



North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

Number 189: June 2015

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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.

From the President: Welcome to the 2nd edition of our colourful, new-look newsletter which sees us moving into the digital age, with many members electing to receive an emailed version.

Thanks to our new editor Chris Forbes-Ewan, who spent many hours researching and setting up the new format—you would have to agree that it looks great.

Contributions from members—whether photos or written items (perhaps an interesting snippet you heard or read somewhere, or an event of interest to Field Nats)—would be gratefully received by Chris.

From the Editor: This newsletter includes the usual reports on recent Club activities and the schedule of upcoming activities, but also an interesting article and photos about one aspect of a recent trip to the Caribbean by Revel and Helen Munro.

In an attempt to keep the newsletter fresh and interesting, this issue also includes references to articles that may be of interest to members. In addition, Lesley Nicklason continues to keep us informed of developments in the Blue Tier.

My special thanks go to Lesley, Lou Brooker and Ellen Naef for their very valuable contributions to the June edition of The North Eastern Naturalist.



White Gum

Boags Rd

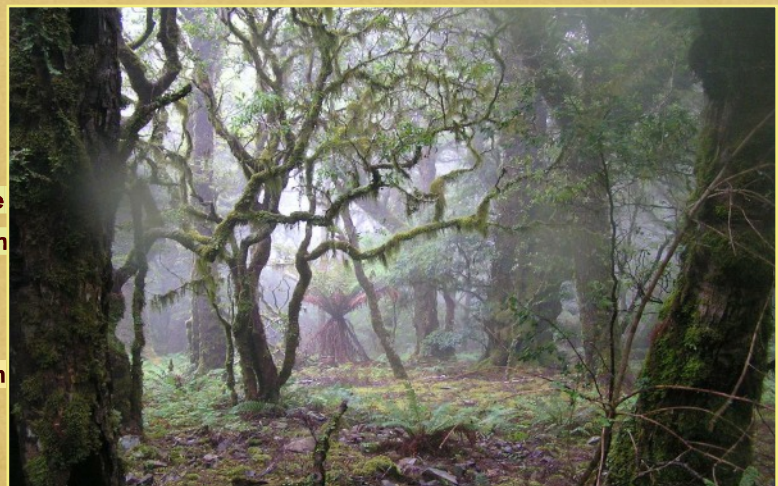
2004

Rattler Range

North-Eastern

Tasmania

Photos by Lesley Nicklason



Program for Jun–Sep 2015

NB Please read the notice at the bottom of this page about the cancellation process.

JUNE 13TH 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. Bring binoculars.

Meet 10:00 at the signposted junction of Waterhouse Rd and Homestead Rd, approximately 27 km from Bridport.

This walk was postponed due to inclement weather in February this year.

Leader: Mike Douglas 6356 1243.

JULY 11TH AT HOME AT THE LINC – SCOTTSDALE

We traditionally call this an 'At Home Day', but since discovering this wonderful facility in Scottsdale we will use it for this day of talks and pictures. We have two excellent presenters in Wolfgang Glowacki (a Tasmanian nature photographer) and George Wilkinson (Zoology student and photographer) who has just finished the second year of his degree at Bristol University, UK.

The Scottsdale Linc is part of the library complex in King Street. Door opens at 10:00. Pictures/talks begin at 11:00. Bring lunch to share; small oven and microwave available.

Contact: Lou 6356 0381 or 0417 149 244.

AUGUST 8TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – GUEST SPEAKER JOHN DOUGLAS

Held at the home of Lou Brooker, 20 Edward Street, Bridport, this is no ordinary AGM – it is the most well attended day on our calendar. It is inside, dry, predictable, social etc. The day begins at 10:00 with coffee, the meeting begins at 11:00, then afterwards a shared lunch (bring food and beverages to share).

