veined, Slaty and Small (aka Pelicans) Helmets all in flower; others in leaf) and watch Gannets diving in the Bay. In Pentland Gardens, also close by, a pair of Black Ducks had seven ducklings in mid August. The rest of the time I've spent preparing my garden for Spring, walking around the block, and watching other people's gardens burst into flower. Also wondering why the Eastern Rosellas reject the nest box I made for them. They inspect it carefully, but decide against. I wish I could get them to fill out a questionnaire so I could know what improvements would change their minds.

Thanks to all those who submitted material for the newsletter—so much that not all could be included in this edition, and will be held over to the next. I have a feeling that I will need all the material I can get for that next newsletter, so I welcome any contributions. One or more paragraphs, with or without photos, letting us know how you have been keeping up your Field Naturalist interests, would be of interest to us all.

Stay safe and we'll meet up again soon.

Back in Action: Seaford Wetland 1st June

With some easing of Covid-19 restrictions—namely groups of 10 outdoors allowed—we re-commenced our programme with the birding visit to Seaford Wetland that had been scheduled for May (two members who live locally, Heather and Velimir, had kept the May date; see their report in the June newsletter).



Photo: Lee Denis

Seven members gathered at the Austin Rd viewing platform on a fairly chilly and windy day. There was plenty of water but not many birds, apart from a family, or perhaps two families, of Chestnut Teal. I counted 11 ducklings, but we were told that there had been 25 ducklings, definitely from

more than one clutch, in May. A few swans, some Black Ducks and a circling Swamp Harrier just about summed up the birdlife at that location. We could hear Little Grassbirds in the reeds.

We then walked along the eastern, Wells Road, path which was a bit sheltered from the wind, seeing a few birds including a White-faced Heron beside the path, that let us get surprisingly close before taking flight; White Ibis, Silver Gulls, and a number of honeyeaters including White-eared and Yellow-faced. The most productive area was in the revegetation zone, where we saw the flock of Red-browed Finches that had been seen in May, as well as small flocks of Silveryeyes and White-plumed Honeyeaters.

Continuing to the old farm we first spotted a Nankeen Kestrel on a fence post, then finally the main object of the day—Flame Robins. We saw four males and one female hopping between the fence and the ground. They didn't seem to be bothered by the Kestrel which remained nearby.

There was some debate about continuing around the farm to Eel Race Drain and back on the western side, but the blustery wind persuaded us to retrace our steps instead, especially having been successful in finding Flame Robins.

Bird List For Seaford Wetland 1st June 2020	
Black Swan	Noisy Miner
Pacific Black Duck	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Chestnut Teal	White-plumed Honeyeater
White-faced Heron	New Holland Honeyeater
Australian White Ibis	Flame Robin
Royal Spoonbill	Eastern Yellow Robin
Black-shouldered Kite	Grey Shrike-thrush
Swamp Harrier	Magpie-Lark
Nankeen Kestrel	Willie Wagtail
Purple Swamphen	Australian Magpie
Silver Gull	Little Raven

Spotted Turtle-Dove	Red-browed Finch
Crested Pigeon	Welcome Swallow
Rainbow Lorikeet	Little Grassbird
Eastern Rosella	Silvereye
Red Wattlebird	Common Blackbird
Little Wattlebird	

Our final count of 33 was just below the May total of 36, but we did see Flame Robins. Above all we were pleased to gather as a group to go birdwatching again, so the count was a secondary consideration. The main thing was that everyone was coping with the situation—long may it continue!—**Lee Denis**

Warringine Park 13th June

Warringine Park has two main accessible sections: a narrow strip along Warringine Creek and a boardwalk through the salt marsh between Hastings and Jacks Beach (there are other patches which are not easily accessible). The Park has been under the control of the Mornington Shire since 2006; it was first declared a conservation park in 1994.

large, one Rough Tree-fern being of the order of three metres tall.



