



North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the North East Tasmanian Field Naturalists

March 2015

President: Jill Van Den Bosch, 6 Albert St Bridport. Phone 6356 0483 or 0429 644 329

Vice President: Lesley Nicklason, Phone 0400 557 418

Secretary: Louise Brooker, 20 Edward St Bridport. Phone 6356 0381 or 0417 149 244

Treasurer: Revel Munro, 35 Highcrest Ave, Binalong Bay. Phone 0448 542 254

Committee: Mike Douglas, Jay Wilson, Adrian Geard

Newsletter Editor: Chris Forbes-Ewan. Phone 6352 2092; email: forbes-ewan@tassie.net.au

Web address: <http://www.netasfieldnats.org.au>

MISSION STATEMENT: It is the mission of this club to encourage the study, appreciation and preservation of our natural and cultural environment, the animals, plants, geology and landforms, including those of the coastal and marine areas in the North East region of Tasmania.

Welcome to the first edition for 2015 of the newsletter of the North East Field Naturalist Club. As the newly appointed editor, my aim will be to publish four newsletters each year – in March, June, September and December. Each newsletter will contain accounts of recent field activities (including relevant photos), articles that may be of interest to members and upcoming activities. I hope to make this

newsletter interesting and useful to members, so please feel free to send me suggestions on how this can be better achieved.

This issue includes brief reports on field trips conducted in August, October, and December 2014, and a short article by Lesley Nicklason about recent developments in the Blue Tier.



Rattler Range , North-Eastern Tasmania - photo by Lesley Nicklason

Program for Feb-May 2015

FEBRUARY 14th *(NOTE: This activity was postponed indefinitely due to bad weather – notification will be sent to members when a new date has been chosen)*

WATERHOUSE CONSERVATION AREA (Easy 6-km walk over heath, woodland and rocky coast in the One Tree Hill area, commencing and finishing at Blizzard's Landing. Some cross-country travel and clambering over coastal rocks involved. Bring binoculars.

Meet 10 am at the signposted junction of the Waterhouse and Homestead Roads, approximately 27 km from Bridport.

Leader: Mike Douglas, ph. 6356 1243.

MARCH 14th SALTMARSH EXPLORATION – LITTLE MUSSELROE BAY

This often forgotten and undervalued habitat has been the subject of recent studies. NRM North and UTAS have identified and mapped Tasmanian Saltmarshes and published their findings. As with our day at Weymouth, we'll do a walk-and-talk in the morning, then help with some shoreline monitoring after lunch. Shoes for walking in water would be handy.

Meet at 10 am at the Camping Ground at Little Musselroe Bay.

Leader: Emma Williams and one other person. Co-ordinator: Louise Brooker 6356 0381

APRIL 11th SUNFLATS ROAD TO PLATTS LOOKOUT – BLUE TIER

The last time we did this walk was in 2002 and we were surprised at the number of plants bearing berries. I have scheduled this walk at the exact same time as in 2002 for this reason. It is a downhill walk, of about 5–6 km on a 4WD track. Since this is a one-way walk, we will meet at the bottom and arrange which cars will take us all to the top of the Tier. Some may be interested in camping on the Tier after the walk.

Meet at 10 am at the junction of SunFlats Road and Murdoch's Road [Map reference 890/378 Georges Bay Tasm].

Leader: Louise Brooker, ph. 6356 0381

MAY 9th BLACKBOY PLAINS OVERHANGS – MT VICTORIA AREA

A fascinating day exploring these overhangs which were used for shelter 1600 years BPE. Easy walking, no more than 5 km, with some button grass.

Meet at 10 am at the junction of Mathinna Plains Road and Mt. Albert Road.

Leader: Lesley Nicklason, ph. 6373 6195 or 0400 557 418



Scottsdale Burrowing Crayfish

In August 2014 Alistair Richardson, from the Bookend Trust, made a presentation to our club on freshwater crayfish. He then guided members on field expeditions in search of the Tasmanian burrowing crayfish at North-East Park and in a small button grass plain near Scottsdale.

