



North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

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

Vice President: Pam Bretz, Phone 0439 547 529

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, Mike Bretz, Ross Coad

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.

From the President: Led by Revel Munro, our next activity—a walk along the Blue Derby Mountain Bike Trail—promises to be an outstanding one. Revel has extensive knowledge of the area, historically, geologically and from a field naturalist point of view. We also look forward to winding up the calendar year with a social gathering after the activity. This will be hosted by Penny and Lloyd Reeves at their wonderful property, Home Oak (see the Program on page 2 for details). To those members we don't see on December 12th, best wishes for the Festive Season, and we look forward to seeing you at activities in 2016.

From the Editor: This issue marks the end of my first year as editor of the North Eastern Naturalist. I hope you have enjoyed reading these newsletters as much as I have enjoyed putting them together. There will also be a special 'pre-Christmas' supplement to this edition, with fascinating articles submitted by Lou Brooker and Ross Coad. Lou's article expands on the report of our visit to Paradise Plains (see p. 6 of this issue), and Ross's article refers to a little-known (but potentially explosive!) aspect of the history of the humble grass tree, *Xanthorrhoea*. My thanks to Lou, Ross and all the other contributors to this year's newsletters.

Photos below by Lesley Nicklason



Tasmanian Wedge Tailed Eagle



Pyengana Valley

Program for Dec 15–May 16

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

DECEMBER 12th: BLUE DERBY, FIELD NATS STYLE

Revel Munro will show us the historical elements of some of the Blue Derby Trails. Last time we explored the area these trails had not been built; this time we'll see what was uncovered. Meet at 10 am at the car park for the Blue Derby, which is on Main Road, Derby. Lloyd and Penny Reeves have kindly offered to host an end-of-year barbeque after the walk – BYO meat and drinks, a salad to share, and a table tennis bat if you have one.

FEBRUARY 13th: FOREST WALK, PEARLY BROOK AREA

Interesting 5-km forest walk of moderate difficulty on marked tracks in the Pearly Brook area, north of Scottsdale. Meet at 9.30 am at the intersection of George and Cameron Streets, Scottsdale, i.e. alongside North-East Glass.

Leader: Mike Douglas, phone 63 561 243

MARCH 12th: FIELD NATS OF TASMANIA FEDERATION GET-TOGETHER

This get-together happens to fall on the same weekend as our outing would be held, so we're putting it on our calendar and encouraging people to attend. It will be a weekend full of interesting outings, ideas and people. Venue: Gowrie Park. There will be an additional email soon, with all the information required, and people who are keen to go might like to think about making their bookings early.

APRIL 9th: MERTHYR PARK, LILYDALE

We will be exploring this charming little reserve and other places nearby. Walks of moderate difficulty and no more than 2–3 km on marked tracks. Meet at 10 am at the junction of Second River Road and Lilydale Road, 1 km north of Lilydale. More info closer to the date.

Leaders: Lou (phone 0417 149 244) and Sue (0448 435 012)

MAY 14th: SPRINGFIELD HATCHERY

This day will include an extensive tour of the Springfield Hatchery, a visit to Scottsdale's water intake and a look at the Headquarters Dam. Meet at 10 am at the Hatchery, Headquarters Road, South Springfield.

Contact person: Lou Brooker, phone 6356 0381 or 0417 149 244

Cancellation of Field Nats Outings

In case there is unpredictable and severe weather, or for any other reason, it may occasionally be necessary to cancel with short notice. Here is the process for cancellation: an outing will be cancelled if the leader considers that the conditions are not safe. If an activity is cancelled, a global email will be sent by 0700 (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.



SEPTEMBER: NORTH-EAST RAIL TRAIL

Article by Lou Brooker; photos by Chris Forbes-Ewan

To walk or to ride? That is the question. Of course, those who came on the September Field Nats outing did so because they were curious to see what the fuss is all about. Some of those who didn't come said they often ride the trail and couldn't see why it would be interesting to walk.

Whatever! The eight people who came really loved the walk, which consisted of six kilometres of gentle, winding trail, wide enough for three or four to walk abreast.

The trail meanders through farming countryside to the east of Scottsdale; across wet gullies dotted with tree ferns; through numerous cuttings; over Carey's Lane; through a lovely bit of bush and a wet area with button-grass and *Melaleuca gibbosa*. Although the trail continues for about 30 km to Legerwood, our walk finished at Lings Siding.