Rough Tree-fern. All photos: Lee Denis

We began at the Creek section. The Ted Harris walk, named in honour of a significant volunteer with the Friends group, takes you from Hendersons Road to the Frankston-Flinders Road, through a narrow strip on the south side of the Creek. The Friends group has done extensive planting, particularly of Acacias, on one side of the path, making it a bit difficult to tell the original vegetation, although some very large old manna gums and messmates were obviously part of it. The Creek runs about 10 metres below the walking track in a narrow steep valley, vegetated by Swamp Paper-bark, Prickly Tea-tree, Sweet Bursaria and Prickly Currant-bush, as well as a collection of ferns including Rough and Soft Tree-ferns, Maidenhair, False Bracken (as well as real Bracken) and Gristle Fern. Some of the tree ferns are very



'Weed' Fungus *Favolaschia calocera*

There were also a lot of fungi along the track, including the Ghost Fungus (*Omphalotus nidiformis*), Horse-dropping Fungus (*Arrhinus* sp.), a good many species of *Amanita* (perhaps *A. farinacea*), some species of *Agaricus*, and bracket fungus (*Fomitiporia robusta*, wherein lies a tale: see below). We also observed, on a piece of fallen wood, the introduced 'weed' fungus *Favolaschia calocera*. Originating in Madagascar, this fungus is distinctive, being bright orange with an undersurface of very large pores, the outline of which can be seen from above.

The Walk crosses a wetland via boardwalk—the only birds on it were a couple of Black Ducks and a Purple Swamphen. Other birds sighted along the walk included Red and Little Wattlebird, Yellow-faced, White-eared and New Holland Honeyeaters, Yellow Robin, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Rainbow Lorikeet. Total number of bird species was 26 and also included common bush birds like Spotted Pardalote, Superb Fairy-wren, Grey

Butcherbird and Grey Currawong.

Two species of orchid, Nodding and Tall Greenhood, were noted. This is a very pleasant and interesting walk with much of interest to a field naturalist.

In the afternoon we walked a little of the saltmarsh boardwalk from Jacks Beach. Only two sticks now remain of the old jetty, while the space in front of the tan pit has almost filled in with mangroves over the last 40 years—except for the band of tilted Silurian sandstone that

outcrops at the shore here before heading across the Bay to Sandstone Island. Velimir was pleased to find another Lamp Shell here (readers may remember his successful quest to identify a specimen of this shell, reported in a previous newsletter).

Nothing much of note was observed along the boardwalk, except that the mangroves are invading quite deeply into the salt marsh. If sea levels are rising this is to be expected. Not all of these will necessarily survive the summer though.
—Lee Denis

New Caledonia – an ancient slice of Australia

Heather Ducat, March 11, 2020

This is Heather’s 18th talk to us, and every talk has been fascinating, well researched and with brilliant photos.

(the main island) is limestone, and Isle of Pines has an ultramafic core ringed with limestone.

In 2018 Heather and husband Robert spent 3 weeks in New Caledonia. New Caledonia is on the Tropic of Capricorn, 1200km east of Bowen, and west of Fiji. The main island is 450km long, with a mountain spine. The weather in summer is humid, and June to September is the coolest time. Because of the prevailing winds, the east coast gets 2000mm of rain per year, and is rain forest, while the west coast gets 1000mm per year, and is coastal plain with dry tropical forest. The mountainous spine has higher rainfall again. The barrier reef which surrounds the island is the second largest in the world, second only to Australia’s.



New Caledonia East Coast. All Photos: Heather Ducat

Geological history: 200 million years ago Gondwana started to separate, and by 80 million years ago New Zealand and New Caledonia were still joined together by a ridge. By 65 million years ago New Caledonia had settled into its current position and configuration.

New Caledonia is not volcanic, and 1/3rd of the rocks are ultramafic, which is a metamorphism of upper mantle rocks from the Earth’s core and some oceanic crust. Ultramafic rocks are a startling red/orange, with high levels of minerals such as magnesium, chromium, nickel and iron, with low nutrients and toxic soil. The northern area of Grande Terre



Paperbark Forest on Ultramafic Soil

Vegetation: New Caledonia has 3344 species of plants, 80% endemic, which is twice as many plants as New Zealand. The combination of unusual geology and extreme isolation has created the high rate of endemism. There are no Eucalypts, lots of Paperbarks, 3 endemic Grevilleas such as *Grevillea gillivrayi*, and 46 species of conifers (compared to Australia - 35, and NZ - 17). In the conifers there are 5 species of Agathis, 3 of Callitris, 7 of Podocarpus, 6 of Dacrydium, 3 of Libocedrus, and 14 Araucarias, which New Caledonia is famous for.

In the rest of Gondwana, scattered among South America, Australia, Norfolk Island and New Guinea, there are 6 species of Araucarias, such characteristic and widely planted trees as the monkey puzzle, Bunya pine and Norfolk Island pine.