In a fascinating lecture, Alistair told us that there are 35 species in the genus *Engaeus* in Australia, of which 15 are found in Tasmania. A defining characteristic of these crustaceans is that they dig burrows in peats with high content of organic matter, and build a mound ('chimney') at the top of the burrow. They eat roots, rotting wood, leaves and the occasional worm. Their lifespan is thought to be somewhere in the range 5–10 years. Perhaps because of long exposure to acidic soils, Tasmanian freshwater

crayfish have evolved to tolerate a high level of acidity (up to pH 5).

There are many environmental threats to these delicate animals, including habitat destruction, the introduction of new species and soil compaction.

The giant freshwater crayfish, *Astacopsis gouldi*, is endemic to (i.e. found only in) Tasmania. It is thought that *A. gouldi* can live for several decades, and individuals have been measured at up to 5 kg in weight.

The search for the burrowing freshwater crayfish in North East Park was very fruitful, with many small individuals being located.

Attending members were very grateful that Alistair so generously shared his vast knowledge on these little-understood native invertebrates.



Freshwater crayfish chimney – North East Park, Scottsdale



Burrowing freshwater crayfish – North East Park

Hunting for the Bornemissza Stag

Beetle - by Lou Brooker

Ian and Kim Matthews have a bushland block at Goshen, north-west of St Helens. In October 2014 they hosted our club for a fascinating day during which we heard the story of the discovery of this rare stag beetle, met the widow of George Bornemissza, after whom the beetle is named, and were guided by Mike Bouffard on our search to find a live specimen.

Mike started by telling us the history of 'beetle trading'. Have you ever seen the insect collections in museums and wondered how they manage to get their specimens from all over the world – a weevil from Ecuador, a wasp from Nepal, a beetle from Tanzania?

Well, they are traded by collectors. George Bornemissza was one such collector, and he is famous for, among other things, bringing dung beetles to Australia. He was especially passionate about stag beetles and collected specimens of the many endemic Tasmanian species to trade for insects from other countries. The Japanese and Germans are especially fond of collecting, so there was a ready market.

There are 35 species of stag beetle in Tasmania. I recently saw them arranged in a circle on a window in the museum in Hobart – an ingenious way to present them, as you only have to pop into the next room and look through the window to see their underside. Knowledge of this particular stag beetle was sketchy to begin with. A forestry entomologist found a mandible and parts were sometimes found in owl pellets, but it wasn't until 1994 that a live *Hoplogonis bornemissza* was found.

Hoplogonis = protected head; it is the only stag beetle with armour on the head. This seems strange, because stag beetles are friendly; they don't fight, so why the armour? Only Christmas beetles fight. By 1997 it had been described, with the holotype (a single physical example known to have been used when the species was formally described) being held in the National Collection. Another strange thing about Tasmania's stag beetles is that they only walk, whilst all other stag beetles in the world fly. They may walk tremendous distances during one night, perhaps up to 100 metres.



First instar larva of *Hoplogonis bornemissza*

Very few live specimens were found during the surveys that were conducted in 1999, 2003 and 2004. They have only been found in one area east of the Blue Tier, centred on Terry's Hill near the Ransom River. Specimens have been found in five locations over 10 sq kilometres.

There is no quantitative data, though with the major threat being the clearing of native forest and the establishment of plantations their numbers are predicted to decline. Forest burning to establish plantations may kill them directly, but also indirectly, through increasing their susceptibility to predators such as the omnivorous Black Currawong.

The day was a great success. Many times we thought we might have to give up and just be happy with finding a couple of larvae, but there was a real sense of excitement when we found a live adult and it was like the icing on the cake – sweet!

Ian and Kim were the consummate hosts; we enjoyed their friendly, thoughtful attentions.



Adult *Hoplogonus bornemissza* – a lucky find on the day

Bird-watching at Green's Beach



The December activity involved bird-watching on the property of Don and Barbara Pitt, who own 340 hectares at Friend Point, near Green's Beach, where the Tamar River meets Bass Strait.

In ideal weather – warm and sunny, but not too hot – a dozen or so members started the day with a wonderful morning tea provided by Barbara at the Pitt's 'holiday shack' (mansion might be a more appropriate term to describe their roomy and very comfortable house.

