



North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

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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: This will be the last newsletter for the calendar year (*note from the editor: except for the Christmas supplement*) but not, of course, for our Field Nat's year.

We still have plenty of exploring and 'naturalising' ahead of us, including our December outing to Big Waterhouse Lake, which will be followed by a BYO everything barbeque (a couple of BBQs will be provided). Hopefully, many of you will be able to attend and wind up the year with a relaxed social event and perhaps even camp overnight.

I would like to wish everyone a wonderful festive season with family and friends and I look forward to seeing you when our outings resume in February.

Finally, about four weeks ago, after some wild northerly weather, a mass of what looked like milky white strings of pearls about 3 cm across washed up on many of Bridport's beaches. These could have been spawn of some sort.

Did anyone see this phenomenon on other beaches, and does anyone know what it could be? No locals were able to enlighten me.



Coral fungus – Ross Coad

Photos of Northern Tasmanian wildlife



Honey bee – Mehrdad Abbasian



Spotted pardalote – Mehrdad Abbasian

Program for Dec 17-May 18

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

DECEMBER 9TH: THE SECRETIVE BIRDS AT BIG WATERHOUSE LAKE – FOLLOWING UP ON THE PRESENTATION BY LIZ ZNIDERSIC AT THE 2016 AGM

Are there rails? Are there bitterns? Following the setting up of cameras at Big Waterhouse Lake last summer and the subsequent retrieval of data from them, Liz will share the results with us. It's such a lovely site that we will have our end of year barbeque there. Debbie Searle will also lead an exploration of the fresh water invertebrates. There may be quite a lot of activity as a result of recent rain, which has led to a rise in the water level at the lake. BYO food, drinks (and perhaps chairs) for our end-of-year barbeque, which we'll have late in the afternoon. A gas barbeque will be available. There is space for camping for those who would like to stay on.

Meet at 10 am at the corner of Homestead Road and Waterhouse Road, 27 km east of Bridport.

FEB–MAY 2018

At this stage the calendar for 2018 is still being developed.

As usual, our outings will take place on the second Saturday of the month, beginning Saturday 10 February. Details will be notified by email early next year.

Although dates for specific activities haven't been determined, here are some of the walks that are in the preliminary planning stage:

- Explore Scamander River under the guidance of Leise Fearman, Geography tutor at UTAS
- Visit Scott Bell's Devil enclosure under the guidance of Steve Cronin – April or May
- Walk along the coast from Bell Buoy Beach to Five Mile Bluff where there is a rock platform, possibly in March (the tide is low in the middle of the day in March)
- Investigate the disused and historic Dorset Dredge on the Ringarooma River – April or May
- Walk up Constable Creek – St Helens.

Cancellation of Field Nats Outings

If 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 2017: SPRINGFIELD – FINDING AN UNUSUAL TREE FERN

Article by Jay Wilson, with Sean Blake and Lou Brooker; photos by Chris Forbes-Ewan (CFE) and Roger McLennan (RM)

Led by Owen Powell, the September excursion of NE Field Nats involved 16 intrepid members and guests descending upon a lone, unsuspecting and endangered slender tree fern (*Cyathea cunninghamii*). This 8-m tree fern is on the edge of a paddock on Owen's farm at Springfield and is one of only about 200 known specimens in 15 locations around the state.

Because all other populations are near the coast, the discovery of slender tree ferns in the Springfield area has led scientists to reconsider the historic and geographic range of the species in Tasmania.

An unusual feature was the sighting of a native pepper (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) that has established a symbiotic relationship with the slender tree fern and is apparently growing quite happily in its trunk.



Cyathea cunninghamii – slender tree fern (CFE)



Native pepper (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) growing in the trunk of the slender tree fern (CFE)

Owen then led the adventurers on a leisurely walk across the farm to view a large and spreading *Eucalyptus regnans* (known in northern Tasmania as stringy gum, and on the mainland as mountain ash) near the Brid River.

This tree is estimated to be more than 200 years old and more than 35 m high. Unlike most stringy gums, which are usually tall and relatively slim, this one apparently grew with little competition, so it didn't have to 'reach for the sky'. As a result, it developed a very wide base, as shown in the photo below.

Keen-eyed field naturalist Roger McLennan (who took the photo of the giant stringy gum) also photographed a goshawk peering warily at the human intruders from his vantage point in the tree.

While the walkers relaxed and reflected, Owen spoke about Aboriginal land management practices that would likely have occurred in the area within the lifetime of the tree. These practices included controlled burning to encourage wallabies and other grazing animals to feed in the areas of regrowth, thereby making hunting easier.