The Isle of Pines, a large island south of Grande Terre, and popular tourist destination, has groves of Cook’s pine, *Araucaria columnaris*, which are tall and narrow. *Araucaria muelleri* is named after Ferdinand von Mueller, who surveyed and collected there. There are 5 endemic species of Agathis (Kauri) in such a small country, compared with 15 species in the rest of the Pacific

(Australia, NZ, Philippines and Malaysia).

There are 200 species of orchid, many endemic to New Caledonia. Familiar genera to us are Dendrobium, Pterostylis, Thelymitra and Caladenia, all with local species, and unfamiliar are genera such as the beautiful *Eriaxis rigida*.



Endemic Orchid Eriaxis rigida

Birds: of the 102 species 26 are endemic. These include the Kagu, a flightless bird the size of a chicken, known as the Ghost of the forest, the only one of its genus and family, and endangered by rat predation. The famous New Caledonia crow is supposed to be the most intelligent bird

in the world. Leach's Giant Gecko, at 40cm long, is the largest gecko in the world.



Endemic Kagu

Human history: Melanesians colonised the islands 3500 years ago. Captain Cook discovered and named the islands in 1776, then in 1853 the French annexed the islands as a colony. It was a penal colony for 30 years, and the Melanesians (Kanakas) revolted against French rule from 1878 onwards, without success. In 1946 it became a French overseas territory, and the independence movement is still ongoing.

Timber harvesting and mining are the major economic activities, apart from tourism.

After New Caledonia, Heather and Robert went on to Vanuatu to see the live volcano there, which is constantly erupting.

Footnote: The Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne has a New Caledonia section, with some New Caledonia Araucarias, as well as their extensive Araucaria collection in the rest of the gardens.—**Judy Smart**

Sages Woodland Working Bee July 4, 2020

Our Club has an annual working bee each July, usually around Frankston. This year we branched out to Sages Bushland, part of the Sages Cottage complex at Baxter.

The land is owned and managed by Wallara, a community disability support service, building life and work skills with clients. At Sages Cottage activities include looking after farm animals, working in the bushland, and in the on-site cafe. Currently all these activities are on hold due to Covid 19. The historic cottage is not open to the public, and the Baxter Barn is sub let as a wedding venue. (Author's note: my son got married there, and it was beautiful.) The Bushland is between the Moorooduc Hwy and the driveway to the farm area.

We met Gerard McDonald and Daniel Idczak there, who are Friends of the Bushland. Gerard was introduced to the site 14 years ago by Ted Harris, who was working across the road at Baxter Park. Gerard was working for Skills Plus at the time, managing groups of Work for the Dole participants, and trying to teach them bushland regeneration. He ran 4 x 6 month projects there, weeding and regenerating the open paddocks as well as the bushland, and removing gorse from along the fence line, not a popular task for the participants. After Gerard resigned from Skills Plus he continued to volunteer there,

with Ted Harris for many years, and now with Daniel Idczak. Daniel managed the complex for Menzies Homes for some years, before Wallara acquired the site. Daniel now works for the CFA, and also organises working bees for Balcombe Landcare group.



One of Gerard's Interpretive Signs. Photo: Coralie Davies

A display board near the gate has photos from 50 years ago of cleared paddocks, which over time and under their care

have regenerated naturally. Gerard designed interpretive signs for the vegetation along the walking tracks, and the Wallara clients installed them.



Wetland at Sages Cottage. Photo: Lee Denis

We started our tour near the wetland, which after all the recent rain was overflowing. We saw Wood Ducks nesting in a hollow tree stump, and Pacific Black Duck, Dusky Moorhen and Australasian Grebes on the water. White-faced Heron were nesting in a tall pine tree. We squelched across the boggy low lying area to the bushland. Nearby is the head waters of the Balcombe Creek, which runs around the back of the Moorooduc Quarry and Mt Eliza, and then across the plain to the back of the Mornington Racecourse before reaching The Briars and the Estuary at Mt Martha.

We mainly worked on flatweeds and young willow wattles, and some of us tried to remove Wonga vine, *Pandorea pandoreana*, which is invading from Baxter Park across the road. It is a very vigorous and difficult weed to remove, as it suckers and twines. For a long time it was believed to be indigenous, but in the last few years, whether by hybridising or by other means, has become very weedlike. At Moorooduc Quarry just nearby it smothers large trees and shrubs. Our work was accompanied by the tink tink of the Bell Miners. We also saw Grey Fantail, Grey Butcherbird, Magpies and Pied Currawongs. Another interesting sight was a large mature Pine tree, which was struck by lightning last summer. It has a prominent scar from this, but has survived. We also saw the large cocoon of a White stemmed Gum moth in the pine bark.