Despite there being only one town (Scottsdale) within 20 km, at one stage one member—who had become directionally challenged—was bamboozled and asked 'what is that town over there?'

Several years ago we walked the old railway line from Rocky Gully to Tonganah. But that was before the decision was made to tear up the line and convert it to a cycling/walking track. This has been completed in the last year or

two and the finished product is amazing, with the chunky bluestone ballast having mostly been converted to a fine walking (or riding) surface.

The walk was full of interesting finds, including fascinating relics of the rail era, plants to be identified, and a list of observed bird species (15 in total) to be compiled.

One feature was the number of apple trees spaced out beside the track, perhaps indicating what the travellers of the time ate for lunch.

A great walk!



Looking east along the North-East Rail Trail



Peacock Jumping Spider – front view

AUGUST: THE SPIDERS OF TASMANIA

Article by Chris Forbes-Ewan; photos by John Douglas

The invited speaker at the AGM on 8 August was John Douglas, an expert on Tasmanian spiders and author of a fascinating book titled *Webs: A Guide to the Spiders of Tasmania*. Altogether, 25 people—about half our membership—attended John’s presentation.

John told us that there are two kinds of spiders—Mygalomorphs (ancient spiders) and Araneomorphs (the more modern form).

The Mygalomorphs originated more than 200 million years ago, during the Triassic Era (when dinosaurs also made their first appearance on Earth). They are characterised by having downward-pointing and parallel fangs, and two pairs of ‘book lungs’ (organs used for atmospheric gas exchange). The funnel-web is an example of a Mygalomorph. Nearly all species of Mygalomorphs have eight eyes. They are also mostly long-lived, with some species able to reach a ripe old age of 25 years.

By contrast, the Araneomorphs have fangs that slope towards each other, have only one pair of book lungs, and generally die within a year of hatching. The huntsman, orb weaver, wolf and jumping spiders are all



Badge Huntsman

Araneomorphs.

Rather than spinning a web, jumping spiders hunt, despite generally growing to only a centimetre or so in diameter. The water spider, another Araneomorph, can run on water and swim beneath the surface.

The huntsman (of which there are at least three species in Tasmania) appears to be rather docile and its bite isn’t very toxic.

(Article continues on the next page)

THE SPIDERS OF TASMANIA (continued from the previous page)

Contrary to folklore, the white-tailed spider is also not very toxic. However, it has been claimed that necrotising bacteria may be injected with a bite, and that the resulting wound can take months to heal. The same applies to other ground spiders, including the wolf spider.

The common black house spider is not considered very dangerous, but it does have large fangs, so would probably inflict considerable pain with a bite.



The Redback – one of two potentially deadly Australian spiders

I don't know if anyone at John's presentation was arachnophobic, but after seeing his beautiful close-up photos, I believe that the fears of even the most hardened arachnophobe would have been somewhat allayed.



Peacock Jumping Spider – seen from above

The redback is a close relative of the black widow of north America and, as the name of its northern hemisphere cousin suggests, it is also potentially lethal.

Spiders show considerable 'sexual dimorphism' (size difference between the genders), with males often being much smaller than females of the same species.

There are 114 families of spiders worldwide, with at least 50 represented in Tasmania. John has recorded 230 species so far, and it is not known how many remain to be identified in this state.



Triangular Orb Spider

For more reading, go to:

1. <https://theconversation.com/health-check-what-should-you-do-if-youre-bitten-by-a-spider-492322>
2. <https://theconversation.com/the-spectacular-peacock-spider-dance-and-its-strange-evolutionary-roots-51327>

Or go to: <http://theconversation.com/au> and type in the Search box the first few words of the title of the article you would like to read.



OCTOBER: MOSSING AROUND @ PARADISE PLAINS
Article by Lou Brooker and Chris Forbes-Ewan, photos by Chris

On a sunny, mild, spring day 23 people took part in the visit to Paradise Plains, a sub-alpine (about 900 metres above sea level) area behind Ringarooma. The N-E Field Nats last visited this area in 2007.

Sean Blake, retired Senior Forest Planner for Forestry Tasmania, led us on three short walks—to a stand of *Eucalyptus delegatensis* (white-topped stringy bark); into an open grassland area that was used for cattle grazing a century or so ago and is now undergoing rapid transition; and through a rainforest that is also undergoing transition, albeit at a much slower rate.

