



# 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 Secretary:** A very successful Annual General Meeting was held in August, with nineteen people attending.

The annual report, written by the President Jill van den Bosch and read in her absence, noted 'varied outings and excellent attendances'. In her closing comments, Jill said she felt it was time to hand over the role of President – a role she had greatly enjoyed. We know she will maintain the friendships she has made with Field Nats, because that is one of Jill's strengths.

Her cheerful, welcoming manner has been a major contributor to the success of our club.

We welcome Ann Scott as Jill's successor.

A public showing of a feature documentary titled 'The Desperate Plight of the Orange Bellied Parrot' followed the AGM.

Thirty people attended, and it was obvious that there was great interest in this subject. After the film, discussion with the film-maker David Neilson and Volunteer Co-ordinator and NE Field Nats member Debbie Searle continued for more than 30 minutes.

All in all, the AGM lived up to its reputation as a very friendly, social event.



Potato orchid – Mike Douglas

### Photos of Northern Tasmanian wildlife



Melaleuca squamia – Chris Forbes-Ewan



Wedge-tailed eagle – Ann Scott

# Program for Sep-Dec 2018

***NB Please read the notices at the bottom of this program about the cancellation process and policy on images of participants at NE Field Nats activities***

## **SEPTEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup> : FERN FORAY, LITTLE CHOOK – WELDBOROUGH**

Drive to Weldborough and turn onto Emu Road, next to the Weldborough Pub. Meet at 10 am at the car park about 800 m along Emu Road. This is the start of the Little Chook mountain bike trail, arguably one of the most beautiful trails in the Blue Derby network.

An easy grade 5.9-km circuit walk, with a few undulations, wends through a myrtle forest and is a hotspot for ferns. Wear good walking shoes and bring a hand lens if you have one, as well as any fern reference books. You may like to bring a walking pole too.

Contact Debbie Searle for more information: 0438 609 980

## **OCTOBER 13<sup>TH</sup> : MT WILLIAM NATIONAL PARK – BOULDER POINT**

Meet at 10 am at the Rangers Centre [on the C845 road] at the entrance to Mt William National Park. We will climb Mt William, then walk to Boulder Point in the afternoon. Camping is available if you choose to stay.

More information is available from Lou Brooker: 0417 149 244

## **NOVEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup> : OLD WET FOREST BEING INVADED BY FIRE LOVERS FROM THE NORTH**

Alex Buchanan of St. Helens will lead us through a mix of forest types to look at this situation. The exact site[s] will be announced closer to the date.

## **DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup> : GENTLE DOWNHILL WALK FROM DIDDLEUM TO SOUTH SPRINGFIELD**

Ian Cameron has offered to lead this 6-km walk in his home territory. Meet at 10 am at the Springfield Hatchery on Headquarters Road, South Springfield, from where we will car pool and proceed to the start of the walk at Diddleum Plain. We will have our end-of-year barbeque at the Hatchery; BYO everything.

More information is available from Lou Brooker: 0417 149 244

### **Images of Participants at Field Nats Activities**

***Participants on outings need to be aware that filming may occur and films and photos may be placed on-line, in the N.E.F.N newsletter and/or in the N.E. Advertiser.***

***PLEASE INFORM THE LEADER IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED OR FILMED.***

***Film-makers also have a responsibility to notify activity co-ordinators of their intentions, then films will be viewed and approved by the executive before being made public.***

### **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 Ann, Lou or the leader (whose phone number will be in the Calendar notification for the activity). Note that phone reception is not always available, so you may have to try alternative numbers.***



**Panoramic view to the east from Duncraggen Hill, the starting point for our walk to the Brid River Reserve – CFE**

The Brid River rises on Mt Scott and its upper reaches also drain the eastern slopes of the Sideling Range. Much of its 60-kilometre journey to Bridport is through agricultural land with inadequate streamside vegetation.

A tiny reserve of about 15 hectares at the edge of Bridport contains the intake for the town water supply and a race conveying water to Huon Aquaculture's establishment.

Five kilometres south of Duncraggen Hill and three kilometres west of the Scottsdale Waste Transfer Station there is a ribbon-like conservation area, mostly on one side of the stream. It is three kilometres in length, with an average width of 125 metres, giving it an area somewhere in the range 35–40 hectares.

A crown river reserve at the western base of Duncraggen Hill is larger, extending along the river for 3.5 kilometres, mostly with a width of 300 metres, but extending to a maximum of 450 metres at the southern boundary. Its area is approximately 120 hectares. The river flows through a defile to skirt Duncraggen Hill.

This little-known reserve was the location of the club's June excursion, attended by 15 people on a sunny winter's day. Strange to say, this reserve is not shown on the new 1:50 000 Tasmaps, although the smaller reserves are delineated.

The reserve, which is surrounded by State forest, is clothed with a dry-to-damp sclerophyll forest dominated by stringybark and black peppermint, with a scattering of white gums. The latter, including some lofty old specimens, are more prominent in the riparian ribbon, together with dogwood, blackwood, silver wattle, currant bush and a few manferns.