John Douglas, who is the author of a new book titled "Webs", will then present on *The Spiders of Tasmania*. His book is the first to capture many of Tasmania's spiders on the page, and is the most extensive reference since V. Hickman's "Some Common Spiders of Tasmania", published in 1967.

Contact Lou: 6356 0381 or 0417 149 244.

SEPTEMBER 12TH MOSSING AROUND – PARADISE PLAINS

Last conducted in 2007, this outing is being repeated by popular demand. Sean Blake, retired Assessor for Forestry Tasmania, will lead this tour of moss fields and unusual forest types. Grading is of "medium" difficulty; it will be a "bit scrubby and wet" with no formed track, a distance of about 3 km in total on reasonably level ground. Meet at 10:00 at the junction of Mathinna Plains Road [C423] and Ben Ridge Road.

Contact Sean, 0427 946 648 or Jill 0429 644 329.

Cancellation of Field Nats Outings

Because of the occasional onset of unpredictable and severe weather, here is the process for cancellation of Field Nats activities. An outing will be cancelled if the leader considers that the predicted weather will lead to unsafe conditions. If an activity is cancelled, a global email will be sent by 07:00 (i.e. 7.00 am) on the day of the outing. If members are uncertain, it is their responsibility to contact Jill, Lou or the leader. Note that phone reception is not always available, so you may have to try alternative numbers.



MARCH: SALTMARSH EXPLORATION – LITTLE MUSSELROE BAY

Story by Lou Brooker; Photos by Ellen Naef (this page) and Lou Brooker (overleaf)

Our guide for this visit to Little Musselroe Lagoon and Saltmarsh was Vishnu Prahalad of the School of Land and Food at UTAS. There were 27 people present, including five visitors. Vishnu's recently published book was a reference and he provided members with a checklist for observations.

Vishnu began by telling us that saltmarshes store more carbon per hectare than tropical rainforests! The saltmarsh soil forms as the plants trap and store fine sand, mud sediments, and organic particles from plants and animals. For this reason, among many, saltmarsh communities were listed in 2013 as vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act [EPBCA].

Saltmarshes provide a buffer protecting low-lying land from flooding. Many Tasmanian saltmarshes occur in 'low energy' coastal environments that are protected from the ocean swell waves – a sheltered lagoon with a spit as a sand barrier and a narrow entrance for tidal flow. In this sheltered environment there can be saltwater wetlands, freshwater wetlands and freshwater streams flowing into the lagoons. This is the case at Little Musselroe.

After walking across the lagoon at low tide and along the edges to the more inland sections where there are sheltered channels and marsh pools, it

became obvious to us just how interconnected the plant life is with the animal life. We saw a 'fish nursery', where fish shelter and feed on food derived from crabs, snails, insects and microalgae. We saw them in schools when we walked through the channels. Up to 35 species of fish have been recorded from saltmarshes in Tasmania. Crabs are the most abundant invertebrate here; their holes are everywhere. As well as providing food for fish and birds, they play an important role in soil building and breaking down plant matter. A wide variety of insects and spiders form an important part of the food web.

(Article continues on page 4)



Austracantha minax - jewel or spiny spider– photo by Ellen Naef

SALTMARSH EXPLORATION – LITTLE MUSSELROE BAY (continued from previous page)

It is easy to understand the vegetation zonation—the amount of exposure to tidal flooding determines which plants live where. The low marsh area, which is inundated by every tide, has as its signature species *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*, commonly called samphire, also known as the beaded glasswort. Samphire is especially obvious when its succulent stem-like leaves turn bright red. It was in flower during our visit, with small, inconspicuous flowers—the male flowers white and the females yellowish and slightly larger.

The mid-marsh, which is inundated by most tides, is dominated by *Tecticornia* and *Gahnia*. The high marsh zone borders the upland zone which is often dominated by *Melaleuca*. Present in this zone are grasses such as *Austrostipa stipoides* and rushes such as *Juncus kraussii*; these species are tolerant of saltwater but are inundated only rarely, such as during spring or king tides.