Lightning Scar on Pine Tree Cocoons of White-stemmed Gum Moth



Large Patch of Nodding Greenhoods. Photo: Coralie Davies

The woodland is higher ground, with open Eucalyptus woodland. Manna gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis* ssp *pryoriana*) towards the southern end and Silver leaf Stringybark (*E. cephalocarpa*) towards the northern end. Sweet wattle (*Acacia suaveolens*) had started flowering, with *A.melanoxylon* and *A.paradoxa* yet to come. There were large patches of nodding greenhoods (*Pterostylis nutans*) in flower. One uncommon plant there is *Parsonsia brownii*, twining silkpod, a climber, which we have only seen previously at Pearceedale.

Access to the Bushland is restricted, being private property, and needs to be booked with management. It is well worthwhile though, and will be a picture in Spring.



After our Working Bee.

Historic Cottage

Sages Cottage Farm dates back to the 1850s and has heritage protected buildings and grounds. Captain Benjamin Baxter arrived at Port Melbourne from County Cork, Ireland, in 1837 and became the first European settler in the Mornington Peninsula district. In the same year he opened the first post office in Port Philip and in 1838 he was

granted a pastoral lease of 15,000 acres in the Langwarrin/Moorooduc area to run cattle. Baxter’s cattle station was also known as Carrup Carrup and he owned this from 1838 to 1860. In 1851 he became the Commissioner of Crown Land.

Baxter spent most of his time in Melbourne taking care of other business interests so he appointed John Sage as overseer of Carrup Carrup. In 1852 John Sage married Maria Baxter – Benjamin Baxter’s daughter – and acquired a portion of Baxter’s land in 1856. Circa that time, John and Maria built their home which is now known as Sages Cottage. The property remained the home of the Sages descendants until the 1970s after which time it was operated as a restaurant and tourist facility before being purchased by Menzies Inc., an organisation dedicated to caring for disadvantaged youth.

In 2013 Wallara took over the property to provide

innovative disability services in the tranquil setting, which included animal experiences, horticulture and hospitality training. The heritage protected buildings have been restored to their former glory and the cottage is now open to the public for tours, to experience life on Sages Farm.

Ted Harris

Ted Harris made a big impression on all those lucky enough to meet him. By coincidence the Field Nats walked the Ted Harris Walk at Warringine Creek several weeks before. There is a large plaque there honouring Ted’s achievements there and elsewhere in bushland regeneration.

Gerard’s plaque honouring Ted at Sages reads:
In Memory of Ted Harris, 8.5.1944 – 21.9.2011
An environmental warrior whose tireless efforts have helped rehabilitate this fantastic bushland along with many other significant areas.—Judy Smart

**The Last Hurrah (for now): OT Dam
 6th July**

The last of our little burst of activity was a birding visit to OT Dam, which is part of Arthurs Seat State Park. That evening Stage 3 restrictions were re-imposed—at time of writing we are in Stage 4. OT Dam, while a pleasant piece of bushland, has not in the past been a happy hunting ground for birding—on one memorable occasion our bird count totalled one species!. We have had some respectable counts in Spring though.

compensations in the plants, which include some species not often seen in other parts of the Peninsula, and, especially in winter, in the abundant fungi.

Some of the notable plants in flower were *Acacia myrtifolia*, *Epacris impressa* with pink, white, and in-between flowers, *Pultenea daphnoides* just in bud, as were *Acacia pycnantha*—this one probably not indigenous—and *Exocarpus strictus*. Not in flower, but very common, was the Holly Lomatia *Lomatia ilicifolia*.

Fungi included the toothed form *Hydnum repandum*, the woody *Coltricia cinnamomi*, brackets *Fomitiporia robusta* and *Stereum ostrea*, club fungus *Clavulina subrugosa*, coral fungus *Ramaria ochraceosalmonicolor*, a tiny yellow jelly fungus *Heterotextus miltinus*, and the small yellow ascomycete (cup fungus) *Discinella terrestris*.



