PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.
www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au

March 2026 Newsletter

Excursion reports

Greens Bush, Long Point Circuit – 13 December 2025

Text and photos: Lee Denis

Cinnamon Bells
(Gastrodium sesamoides)

We last visited this area in June 2025 (see September 2025 newsletter report) and were keen to come back to look at a different section. This time we walked the official Long Point Circuit. Starting at the end of Long Point Road, off Boneo Road, we first followed the firebreak into the Mornington Peninsula National Park, before turning off onto the circuit track halfway down the hill. This circuit took us through a fairly open Eucalypt woodland, quite different to the riparian community along the Lightwood Creek. We noted mostly Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) on the higher slopes, mostly Narrow-leaf Peppermint (*E. radiata*, in flower) on the lower slopes, with the dominant Eucalypt being Swamp Gum (*E. ovata*) along the creek lines. Occasional Manna Gums (*E. viminalis*) were in flower. The understory consisted mainly of Daisy-bushes (*Olearia argophylla* and *O. lirata*, both in flower), along with Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) - of moderate size on the higher slopes, tall trees along the creek lines. At one point the track passes through a grove of Muttonwood (*Rapanea howittii*); in some places the non-indigenous Sweet Pittosporum (*P. undulatum*) forms dense thickets. Ground cover was mostly Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*), but along the edge there were quite a number of plants in flower.

Some of the plants flowering were familiar from the northern end of the Peninsula, in the heathlands such as at Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve, although it seemed that they were flowering a little later here. These included Purple Flag (*Patersonia occidentalis*), Native or Ivy-leaf Violet (*Viola hederacea*), Bent Goodenia (*Goodenia geniculata*), Tall Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia stricta*) and Grass Trigger-plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*). We also found two Cinnamon Bells (*Gastrodium sesamoides*) aka Potato Orchids - we couldn't detect any cinnamon scent. They seemed to be very late flowering.

Prickly Starwort
(Stellaria pungens)

Kangaroo apple
(Solanum aviculare)

Plants more common on the southern Peninsula included Prickly Starwort (*Stellaria pungens*), Pale Vanilla-lily (*Arthropodium milleflorum*), White Elderberry (*Sambucus gaudichaudiana*), Twining Glycine (*Glycine clandestina*), and Kangaroo Apple (*Solanum aviculare*) - the species of Kangaroo Apple found further north is *S. laciniatum*, which has notched petals, whereas *S. aviculare* has pointed petals. As well as the often large Austral Grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea australis*) there were also Small Grasstrees (*X. minor*), some of which were in flower, providing a feed for butterflies.

Our bird count came to about thirty, with notable sightings including Rufous Fantail, Varied Sitellas and White-throated Treecreeper, while Shining Bronze-cuckoo, Satin Flycatcher, Fantailed Cuckoo, and Striated Pardalote were heard.

The circuit leads back to the Two Bays Walking Track along Lightwood Creek before returning to the Long Point Track along the firebreak. Looking north across the Creek we spotted a large bird on a fencepost in the paddocks - soon if took off and confirmed our identification of Wedge-tailed Eagle. A majestic sight. The whole circuit is rated at 4 kilometres, and is well worth a visit.

Western Treatment Plant – 14 February 2026

Text and photos: Roger Standen

Brolgas' duet

What a perfect day Saturday turned out for a trip to the Werribee poo farm by eight members of our group. While the early start was tough for some, the two carloads found 70 species of birds across the day.

Starting with a flock of 10 Brolgas was pretty good, and parents of a young one serenaded us with a lovely bugling duet. Striking views of Red-kneed Dotterel, Spotted Crake, Black-fronted Dotterel, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stint and Black-winged Stilt all within 2m of each other kept us occupied for quite a while. At one of the outfalls into the bay, swans were clustering around the fresh water for a drink and performed their version of a black swan ballet.

A Little Egret was using its typical mad-scramble feeding technique that was momentarily copied by a nearby Great Egret. The Little Egret successfully caught a few tiny fish but I didn't see the Great Egret catch any.

But it wasn't just water birds that gave us good viewing, with some small passerines, including the diminutive Golden-headed Cisticola showing themselves at times. However, waterbirds were the main attraction and way ahead in the numbers race were the shelducks, with large flocks of Pink-eared Ducks still in plentiful supply.

Cisticola

Little egret (L) & Great egret (R)

A male Musk Dusk showed his special mating ritual where he whistles while splashing water with sharp kicks of his feet. As for the migratory waders, Red-necked Stint were in good numbers as were Sharpies, but Curlew Sandpipers were in short supply. A very small group of Bar-tailed Godwit and a solitary Greenshank were the only others.

With so many places to see across the area and so many birds to 'inspect', it is no surprise that other great experiences were had, whetting the appetite for our next visit.