One of the less noticeable yet still very important components of the saltmarsh is the bottom-dwelling algal community present in the tidal channels and marsh pools.

In the past Little Musselroe has been affected by the draining of swamps inland at Rushy Lagoon, which has meant that nutrients and runoff from farming have flowed into the lagoon without the cleansing effect a marshland can have. There have also been problems with quad bikes hooning across the lagoon flats. There has been indiscriminate shooting, and hunting dogs have been allowed to run free, killing the wildlife. To top it off, there has even been some dumping of rubbish. Variable management approaches may also have contributed to the loss of some of these natural assets. Similar threats face the saltmarsh communities around Tasmania, but here, through education and vigilance on the part of those who care, these problems have been minimised in recent times.

Fortunately, there has been little inappropriate development here—the two shacks on the shore have been allowed to remain since the review of such dwellings in the 1990s, and there is a small community at the mouth of the lagoon. In addition, no levees or tidal barriers have been built, and little nutrient enrichment from human activities can be observed.



Flowers appearing on samphire - photo by Lou Brooker

Samphire – Sarcocornia quinqueflora – a succulent, low-growing herb that forms dense mats and is the most common plant in the saltmarsh.

In fact, Vishnu goes so far as to say that Little Musselroe is in pristine condition. Vishnu has extraordinary energy and passion for our saltmarshes, and he intends to impress their importance on the public with his plans for interpretive information. His book fills a large gap in the literature on Tasmanian flora, and sheds light on some 67 species living in this ecosystem.

Reference: A Guide to the Plants of Tasmanian Saltmarsh Wetlands, by Vishnu Prahalad, 2014, University of Tasmania and NRM North.



Roundleaf pigface - photo by Lou Brooker

Roundleaf pigface – Dysphyma crassifolium – another familiar plant whose succulent and fleshy leaves turn red at times.



APRIL: SUNFLATS ROAD TO PLATTS LOOKOUT – BLUE TIER

Story by Chris Forbes-Ewan and Lou Brooker; photos by Chris and also by Ellen Naef

Twenty three people took part in this walk, including guests from as far away as Adelaide, with Lou Brooker as leader. When the NE Field Nats last conducted this activity in 2002, members were surprised at the number of plants bearing berries. Although this walk was conducted at the same time of the year, there were far fewer berries on view compared to 13 years ago.

Nevertheless, we saw some magnificent flora and enjoyed a pleasant, largely downhill stroll of about eight kilometres through a beautiful wilderness area.

Berries that were sighted include:

The Snowberry (*Gaultheria hispida*) – a slightly sour berry that was a food for the Aborigines and was also eaten by early colonists in the form of a tart.

Native pepperberry (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) – see photo at bottom left of this page. Named in honour of Abel Tasman, the native pepperberry is Tassie's first 'bush tucker'. In addition to being used commercially in Tasmania and on the mainland as a pepper-like spice, it is also exported to Japan to flavour wasabi. The berries are sweet at first with a peppery aftertaste.



Native pepperberry - photo by Ellen Naef



Nature imitating abstract art - photo by Chris Forbes-Ewan

**APRIL: SUNFLATS ROAD TO PLATTS LOOKOUT —
BLUE TIER (continued from previous page)**

Climbing blueberry (*Billardiera longiflora*)—also known as the purple apple-berry because the fruit has a taste similar to apples. The genus was named in honour of Jacques de Labillardière, who was a botanist on the 1792/93 French expedition to Australia (then known as New Holland) led by French explorer Bruni D'Entrecasteaux. The fruit is a beautiful violet/purple colour (see photo below).



Climbing blueberry – photo by Chris Forbes-Ewan

Heart berry (*Aristotelia peduncularis*). Endemic to Tasmania (i.e. found naturally only in Tasmania), the plant has small, vivid red, heart-shaped berries containing (relatively) large seeds—see photo at right. The genus was named in honour of the great Greek natural philosopher Aristotle, who lived in the third century BCE and was the first person to devise a system of classification of animals and plants. The Aristotelian system of classification of living things was used until Carolus Linnaeus introduced an improved system in the 18th century.