White-browed Scrubwren. All Photos: Lee Denis

The day started inauspiciously with driving rain from Seaford to Mt Eliza, but we were so determined to have our outing that we pressed on anyway, fully expecting the weather to be even worse on Arthurs Seat. Amazingly, when we got there we found the weather fine, and it stayed that way for the rest of the day.

When the birds are scarce at OT Dam there are



Shelducks on OT Dam

Our bird count was once again modest at 15, including mostly common bush birds—White-throated Treecreeper being the main one not regularly seen further north on the Peninsula. At one point a White-browed Scrubwren came to check us out, while we thought we heard a Mistletoebird but were unable to find it.

The dam itself belonged to a pair of Australian Shelducks: a couple of males trying their luck were soon seen off.—**Lee Denis**

Bird List For OT Dam 6 July 2020	
Australian Shelduck	Brown Thornbill
Galah	New Holland Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Eastern Yellow Robin
Crimson Rosella	Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra	Grey Fantail
White-throated Treecreeper	Grey Butcherbird
Superb Fairy-wren	Australian Magpie
White-browed Scrubwren	

To Twine to the Left or to Twine to the Right [From The Murrumbidgee Naturalist*, May 2020]

In his report on our last trip to Jacks Creek, Alan Whitehead wrote ‘... some of us gathered to contemplate why Wonga Vine always spiralled to the right as they climbed their supporting trees’. When Charles Darwin received a paper by Asa Gray in 1858 on the coiling of tendrils he didn’t contemplate why the tendrils behaved that way but asked himself the question how. He immediately set about studying them, growing seeds of one of the marrow family that Gray had sent him.



Twining Fringe Lily coiling around a Greenhood stem, a taller, thicker stem; and Wonga Vine coiling around a White Cypress Pine

It was already known that growing tips of plants not only bent towards light but also steadily revolved its bending in a daily cycle. Botanists of the day put it down to the tips just following the sun and never asked how. That was not good enough for Darwin. He devised a simple experiment, either cutting off the growing tip or otherwise covering them, then illuminating them from only one side. They all grew straight up whereas control plants duly bent towards the light. In this way he proved that the bending action was controlled by the growing tips. It was much later and with much better means of chemical analysis that the controlling agents were found to be auxins (plants equivalents of hormones) formed only by the growing tip, and only recently that these auxins actively migrated to one side of the tip to promote the extra growth there.

As was common with many of the landed gentry of the day, Darwin collected plants from around the world for his garden. As he was often ill, probably an infection picked up during his voyage around the world, his collection was usually from donations from professional botanists as he seldom left his home at Downs House in Surrey. In his quest to determine how and why twiners formed their coils he turned to his collection of climbers. Carefully observing a Wisteria he noted that stems would only coil around a support if the support was less than a critical diameter. He thereby debunked the current idea that coiling was a response to touch. Turning to his work on the origin of the species and in particular his views on the steady evolution of features from existing features, he concluded that the gyrations of the growing tip is extenuated in twiners resulting in wrapping the stem around the support. He likened it to whirling a rope around your head and then letting the free end hit a post. The end immediately coils around the post.

But what of the way the coils go? Darwin looked at his 40 climbers and found 27 were right-handed (growing from bottom left to upper right) and the other 13 left-handed. That was a clear statistical difference. In 2007 a New Zealand ecologist showed that 92% of the world’s twining plants twine to the right – regardless of which hemisphere they grow. The question for us is – which of our native climbers are right-handed and which are left-handed? Wonga Vine and Twining Fringe-lily are right-handed, the rest are - - - !

Eric Whiting

* The newsletter of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Club, which is based in Leeton. Website: www.mfn.org.au

Since reading this article I have had a close look at every climbing plant I have come across, including local native species Wonga Vine, Dodder Laurel, Mountain Clematis and Twining Silk Pod; cultivated natives Gum Vine and Snake Vine; and introduced species Jasmine, Honeysuckle and even Bridal Creeper. I have yet to find one twining to the left.—**Ed.**

A Field Naturalist in Lockdown

While Covid-19 has altered our connection with the environment it has enabled many of us to go back through old photos and sightings, together with collections that we had made over many years.

ParksVic have been running the ‘Winter by the Sea’ series of online presentations which has sparked an interest in the marine and intertidal environments for me. Over the years I have taken photos and collected all sorts of items related to this area of the environment.