Beyond the ribbon the understorey is shrubby, with bulloak, banksia, prickly box, native cherry and hop wattle being the most common species.



**Leafy flat sedge, *Cyperus lucidus* – MD**

Frequent cool fires—the usual regime within dry sclerophyll—favour the spread of bracken, as seen in much of the reserve. On moister sites, with indifferent drainage, a profuse growth of tall swordsedges (*Lepidosperma ensiforme*) is the result, rather than bracken.

Poorly drained areas, especially around soaks, carry thickets of scented paperbark.

Dense copses of bulloak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*) overtopped by a few old eucalypts occur here and there. Cool fires do not penetrate these patches, since the foliage (cladodes) and litter are difficult to ignite.

An infrequent hot fire will kill these trees, after which seed is released, leading to a new crop; however, multiple hot fires favour the spread of eucalypts.

In the absence of fire, bulloaks—which have winged seeds—spread via gap-phase regeneration more readily than eucalypts.

Early in the walk Ann Scott spotted a colony of spurred helmet orchids (*Corybas aconitiflorus*), a winter-flowering species widespread in northern Tasmania. Nearby was an interesting fungal body, viz. a brown navel (*Lichenomphalia umbellifera*). This is an orange-brown gilled fungus that is always found in association with an algae to form a lichen.



Brown navel, *Lichenomphalia umbellifera* – CFE



Spurred helmet orchid, *Corybas aconitiflorus* – CFE

Other observed fungi included white brain (a jelly fungus), mauve splitting-waxcap, pagoda fungus and white punk. The last of these is a polypore, which forms large soft brackets on eucalypts, leading to a disease known as white heart-rot. With age, the fungi drop to the ground where they remain as large spongy lumps. This is the form we saw.

Fungal fruiting bodies are photogenic, but the cameras also came out for the bushy club moss, *Lycopodium deuterodensum*, sometimes called conifer club moss because it resembles a small pine. This plant is a modern representative of an ancient group of vascular plants dating back 350 million years. As applies to ferns, the lycopods bear spores.



Bushy club moss, *Lycopodium deuterodensum* – CFE

The river has many attractive streamside sites (best appreciated during summer and autumn, rather than in winter), often displaying the eye-catching leafy flat-sedge, *Cyprus lucidus*. This sedge has stems with a triangular cross-section, flat sharp-edged leaves, and in season, large rusty flower heads. Undisturbed streamsidings on the Brid and Forester rivers are strongholds for this species.

On a darker note, illegal firewood cutting, which is rife in Tasmania, has ravaged large parts of this reserve. The perpetrators use robust vehicles to smash their way in from tracks in the surrounding forest, then cut down old growth eucalypts.

Poorly monitored reserves, State forests, Crown lands and privately-owned bush blocks are targets for wood hookers. Sometimes the produce is sold on the firewood black market at prices that undercut legitimate merchants.

Plundering of the Duncraggen reserve has declined in recent times, a hopeful trend, touch wood.

Our traverse of the reserve ended at the aptly named Platypus Pool, a broad, quiet bend of the river, where a platypus immediately appeared (he had been told to expect us), although most people only saw the ripples he made.



**Platypus Pool – MD**



**White gum, *Eucalyptus viminalis* – CFE**

A walk back along the track during the warmer months is an agreeable and recommended outing. In fact, you never know what may turn up—twenty years ago an animal resembling a thylacine was glimpsed in this reserve.

## JULY: FIELD NATS 'AT HOME DAY'

Text by Jill van den Bosch; photos by Jill van den Bosch, Lou Brooker, Jay Wilson, Roger McLennan and Wendy McLennan

*Editorial Note: The text of this article was first published in the North-Eastern Advertiser on 25 July, 2018. The photos shown on the following pages are a small selection of those presented during the 'At Home' Day.*

In past years the July activity of the NE Field Naturalists Club has been an 'At Home Day' at the Scottsdale LINC, usually with guest speakers or a film. This year we had a 'Home Grown at Home Day' in the Bridport Hall, with films and photo collections from several of our members.

The day began with Jill van den Bosch and Ruth Cuff making a presentation about their trip to the Galapagos Islands in 2016. Along with showing spectacular photos, they told us about the geology, climate, human history, and challenges to preserving this unique collection of islands which, after his visit in 1835, helped Charles Darwin formulate his theory of evolution by natural selection.



Galapagos tortoise – Jill van den Bosch



Male frigate bird – Jill van den Bosch



Stark Galapagos landscape – Jill van den Bosch

Jeff Jennings followed with a film shot on Albatross Island, which is off the NW tip of Tasmania, showing extraordinary close-ups of albatrosses in flight. The film was so clear it was possible to see the intricate ‘mechanics’ these magnificent birds use when flying. Jeff also showed some very touching scenes of adults feeding their young. He said watching the birds closely for several days was a moving experience and that he felt there was more to their behaviour than pure instinct.