In addition to berries, we saw young celery top pines (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*), beautiful mosses, lichens, fungi and flowers.



Photo above by Chris Forbes-Ewan, below by Ellen Naef



Although the berries weren't as numerous as in 2002, the day was still considered a great success. Many thanks to Lou Brooker for showing us this magical part of the world. (For more on developments in the Blue Tier, see the update by Lesley Nicklason on page 8.)



Heart berry, showing the seeds – photo by Ellen Naef

Paradise Trash(ed)

How the Caribbean is being used as a dumping ground by cruise ships

Story and photos by Revel Munro

These photos are the legacy of a recent, fairly comprehensive, trip to the Caribbean. As a sensitive, somewhat cloistered, ageing lad from pristine Binalong Bay, Tasmania, the sheer enormity of the pollution and the apparent indifference to it came as quite a shock. Especially disturbing was the attitude of the wealthy tourist operators, some of whom shamelessly dump rubbish overboard. Perhaps the clientele on the cruise ships and the countless yachts did not notice what I was able to capture.

The shots are from Castries Harbour, St Lucia – confronting, to say the least!



TRASH – ALL WAVE SORTED, WEDGED, IMBRICATED AND WASHED CLEAN!



THE CRUISE SHIPS PASS OUT



OTHERS ENTER, BRINGING MORE TRASH

I'm NOW a supporter of Peter Whish-Wilson:

<http://greensmps.org.au/content/media-releases/container-deposit-scheme-most-effective-way-clean-tasmania>

FURTHER READING – ARTICLES OF GENERAL INTEREST

If you haven't already discovered *The Conversation* (<http://theconversation.com/au>), you may get value from subscribing to this on-line publication. It is Australia's most widely read independent website, with articles by professionals on a wide range of subjects. Here are some recent articles that should appeal to people with an interest in the environment:

Forestry agreements need a full overhaul, not just a tick and flick

<http://theconversation.com/forestry-agreements-need-a-full-overhaul-not-just-a-tick-and-flick-39324>

Despite decades of deforestation, the Earth is getting greener

<http://theconversation.com/despite-decades-of-deforestation-the-earth-is-getting-greener-38226>

Tasmania's fox hunt was worth it, even if there were no foxes

<https://theconversation.com/tasmanias-fox-hunt-was-worth-it-even-if-there-were-no-foxes-34045>

Quolls are in danger of going the way of Tasmanian tigers

<http://theconversation.com/quolls-are-in-danger-of-going-the-way-of-tasmanian-tigers-27744>

NB If the URLs shown above aren't accessible from the PDF file of this newsletter, go to:

<http://theconversation.com/au> and in the Search field, type the first few words of the name of the article you would like to read.

BRIEF UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLUE TIER

By Lesley Nicklason - Friend of the BlueTier

Editor's Note: In April, Lou Brooker led a walk in the magnificent Blue Tier region (see report on pages 5 and 6). Lesley Nicklason, our Vice Chair and Friend of the Blue Tier, will provide a regular update on developments in this area, which is under threat of logging. For more about Friends of the Blue Tier, go to: <http://www.bluetier.org/>

*Lesley's report for June 2015 reads: We are happy that there are no logging coupes within the boundary of the proposed Northeast Highlands National Park in the current three-year plan. Following the re-release of the *Blue Tier - See it, Save it* brochure, Friends of the Blue Tier have been working on the seven tracks detailed in the brochure, improving signage, clearing tracks and doing some repairs. We have had 19 working bees so far! Halls Falls, The Anchor Stamper, The Don Mine/Boiler/Duco Adit circuit and the Big Tree Track are all in good condition.*



Photo by Lesley Nicklason