So while in isolation it has given me the chance to review many photos and photograph some of my shell collection that I have had sitting in boxes for years. The photos I have been uploading to iNaturalist so the records can be added to the Atlas of Living Australia.

Following are some of the photos that have been uploaded. When we are able to meet again I look forward to bringing more of the collection to a member’s night. In the meantime stay safe and well..—**Graeme Rigg**



The images above are of the Cart-rut Shell (*Dicathais orbita*) and the Cart-Rut Shell eggs taken at the Bunurong Marine Park between Cape Paterson and Inverloch



The images above are of the Elephant Snail (*Scutus antipodes*) and its shell which has several common names, Shield Limpet or Boat Shell both photographed at the Bunurong Marine Park between Cape Paterson and Inverloch.

David and Goliath

While looking at some moths that were attracted to my porch light, a praying mantis was also there looking for a meal. I thought nothing more about it until a few days later when I saw a praying mantis of the same size further around the house, wrapped in a cobweb. The search for food did not come without its own perils.

The spider that made the web was very small and makes an untidy web, but clearly one that is strong and sticky to have trapped the robust mantis. The spider was a Long-legged House Spider (*Cryptachaea gigantipes*). There are several of these around the outside of a few windows at our house. These spiders are in the same family of Comb-footed Spiders (Theridiidae) as the Redback Spider. The general resemblance makes this unsurprising.

previously around the garden, generally well camouflaged, several times.



There have been two species of mantis in our garden, this one and the Australian Green Mantis (*Orthodera ministralis*). The main way of telling them apart is that the Australian Green Mantis has

a bright blue patch on the inside of the main front leg that is black in the False Garden Mantis as can be seen in the photo at left.



Clearly the spider was not intimidated by the size of the mantis, which in this case was a male as its wings covered the whole length of the abdomen (see photo above).

All Photos: Rog Standen

The hapless mantis was actually the False Garden Mantis (*Pseudomantis albofimbriata*), which I have seen



The female's wings only go half way down the abdomen. At about 50mm, this mantis dwarfed the spider, but I guess the web gave 'David' a decided advantage in this battle with

'Goliath'

Whilst I couldn't tell whether it still had eggs in it or they had hatched, there was an egg sac belonging to the spider hidden up in the corner of the framework around the window that the web was attached to.—**Rog Standen**

Eutaxia microphylla var. microphylla

A little plant I don't see often is *Eutaxia microphylla*, Common Eutaxia, which I only see growing along the cliff tracks of Mt Eliza beaches between Ranelagh and Kunyung, and along the cliff track near Mills Beach in Mornington. It's a pretty little heath-like shrub, almost prostrate, with fine leaves and bright red/yellow pea flowers, flowering in August.

It turns out to be more widespread than I realised, growing in 5 states. In NSW it grows in Mugga Ironbark and Mallee country, west of the Great Dividing Range. In South Australia, in the southern part of the state. In WA, only in the south west corner. In Tasmania it is a threatened species, only found in the north east of the state, and in similar circumstances to the local plants, which is low open coastal shrubby vegetation and on cliff sides.

In Victoria, according to VicFlora, it is mainly in the west of the state, where it is a pioneer plant of grasslands. It is widespread on the Volcanic plains, and up into the Mallee. Our local plants are on the map too, along the coast only.

The Eutaxia is restricted to areas of low open-scrub, gaps in the denser closed-scrub, where it receives full sun. The sun-drenched north-west and west facing bluffs of Mount Eliza and Mornington bake in the afternoon summer sun creating a semi-arid microclimate suitable for the species. It is towards the wet and cool end of its geographic range in Australia so climate change, either a drying and/or warming in the climate, should not adversely affect the

species, indeed its population may increase. Its seeds have a small aril (ant reward) so it is dispersed by ants. (Jeff Yugovic)

There is a *Eutaxia microphylla* var. *diffusa* which is more upright with soft branches, larger leaves, and no spines. It also grows in the grasslands in the west of Victoria, and to the west of Melbourne.