Magnificent specimen of *Eucalyptus regnans* (local common name stringy gum) at Springfield (RM). Note the size of the tree relative to the people standing on either side



Accipiter novaehollandiae – grey goshawk (RM)

The next stop was for lunch, which was eaten in Mike and Edwina Powell's garden near the foot of the Sideling, overlooking a panoramic landscape to Mount Stronach and beyond.

After lunch we enjoyed a walk up the old Sideling road. This road was built in stages—in the mid-19th century it was a 'pack track' (only wide enough for men to walk single file while carrying their packs). It was then widened slightly to become a 'bridle track', i.e. pack horses or mules could be led along the track. Finally it was widened further so that horses and carts could travel along it.

In the early 20th century, when 'horseless carriages' started travelling through north-eastern Tasmania, the existing track was wide enough for one lane of traffic. As cars became

more common, it was clear that the existing track was too narrow, so it was replaced by the current highway (Tasman Highway).



Lunch was enjoyed in the garden of Mike and Edwina Powell, with Mt Stronach clearly visible on the horizon (CFE)

As we walked up the track the weather was very pleasant and the wattles were just starting to come into bloom. NE Field Nats Secretary Lou Brooker introduced the uninitiated to the various plants we observed along the way, and demonstrated the aromatic characteristics of their leaves when crushed. These included:

- Stinkwood (*Zieria arborescens*): A disagreeable smell that induces headaches in some people
- Musk (*Olearia argophylla*): A strong musky smell; plants in this genus often have a pleasant, mild herby smell
- Christmas bush (*Prostanthera lasianthos*): A minty smell for this plant (and all other species in the genus *Prostanthera*)
- Cheesewood (*Pittosporum bicolour*): Despite its name, this doesn't smell like cheese; rather, its flower has a rather strong, sweet smell.

All in all it was a very relaxing and informative day.

OCTOBER 2017: ANSONS BAY

Article by Jenny Bicanic and Lou Brooker; photos by Lou Brooker

The activity of the NE Field Nats for October was an exploration of the bush near Ansons Bay.

Led by Jenny Bicanic, 14 NE Field Nats members and six members of Launceston Field Nats enjoyed warm and sunny weather while looking for interesting plants (especially orchids) and birds.

Following morning tea, Jenny took the group along the track on the edge of the Bay, then beside the river, and finally back to the bush.

Despite the dry conditions on the east coast, ten orchids were identified, including the waxlip orchid *Glossodia major*, which is endemic to (i.e. occurs naturally only in) eastern Australia.



***Glossodia major* – a common waxlip orchid**

In addition, a beautiful purple climbing scrambler of the species *Glycine clandestina* was seen. This is a member of the pea family, Fabaceae.

After lunch, cars were used to ferry people to Policemans Point, where they walked down the channel and along the beach.

Amongst the brightly coloured and exquisitely diverse bundles of seaweed seen on the beach at Policemans Point was one particular red alga which caught the eye of a couple of keen observers. None of us had seen this one before, so we set about researching it.