After a lunch break—during which people wandered down to the climbing frame that was recently added to the foreshore playground, but were happy to simply watch others scramble to the top—it was Louise Brooker’s turn to present. She had the group guessing by showing a series of zoomed up shots, followed by the original: a caterpillar’s furry back; a bird’s eye; and a toadstool cap looking just like lemon meringue pie, if a little over-cooked.



Close-up of a bolete\* fungus; lemon meringue pie anyone? – Lou Brooker



Near-life-size image of the bolete\* fungus shown in close-up at left – Lou Brooker

\*A *bolete* is a type of *fungal* fruiting body characterized by the presence of a pileus that is clearly differentiated from the stipe, with a spongy surface of pores (rather than gills) on the underside of the pileus (*Wikipedia*).

Ann Scott had the group guessing again with ‘What’s This Fungus?’—a series of photos showing the diversity in shape, form and colour of various Tasmanian fungi. These included a bracket fungus half a metre across, brilliantly coloured stagshorn fungi, and others that were tiny and delicate.

‘In My Backyard’ followed, with Jay Wilson showing just how much diversity can be right there on your door step. Among his resident or visiting fauna were a pademelon he had watched raise her joey, various spiders and insects, two kookaburras with their breakfast of an unfortunate blue-tongued lizard, an echidna, a possum, a green and gold frog, a brown frog and a tawny frogmouth.



Green and gold frog, an endangered species – Jay Wilson



**Brown frog doing his Ned Kelly impression – Jay Wilson**



**Tawny frogmouth – Jay Wilson**

Roger McLennan concluded the day with a variety of beautifully composed photographs from 'Out and About'—birds, animals, fungi, plants, and five stunning shots of penguins on Macquarie Island, taken by Wendy McLennan.

The main lesson to be drawn from the day was that there is so much to discover and learn about in our natural world, be it far away or right here at home. The thing is to get out and amongst it, perhaps taking a camera to make a permanent record.



**Sea Eagle following a successful fishing expedition – Roger McLennan**





**Magellan penguin – Wendy McLennan**



**Andean condor – Roger McLennan**

## **AUGUST: AGM AND 'THE DESPERATE PLIGHT OF THE ORANGE BELLED PARROT'**

**Text by Chris Forbes-Ewan, photos by David Neilson**

*Editorial Note: The text of this article was first published in the North-Eastern Advertiser on 22 August, 2018.*

The August activity of the NE Field Nats was our Annual General Meeting, which was conducted in the Scottsdale Library, followed by a public showing of a documentary film titled 'The Desperate Plight of the Orange-bellied Parrot' (OBP), which is the second most endangered bird in Australia.

The film attracted an audience of 30 people. David Neilson, a wildlife and landscape photographer, made the documentary to highlight the plight of the OBP, which is a small (about 45 g) and colourful parrot that has a distinctive orange patch on its belly.

The OBP breeds only in a small area of remote south-western Tasmania (near a tiny settlement called Melaleuca). The chicks hatch in summer and spend several months feeding, growing and practising flying in the Melaleuca region.



**OBP chick – note the size compared to the gloved hand**



**Adult OBP**

In autumn the OBPs fly north across Bass Strait to over-winter in southern Victoria and South Australia. The following spring they fly back to the Melaleuca area and repeat the cycle. The total distance these slight birds migrate each year is approximately 1000 km, including two crossings of Bass Strait, where they are exposed to the notorious winds that continually buffet this stretch of water.

Once plentiful across south-eastern Australia, the number of birds living in the wild gradually decreased until it was estimated a couple of years ago that only 14 remained, making it one of the most endangered animal species in Australia.

Although still severely endangered, with human assistance the OBP has made something of a comeback in the last 12 months or so—it is estimated that there are currently about 50 OBPs in the wild.

The assistance (which is continuing) includes the establishment of breeding programs in Victoria and Tasmania, with birds having been released in each region to bolster both the number of birds in the wild and their genetic diversity (which is critical to the long-term survival of a species). More than 300 captive birds are now available for this restoration program.

Human intervention also includes conservation of breeding and nesting habitat in the Melaleuca area. Environmental scientists working on the recovery efforts are assisted by volunteers who spend two weeks at a time observing and monitoring the wild population of OBPs (many of which were banded as nestlings).



**Regular monitoring of OBPs takes place in the Melaleuca region of South-Western Tasmania**

The high level of interest shown by the people of Australia in the fate of the OBP is illustrated by the success of crowd-funding in raising money for this vital conservation effort. The target of \$60 000 was reached within 24 hours, with \$140 000 dollars raised in total.

Although the future of the OBP isn't assured, recent developments suggest that it may yet be saved from extinction.

Audience members at the Scottsdale screening of David Neilson's fascinating film were clearly moved by what they saw and heard—after the film had finished, questions and discussion continued for more than 30 minutes.