Male Musk duck in courtship display

Great crested grebe

Greenshank

Pink-eared ducks

Black-winged stilts

Birding reports

Birding at Woolleys Beach Reserve, Crib Point – 2 February 2026

Text and photos: Bette Mitchell

Our first outing for the year was to Woolleys Beach. We were fortunate to have a cool day after the spate of hot weather and fourteen members assembled at the reserve.

We started out along the coast track with a mixture of track and beach walking alongside the mangroves. Birds were few in number and we observed Yellow faced Honeyeater, White eared Honeyeater, Great Egret and White faced Heron. We slowly added more birds to the total and then we decided to have lunch at Stony Point.

The derelict boat in the mangroves at Stony Point is a wonderful roost for birds and we saw, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants, Great Egret, Royal Spoonbill lined up in good numbers. Lunch was enjoyed looking towards French Island and we enjoyed all the pelicans hanging around the fish cleaning station together with Black Swans and Pacific Gulls.

The day finished on a high with wonderful views of several roosting Nankeen Night Herons which more than made up for the lack of birds. We finished the day with a tally of 18 species.

Nankeen Night Heron

Pelican

Birding at Stamford Park Wetlands, Rowville – 2 March 2026

Text and photos: Lee Denis

Stamford Park in Rowville is a new birding venue for us, heard about on the grapevine. It consists of a series of ponds along Corhanwarrabul Creek, which flows into Dandenong Creek. The total area is in the order of 50 hectares, including several hectares of open water. The name comes from a homestead built in the 1880s, which still stands, and today is a restaurant surrounded by an impressive non-indigenous garden well worth seeing.

Our interest was in birds, not gardens, however. The weather forecast was so bad we considered abandoning, but after some indecision six members, including new member Di, arrived to find a location vastly different from the well outdated image on Google Maps, which depicted an open bare area with a couple of ponds in the middle. Now the area is completely vegetated, a lot of it grass but also reeds and rushes on the margins of the ponds, and paperbarks on the islands in the middle, with a few Eucalypts. A series of tracks and bridges traverses the whole area, with an observation tower overlooking the wetland. There is also an extensive housing development all along one side of the park and beyond, which has sprung up after the Google image was taken. A plaque tells us that the wetland area was officially opened in June 2024. Several signs informed us that the area is prone to flooding.

Red-rumped Parrots

Birds were not exactly in abundance, but we ended with a list of 34 species. On the water there was a scattering of Black Ducks and Coots, with a lone Great Egret on the edge, and a few Cormorants. At one point a Pelican flew in and landed on the water. There were more birds on the grass and in the bushes, including Ibis, Swamphens, Fairy-wrens, Magpies, Goldfinches and Sparrows. Since it is a new birding location for us the full list is below. No Swans were seen, but their calling-cards were abundant on the tracks!

A particular highlight was the numerous Fairy Martins, mostly flying below eye level close to us, giving rare close views. There were a few Welcome Swallows among them, but the Martins were by far in the majority. A small flock of Red-rumped Parrots was sighted in a Beech tree in the grounds of the homestead, and later on the wetland.

The weather did not live up to the forecast, with only some very light showers and no wind, and we were glad to have made the trip.

Bird List for Stamford Park 2nd March 2026				
Australian Wood Duck	Straw-necked Ibis	Crested Pigeon	Little Wattlebird	House Sparrow
Pacific Black Duck	Purple Swamphen	Galah	Noisy Miner	European Goldfinch
Little Pied Cormorant	Dusky Moorhen	Little Corella	Magpie-Lark	Welcome Swallow
Little Black Cormorant	Eurasian Coot	Rainbow Lorikeet	Willie Wagtail	Fairy Martin
Australian Pelican	Masked Lapwing	Red-rumped Parrot	Grey Butcherbird	Common Starling
Great Egret	Silver Gull	Superb Fairy-wren	Australian Magpie	Common Myna
Australian White Ibis	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Red Wattlebird	Little Raven	

Presentations

Heather Ducat, 'Jurassic Coast of Britain, Dinosaurs of Dorset & Devon'
11 February 2026

Text: Judy Smart **Photos:** Heather Ducat & others

Early purple orchid

Heather & husband Robert spent 5 weeks in Britain in the spring of 2014 and travelled the Jurassic Coast from Kent west to Cornwall and then north to Wales. Travelling this route they also moved from the most recent geological period to the oldest.

The Jurassic Coast is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, for its outstanding geomorphic features created by tectonic forces and erosion. It is also famous for its fossils of marine reptiles - Ichthyosaur (fish lizard) and Plesiosaur (sea dragon), and Ammonites, spanning 183 million years, during the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous geological periods.

The chalk grasslands of Kent are of the Tertiary period, 65 – 2 million years old. They have 21 species of orchids, including the Early Purple orchid.