The Fringed Blue Butterfly, *Neolucia Agricola*, has Eutaxia as its main food source, and has been recorded in our locality, but is not common.—**Judy Smart, with help from Jeff Yugovic.** Photo by Judy Smart



Always more to learn

Following our working bee at Sages Bushland, reported above, we went to Mt Eliza Regional Park (MERP, aka Moorooduc Quarry) for lunch and a walk. During this walk our President Coralie took a photo of a bracket fungus apparently growing on *Melaleuca ericifolia* (I didn't see it, I was looking for Peregrine Falcons at the time). Amy did some research and came up with the tentative identification of *Fomitiporia robusta*, common name Robust Bracket. Coralie sent the photo to me asking what I thought, forcing me to do some research which lead me to agree that Amy's ID seemed reasonable (one post gave it the common name 'Horse-hoof Fungus', which seems very appropriate); but more than that, the fungus in the photo looked a lot like brackets I had photographed at Warringine and OT Dam, as

also reported above.

Each one was very woody, the top surface black and cracked, with a brownish margin; the undersurface pored, of a dingy cream colour. The ones I saw were about 10-12 cm across, and both were on Manna Gum.

I find it a bit frustrating trying to identify fungi because the information on Australian fungi is so hard to come by—if you're trying to identify a plant there are numerous references available. Books like *Flora of Melbourne* and the works of Leon Costermans not only provide pictures and descriptions of plants but also list the locations from which that plant has been recorded. There are also many

on-line resources like Vicflora. Often if you cannot decide between two possible identifications, the locality distribution can be a strong indicator one way or the other. If you are so inclined you can also use keys to identify a plant, since pretty much all of the plants in the country have been recorded and named. The names are changed from time to time, but you can generally make some progress.



Bracket at MERP Photo: Coralie Davies

The situation is quite different with fungi. The study of Australian fungi is far behind the study of vascular plants; no-one is sure even how many species of fungi there are in Australia; it has been the usual practice to assume that fungi found in Australia are the same species as similar fungi from elsewhere, especially Europe. DNA analysis and microscopic examination often determines this not to be the case—although many species are truly cosmopolitan.

Of course, when we say 'fungus' we are referring to the macroscopic fruiting body, such as a mushroom or toadstool. The bulk of the fungus consists of microscopic

threads (hyphae) which we cannot see. In the case of a bracket fungus, these hyphae extend right through the trunk of the tree.

Identification of fungi is thus largely based on comparison with pictures. There are a few references to go by, including the books by Bruce Fuhrer and the series of fact sheets produced by the Fungi Group of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV), but these are by no means comprehensive. Neither of these sources includes the Robust Bracket.



At Warragine At OT Dam
Photos: Lee Denis

I decided to take a short-cut by sending the pictures of the three brackets to Ed and Pat Grey, from the FNCV. They replied that all three were the same species, *F. robusta*. Some internet research found that it is a truly world-wide species, with references online from Europe, Russia, Canada, the USA and New Zealand. It is reported to be very general in its host plants, found on a wide range of northern and southern hemisphere trees including oak, fir, beech, myrtle beech (*Nothofagus*), Eucalyptus, Angophora and Red Cedar (*Toona*). It causes a white heart-rot in living trees and may eventually kill its host.

So, from never having heard of this fungus, we had come across three local occurrences in the space of a month!—**Lee Denis**

Pat Bentley

In case you haven't heard, the lovely Pat Bentley has died. She was an occasional visitor to the Field Nats and a stalwart of Frankston Beach Association, and FEFN.

She was such a bright and friendly person, as well as all the work she did. A sad loss. This tribute appeared in the Frankston Times.—**Judy Smart**

Environment advocate passes away

LOCAL environmentalist Pat Bentley has passed away aged 90.

Ms Bentley was an active member of many community organisations, including the Frankston Environmental Friends Network, Frankston Beach Association, Foreshore Advisory Committee, Downs Estate Community Project Committee, War Memorial Advisory Committee, and the Kananook Creek Association.

The mayor Sandra Mayer said "like so many in our community, I was saddened to hear that passionate local environmentalist, Pat Bentley, has passed away."

"Pat was loved by all who knew her and her work towards improving the environment was respected within and beyond the walls of our city," she said. "Pat moved to Frankston in 1959,



PAT Bentley. Picture: Supplied

ran coffee shops in the CBD and at Karingal Hub in the seventies and eighties and was actively engaged with council, regularly attending our meetings and making submissions.

"We will miss Pat dearly and I would like to offer my sincere condolences to her family and many friends within our community. I'm sure they will continue to carry on her legacy of protecting and improving the local environment for future generations."

Here are a couple more of Heather's photos from New Caledonia and Vanuatu.



New Caledonia: Chicken Rock



Vanuatu: Mt Yasur, from 7 km Away

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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