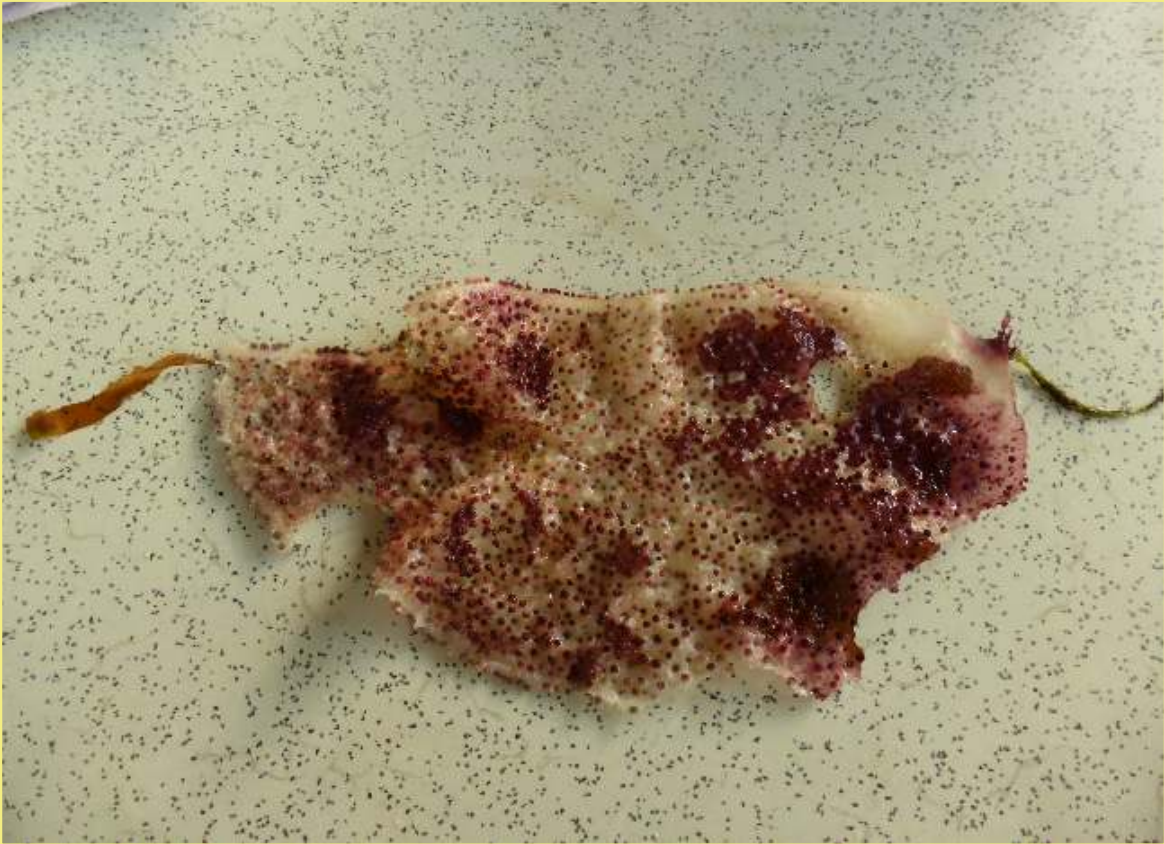
Other orchids observed included:

- Three horned bird orchid *Chiloglottis triceratops* (endemic to Tasmania)
- Wallflower orchid, *Diuris orientis*
- Blunt greenhood orchid *Pterostylis curta*
- Nodding greenhood *Pterostylis curta*
- Upright manhood *Pterostylis pedunculata*
- Small mosquito orchid *Acianthus pusillus*
- Red beak *Pyrorchis nigricans*
- Yellow rock orchid *Dockrillia chrysantha* on a huge granite rock.



***Glycine clandestina* – purple climbing scrambler**

Graeme Edgar was able to provide the scientific name, *Sarcothalia radula*, though it will be much easier to remember by its common name – giant pimply sheets. It is variable in form depending on its age and the degree of water movement in its habitat. It can measure 1.5 m long and can look paper thin or like a thick filmy plastic sheet. Most remarkably though, it is fixed to rocks at depths of 1–10 metres by the tiniest of holdfasts. *Sarcothalia* is found all around the Southern Ocean—off South Africa, the Falkland Islands, Tierra del Fuego and the Subantarctic Islands. In Australian waters it has been noted off the coast of South Australia, Victoria and locally, in the deeper waters off Orford and Schouten Island.



Sarcothalia radula – common name ‘giant pimply sheets’

Of the 659 species of seaweeds in Tasmania, 441 are red. They are of commercial interest because they contain carrageenans—polysaccharides that can be used as food additives.

It turns out that giant pimply sheets are not particularly rare; in fact they are surprisingly common off Orford and Schouten island. There are at least two possible reasons why this seaweed hasn’t been noticed previously: first, it may be shredded by stormy seas before it is washed up. Second, these particular specimens are female plants and the pimply outgrowths are deeply embedded with spotty masses of ‘sori’ which eventually escape through pores. i.e. they are the fruiting bodies. That certainly made them noticeable!

The final walk was a sojourn inland behind the sand-dunes. Here we saw interesting Aboriginal middens and a network of lagoons, all but empty due to the dry conditions. The presence of smooth, rounded rocks suggested that the beach had extended back that far at an earlier time.

In addition to the plants and seaweed previously mentioned, 44 species of bird were observed on the bay, in the bush, or on the beach. These included the sea eagle, eastern rosella parrot, kookaburra, fantail cuckoo, shiney bronze cuckoo, grey fantail, eastern spinebill honeyeater and new holland honeyeater.

In summary, this was an extremely enjoyable and successful nature walk in an idyllic environment.