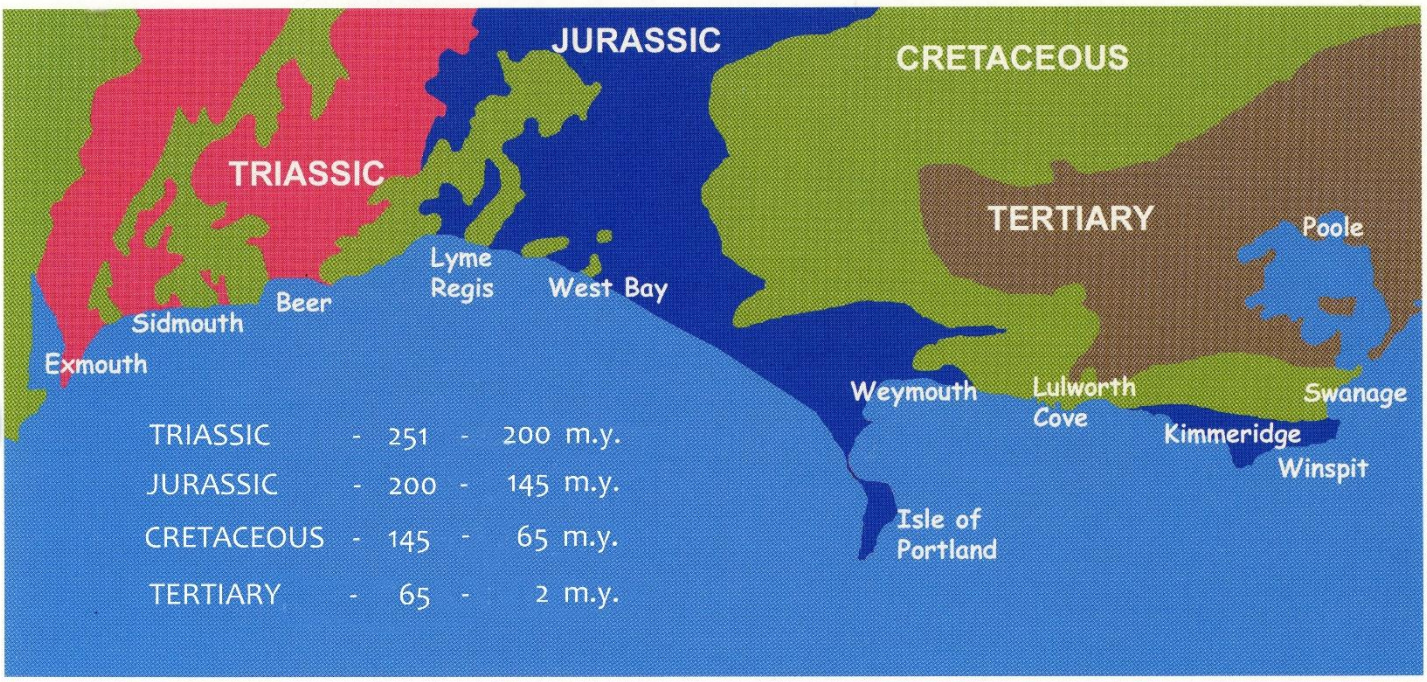
Lulworth is the home of the 'Lulworth Crumple' and 'Durdle Door', spectacular geological formations, created by folding, uplift and erosion and the collision between Africa and Europe 66 mya. Chesil Beach in Dorset is the longest Shingle (flint pebbles) spit (Tombolo) in the world, stretching 29k, and up to 14m high.

Lulworth Crumple

Lyme Regis is where Mary Anning found the first complete marine fossils in the 1800s. (The 'She sells sea shells by the sea shore' rhyme was about her). Her fossil discoveries rewrote geological knowledge.

Dartmoor is a cold, windswept 600m high granite plateau, famous for its wild ponies which have adapted to the conditions with short legs, thick coats and short ears.

Cornwall – Lands End is the most westerly point of the mainland. The Cornish tin, copper and arsenic mines operated from 1700 to 1930, and are now UNESCO protected. Cornish mine chimneys are round, so that there is nowhere for the Devil or nasty spirits to hide, and miners would leave an offering for them of pastie crust. (Welsh mines have square chimneys). The naturally toxic soil has endemic heather plants.



North to Wales, which has a narrow coastal plain with dwarf tundra-like vegetation such as Dwarf willow, Bilberry and Moss Campion. Behind the coastal plain is a mountainous plateau of Cambrian rocks – 500myo slate, and the oldest geological period they traversed.

This was Heather's 24th presentation to us, and as always, fascinating and well-illustrated with her beautiful photos.