The stand of *Eucalyptus delegatensis* includes some impressive trees, at least one of which is ~400 years old. Sean believes that this stand had its origin centuries ago when a stray seed blew in and germinated. The dozens of trees that now constitute the stand are the descendants of that lone pioneer.

The open area that had previously been grazed includes sphagnum moss that is gradually being overgrown by rainforest scrub species, including *Richea scoparia*. It also contains sphagnum peatland, making it of special interest (for details, see the article by Lou Brooker in the pre-Christmas supplement to this issue).

However, there is another reason why this open area is of interest—it was created as a result of human activity. Fragments of charred wood found on this part of

Paradise Plains show that rainforest originally covered the area. It has been established that in areas above about 800 m altitude rainforest is replaced with grassland when burned. Archeological studies have shown that such areas were used by Aborigines as summer hunting grounds. The firing was used to promote growth of fresh vegetation, thereby attracting game that could be hunted.

(Article continues on the next page)



A stand of *Eucalyptus deligatensis* at Paradise Plains

Although these fires would generally have been controlled (so as not to destroy the environment the Aborigines depended on for survival), it is clear that extensive fires did occur by accident during hot, dry years. Following their creation, these plains were a passageway for the north-eastern tribes as they travelled to meet the more easterly tribes to barter and exchange goods.

The area also has a small stream—Newitt’s Creek—running through it, with freshwater crustaceans of the genus *Engaeus* (commonly known as yabbies) living on the banks. Although generally less than a metre wide, and mostly only centimetres deep at Paradise Plains, Newitt’s Creek winds its way tortuously around north-eastern Tasmania. Eventually, it connects with the South Esk river, helping to make the South Esk Tasmania’s longest river.



The mighty Newitt’s Creek

The conversation became quite passionate when discussion turned to plans of resuming the burning in the Paradise Plains Forest Reserve. It was pointed out that nearby the rainforest is beginning to regenerate and it appears that this process—which began more than 5000 years ago—will continue without further human intervention.

Taking into account global warming, attempting to return this place to an early 19th century ‘Garden of Eden’ by the resumption of burning may not only be unnecessary, but perhaps also inadvisable.

The third walk was into a beautiful rainforest area of Paradise Plains. This had been a eucalypt forest at the time the Aborigines lived in this region. Controlled burning by the Aborigines prevented other large plant species from successfully competing with the eucalypts, but following European settlement, the cessation of regular burning meant that rainforest species could move in. As a result, increased shading reduced the soil temperature below the tolerable level for eucalypts, so they have largely disappeared. The current predominant large species is the mountain teatree (*Leptospermum lanigerum*). Sean estimates that some massive specimens of this teatree are about 200 years old. However, an ecological succession is in full swing, and celery top pines are poised to displace the teatrees.

But this isn’t the final chapter in this unfolding story of a super-slow-motion battle for ultimate supremacy—Sean told us that the celery top pines will eventually (over a period of many centuries) be displaced by myrtles as the dominant climax species.

Sean spent nearly five decades working as a forester, and he has first-hand knowledge of the changes that have occurred in the Paradise Plains area (as well as many other parts of north-eastern Tasmania) in that time. Sean is an engaging speaker and is prepared to share his vast knowledge with anyone interested. I strongly recommend that members seize the opportunity to attend future activities where Sean is the leader.



Rainforest celery top and *Leptospermum* at Paradise Plains

FURTHER READING - ARTICLES OF GENERAL INTEREST

Some of the following recent articles in *The Conversation* may be of interest to NE Field Nats members.

NB If the URLs shown below 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.

Hold the spray: some garden weeds are helping native wildlife

<https://theconversation.com/hold-the-spray-some-garden-weeds-are-helping-native-wildlife-47848>

A 21st-century government must care for our nature and our future

<https://theconversation.com/a-21st-century-government-must-care-for-our-nature-and-our-future-48010>

The scariest part of climate change isn't what we know, but what we don't

<https://theconversation.com/the-scariest-part-of-climate-change-isnt-what-we-know-but-what-we-dont-45419>

Climate change could empty wildlife from Australia's rainforests

<http://theconversation.com/climate-change-could-empty-wildlife-from-australias-rainforests-41023>

Reducing emissions alone won't stop climate change: new research

<https://theconversation.com/reducing-emissions-alone-wont-stop-climate-change-new-research-45493>