The Boobyalla River has an obscure source within the Warrentinna Plantation about five kilometres northwest of Branhholm. During its 45-km journey to join the Ringarooma River at Boobyally Inlet on the coast it gains much of its water from the slopes of Mt Horror and the hilly country behind Winnaleah.

Runoff from farms near the latter is probably the source of turbidity in the river. The November walk, led by Mike Douglas, was through the river surrounds near Little Mt Horror—an infrequently visited area within the Payanna State Forest, with a patchwork of swamp forest and other types of riverine forest. This includes 96 hectares of *Eucalyptus ovata* (swampgum) and *E. obliqua* (stringybark) that are highly significant for their conservation value.

E. ovata tolerates poorly drained soils and seasonal inundation. Although it is not a threatened species, extensive tracts of riparian forest (i.e. along river banks) of *E. ovata* are now rare.



Fire-scarred swamp gum – *Eucalyptus ovata* (MD)

Some NE Field Nats members may recall the abandoned 'Summer Rains' irrigation project based on a dam that would have obliterated the Boobyalla River swampgum tracts. Swamp forests are mysterious places found here on the more poorly drained parts of the alluvial flats where the meandering river is a sluggish stream.

Dense thickets of *Melaleuca squarrosa* (scented paperbark) with emergent swampgums occur on the wettest sites. *Melaleuca ericifolia* (swamp paperbark) replaces scented paperbark on damp sites that are occasionally inundated, accompanied by blackwoods and swampgums, with stringybarks on the somewhat better drained areas.



Swamp paperbark – *Melaleuca ericifolia* (MD)

Some of the swamp paperbark groves are impressive, with heights up to 20 metres and girths of more than one metre. The 'Truganini Tree', an old fire-scarred swampgum, is 45 metres tall and has a girth of 4.8 metres—a very large specimen for this species.

We walked past the intake of Ware's Race, originally 32 km in length, constructed in 1906 for the Gladstone miner Henry Ware (1847–1922). For many years it provided water for tin mining operations on Monarch Flats. This race was surveyed by Donald Fraser of Derby, best known for his design (in 1900)



Log crossing (MD)

of the Ringarooma River Race for the Briseis Mine. Fraser was notable for conducting all his local travel by bicycle.

George Augustus Robinson came through this area in July 1831, having followed the Boobyalla River from the coast. He was accompanied by nine Aborigines, including the Bruny Island natives Truganini and her husband Woorady. Robinson's diary indicates that they passed close to Billy Bank (our lunch site) and the 'Truganini Tree', which, 186

years ago, was a sapling. On his journey, Robinson also traversed the future site of Scottsdale, which is described in his diary as an immense forest. Another diary entry reads: 'There is an advantage in travelling in the winter season, as the traveller is then exempt from the annoyance of mosquitos [sic]. The weather has been exceedingly cold and Mt Cameron is covered with snow.'

The Field Nats excursion attracted 21 participants. Seventeen completed the Boobyalla River circuit, while the other four, led by Lou Brooker, did a shorter circuit, including part of Ware's Race. The shorter circuit is downstream from the swampgum tracts and features some attractive sites where the river cuts through Devonian granite.

Supplementary notes by Lou Brooker

After leaving the main group we nervously crossed the Boobyalla River, but we soon realised that the river was at exactly the right level for us to gain strong footholds on the boulders across the stream. Had the water level been any higher, these rocks would have been very slippery.

Having forded the river, we took our time observing all the interesting riverine vegetation, and also noticed a number of burrowing crayfish chimneys with their little excavated balls of clay surrounding the hole. Here on the grassy riverbank were mats of liverworts and *Pratia*



Pratia pedunculata – Trailing pratia (LB)

pedunculata. The liverwort pictured below is of the species *Marchantia berteriana*. It is at home here, but often becomes a weed in gardens and lawns after it is introduced from nurseries.



***Kunzea ambigua* – commonly known as white kunzea, poverty bush or tick bush (LB)**

Two other spectacular plants we passed along the way were *Kunzea ambigua*, whose attractive white flowers exude a smell reminiscent of honey, and an orchid of the genus *Thelymitra*, possibly *T. Ixioides*, the spotted sun orchid.



Orchid of the genus *Thelymitra*, possibly species *ixioides* – the spotted sun orchid (LB)



***Marchantia berteroana* – liverwort; one of three species of the genus *Marchantia* found in Tasmania (LB)**

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Mike Douglas, who spent many hours on the track clearing the way with his axe and putting up carefully crafted markers to ensure our safety.