Ammonite illustration
Source: https://lovelymeregis.co.uk/fossils/ammonites

Ichthyosaur illustration
Source: https://www.popsci.com/science/ichthyosaurs-whale-birthing-ground/

Fossil of female Ichthyosaur giving birth. Photo: National History Museum, London.
Source: https://photoeditor61.wordpress.com/2013/04/12/baby-dinosaurs/

South East Australian Naturalists Association

SEANA Upcoming Events

SEANA Autumn 2026 Get-together
Hosted By Hosted by Geelong Field Naturalists Club
Date: Friday, 27 March - Sunday, 29 March
Location: Geelong

SEANA Spring 2026 Get-together
Hosted By Hosted by Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club
Date: Friday 9 October – Sunday 11 October
Location: Castlemaine

Contact SEANA:
Phone: 03 9801 6946
Email: secretary.seana@gmail.com

Observations

What's in a (Botanical) Name?

Text and photos: Lee Denis

One of the plants noted in our December excursion to Greens Bush was White Elderberry, *Sambucus gaudichaudiana*. I was intrigued by this seemingly extravagant name and was moved to do some research.

The name 'gaudichaudiana' means 'related to Gaudichaud'. So who is Gaudichaud? Well, he was a French botanist who spent time in Australia in 1818-19. His biography in the Flora of Australia (Volume 1, 2nd edition) tells us that Charles Gaudichaud-Beaupré was the botanist on an expedition commanded by Freycinet (whose name is commemorated in the wonderful Freycinet Peninsula and National Park in Tasmania), and collected in Shark Bay in Western Australia, and in Port Jackson, Botany Bay and the Blue Mountains, where he presumably collected a specimen of the species that now bears his name.

White Elderberry
(*Sambucus gaudichaudiana*)

A digression: Louis Claude de Saulces de Freycinet (now that's a name!) made three voyages to Australia; in 1802-1803 he served under Nicholas Baudin, circumnavigating the continent, meeting Matthew Flinders in Encounter Bay near Kangaroo Island in South Australia. Baudin and Freycinet were able to publish their map before Flinders, because Flinders was being held captive on Mauritius; England and France being at war at the time. Freycinet returned to the Pacific in 1818 and 1819 as Commander, visiting Australia twice.

Presumably Gaudichaud collected the White Elderberry in NSW, but he didn't give it its name (naming species after yourself is considered bad form). The name was given by the Swiss/French botanist Augustin Pyramus de Candolle (a highly influential figure in botany, who among others influenced Charles Darwin). If you see the letters 'DC' after a botanical name it means that the name was created by de Candolle—you will find it after many names of Eucalypts and Acacias. A species of *Rhagodia* is named for him.

If you're still reading this you might be wondering 'what about the other half of the name?'. The generic name *Sambucus* was created by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, in his *Species Plantarum* in 1753; Linnaeus used the name by which the Elder tree was known in Latin. World-wide there are about 20 species in the genus, of which two are indigenous to Australia (the other being *Sambucus australasica*, or Yellow Elderberry, listed as Critically Endangered in Victoria).

During our excursion Lyn wondered out loud if there was a connection with the liqueur Sambuca—turns out there is. Although Sambuca is now mostly flavoured with Star Anise, the name comes from an earlier concoction flavoured with Elderberry. In this case the Elderberry is *Sambucus nigra* (named by Linnaeus), which has been recorded as being naturalised in Australia. The elderberry fruit is called a drupe, and is edible. First Nations people ate the fruit of both Australian species.

A final point of note: in older books the genus *Sambucus* is included in the plant family Caprifoliaceae, the family of Honeysuckles such as the Japanese Honeysuckle *Lonicera japonica*. The two *Sambucus* species noted above are the only representatives of this family native to Australia. Most sources now place *Sambucus* in the family Adoxaceae, which is the family of Virburnums such as the Snowball Tree (the website of the Melbourne Herbarium, VicFlora, has not at this time changed the family of *Sambucus* to Adoxaceae). The two species of *Sambucus* are also the only native Australian members of this family. Whichever family they are classified in, there are no other species in the family native to Australia—no doubt an interesting story in itself.

Contact Us

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc CAV: A0010510T

Meetings
- Held on the second Wednesday of each month.
- 16 High Street, Frankston (Frankston Uniting Church, Blue Room).
- 7.30pm start.
- Visitors always welcome.

Activities
- Monthly field trips are on the Saturday following the monthly meeting.
- Birding excursions are on the first Monday of the month.
- The current Program of Activities can be found on our website Schedule page.

Further information
- Website: https://www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au
- Email: penfieldnats@gmail.com
- Facebook: Peninsula Field Nats

Committee members
- Secretary: Judy Smart
- President: Heather Ducat
- Treasurer: Linda Edwards

Newsletter Editor
- Sharon Clifford

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- Family $40

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