After sitting on the balcony, drinking tea or coffee and eating the tasty treats freshly cooked by Barbara, it would have been easy to forego the bird-watching and just continue gazing at the magnificent countryside around the junction of the Tamar River and Bass Strait (see photo above).

But we had come to see birds, so we set off towards the beach, with Barbara's son Andrew as our guide, watching (and listening) for any sign of these sometimes elusive creatures in the lightly wooded area between the shack and coast. We were also on the lookout for orchids, but unfortunately, there were none in flower.

This was followed by a leisurely stroll through the bush inland from the shack.

In addition to seeing (and/or hearing) many birds, we found native cherries (the cherries are very small but quite tasty) and tiny frogs in a small swamp.

The following is a list of birds seen during the day, and a couple that, like well-behaved children from a bygone era, were heard but not seen:

Seen: Eurasian Coot, Australian Wood Duck, Masked Lapwing, Australasian Grebe (or possibly Hoary Headed Grebe), Tasmanian Native Hen, [Mongrel] Mallards, Pacific Black Duck, Little Black Cormorant, Yellow Cheeked Black Cockatoo, Superb Fairy Wren, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike Thrush, Black Faced Cuckoo Shrike, Black Fronted Chat, Currawong, Swamp Harrier, Little Wattle Bird, Golden Whistler, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Wedge Tailed Eagle, Forest Raven, Common Tern, Fantail Cuckoo, Black Fronted Dotterel, Silver Gull, Pacific Gull, White Faced Heron, Richard's Pipit, European Goldfinch, Brown Thornbill, Brown Falcon, Quail [undetermined species], Common Starling, Blackbird.

Heard, but not seen: Shining Bronze Cuckoo and Yellow Throated Honeyeater.

All attendees were very grateful to Barbara and Andrew for their hospitality and guidance on a very successful bird-watching expedition.

Blue Tier Campaign

The following is adapted from a message sent by Lesley Nicklason to
Friends of the Blue Tier

The campaign by Friends of the Blue Tier to protect Tasmania's Northeast Highlands has had a few wins along the way. For more info visit www.bluetier.org

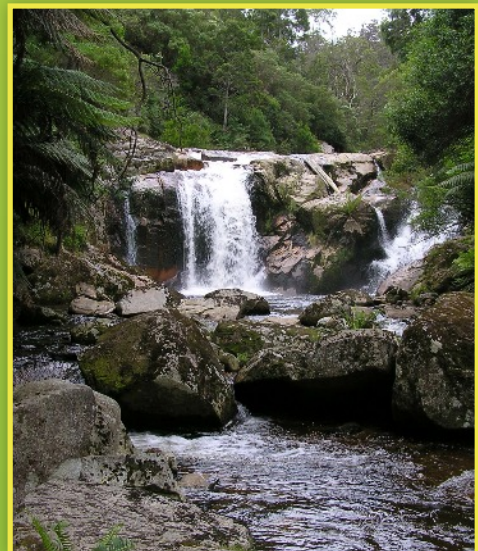
Our 'Blue Tier - See It Save It' brochure highlights seven walks on the Blue Tier. Australia Hill and The Goblin Forest Walk are located within the existing Reserve while the other five are in unprotected forest. Over the years friends of the Blue Tier have created walking tracks to Halls Falls and the Big Tree, resulting in those areas being protected. The Big Tree track was recently upgraded to world-class standard and officially opened in 2013. We successfully lobbied to have the track from Poimena (top of the Tier) to Weldborough formally recognised (known as the Blue Tier Descent), leading to protection of the surrounding forest. The Anchor Stamper walking track is currently closed due to storm damage. The only walk on our Brochure not yet formalised is Crystal Hill, however logging in that area was minimised due to community concerns and the 'unofficial' track and surrounding forest were left intact.

As well as providing environmental information Friends of the Blue Tier have been promoting this area as a bushwalking destination, as an alternative to logging, through the See It Save It brochure and are now fundraising to pay for reprinting of the high quality brochure as well as our Northeast Highlands National Park proposal. We also hope to enhance the Big Tree Track by providing seats / picnic table at two sites on the track.

Leader: Lesley Nicklason, ph. 6373 6195 or 0400 557 418



Official opening of the Big Tree Track



Hall's Falls