



North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

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President: Ann Scott, Phone: 0400 037 492; email: 16erinastreet@gmail.com

Vice President: Pam Bretz, Phone: 0439 547 529; email: pambretz@gmail.com

Secretary and Public Officer: Louise Brooker, Phone: 0417 149 244; email: brooker@vision.net.au

Treasurer: Sue Wilson, Phone: 0448 435 012; email: sue.wilson@utas.edu.au

Committee: Mike Douglas, Jay Wilson, Lloyd Reeves

Newsletter Editor: Chris Forbes-Ewan, Phone: 0448 987 632; email: forbes-ewan@tassie.net.au

Web page manager: Penny Reeves, email: pennyreeves@iinet.net.au

Web page: <http://www.netasfieldnats.com.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 Secretary: The 2019 AGM was its usual success, with about 20 members present.

In her first report as President, Ann made special mention of the efforts of Sue as Treasurer, and Penny, who has done a sterling job developing a new website for the club.

It was decided to increase the family membership to \$30 and leave the single membership at \$20.

Penny is keen to start documenting the history of the club, and she will work on this with Lou.

All the club's officer bearers and committee members were re-elected unopposed.

As usual, the food was outstanding.

The presentation by the guest speaker, Steve Cronin, was fascinating. Steve's presentation is described in an article that starts on page 8.



Shells on Royden Island – John French

Photos of North-Eastern Tasmania



Eastern spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) on Waratah – Susan McGlenaghan



White splitting wax-cap (*Humidicutis mavis*) – Chris Forbes-Ewan

Program for September-December 2019

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

SEPTEMBER 14TH: CAPE PORTLAND – ITS NATURAL FEATURES

This weekend is a special treat organised by Claudia Bohme. Our tour of Cape Portland, which now hosts the Musselroe Wind Farm, will highlight the natural features of the Cape and the efforts of the management team to manage and enhance the natural resources there. We have been offered the use of the stone house out at the beach, so those who have indicated they are camping will need to bring their own food, own sheets and sleeping bags.

Meet 10 am at Gladstone.

Contact Lou on 0417 149 244 by the morning of Friday September 13th [Reception is unreliable in the area.]

OCTOBER 12th: FEDERATION OF FIELD NATS WEEKEND GET-TOGETHER

Members will host visitors from other Tasmanian Field Nats clubs for walks and activities. Could people please let Lou know if they are able to billet visitors. Mike Douglas will lead the walk at Waterhouse on Saturday, and there will be short walks around Bridport on Sunday morning. An informal barbeque will take place on Friday night; details of Saturday night's meal TBA.

Contact Lou on 0417 149 244

NOVEMBER 9th: SCAMANDER – A DAY WITH TODD DUDLEY

Todd will be focusing on the Skyline Tier project. We will visit a plantation site currently being logged as the first step back to native forest to see the 'before'. We will then visit a few regeneration sites (one will include an easy walk of about 45 minutes) to see progress after burning and weeding.

Any or all of the following topics may be covered on the day: Ecological Resilience, Ecological Restoration, Landscape Connectivity, Environmental Ethics and Fire Ecology (including why plantations are bad for the environment).

Meet 10 am at Scamander, in the quarry car park on the land side, by the river near the old bridge.

Contact Lou on 0417 149 244

DECEMBER 14th: EXPLORING MUSSELROE BAY

We will explore the coastal area east of the settlement, and the tracks along the edge of the Musselroe River. More details to come, including a possible end-of-year barbeque and camping arrangements.

Meet 10 am at the river mouth car park.

Contact Lou 0417 149 244

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 Scott, Lou Brooker, or the activity leader. Note that phone reception is not always available, so you may have to try alternative numbers.



Our June activity was a 12-km walk along the North-East Rail Trail. Seven members took part in the walk, which began at Kamona Siding (at the top of Rocky Gully) and finished at Tonganah. (*Editorial Note: There would have been more participants if one member—who shall remain nameless to protect the Editor—hadn't misread the clear instructions on where to meet, so he and his long-suffering wife missed the entire walk!*)

Led by Lou Brooker, the walk was across even ground and downhill with a grade of about two percent. It was a lovely walk through wet sclerophyll forest with ferny understory, and past interesting, hand-constructed cuttings.

There were so many fungi, orchids and other vegetation to observe, it took half an hour for us to complete the first hundred metres! We then had to pick up the pace to complete the distance, though.

Because of the nature of the rail trail's construction there are many different microclimates. For example, on the right-hand side, facing north, we saw tall eucalypts in a wet



Fringed helmet orchid – *Corybas fimbriatus*

rainforest—a mixture of stringy bark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) and black peppermint (*E. Amygdalina*)—while further down the gullies were quite dry, but still contained the same species.

At least for the first few kilometres there were small embankments on the left, cut into granite and soil. At the foot of these banks we saw many plants that thrived in wetter conditions.



Excited to find orchids – Allyson and Sue

springtime, so finding these two winter-flowering orchids was a pleasant surprise.

A feature of the walk was the informative and interesting interpretation boards that have been set up along the trail. One board, titled 'Travelling on the Line', described the two main purposes of the line:

The Scottsdale to Branxholm line was built to accommodate both passengers and freight. There were two classes of carriage available to passengers, first class and second class. First class passengers were charged threepence a mile, with a minimum fare of ninepence, while second class passengers were charged twopence a mile, with a minimum fare of sixpence. The main purpose for this line, however, was to open up North Eastern Tasmania to business development by allowing easier transportation of goods. Freight was charged in a different way to passenger fares, by weight and size rather than by distance. The two main exports of this area at the time were timber, which was charged at two shillings per truck, and tin, which was charged at ten shillings per ton.

We were excited to find colonies of Mosquito orchids (*Acianthus pusillus*). These delicate flowers are very hard to photograph, having tiny flowers all the way up the stem, and kidney-shaped leaves which are green on top and maroon on the underside.

We also saw fringed helmet orchids (*Corybas fimbriatus*) with their bright-red, translucent hoods which appeared to sparkle in the brilliant sunshine coming through the trees. These orchids also have kidney-shaped leaves, but in this case the leaves are green on the underside.

Orchids are usually associated with



Mosquito orchid – *Acianthus pusillus*

JULY 2019: SHORT FILMS ON NATURAL THEMES AND MEMBERS' PICTURES ON THE THEME 'WHERE AM I?'

Text by Jay Wilson; photos by Jay Wilson (JW), Lou Brooker (LB), Roger McLennan (RM), Len Gillett (LG), Jeff Jennings (JJ) and Sue Wilson (SW)



Clarence Dam – looking towards Mt Cameron (LG)

An amiable group of North-East Field Naturalists avoided the chilly winter weather by having a 'show and tell' day in the Bridport Hall as our July activity. The audio-visual feast began with the screening of a DVD by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy. The DVD featured information from TLC sites all over Tasmania.

A highlight was a segment on the botany, history and geology of a National Heritage listed Recherche Bay property purchased by the TLC in 2006. There is a beach there that features conifer fossil pebbles dating back 200 million years.

The emblematic Tasmanian blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and more than 5000 other specimens were collected and catalogued at Recherche Bay by French explorers in 1792 and 1793. These explorers had a notably amicable and harmonious relationship with their Aboriginal contacts.

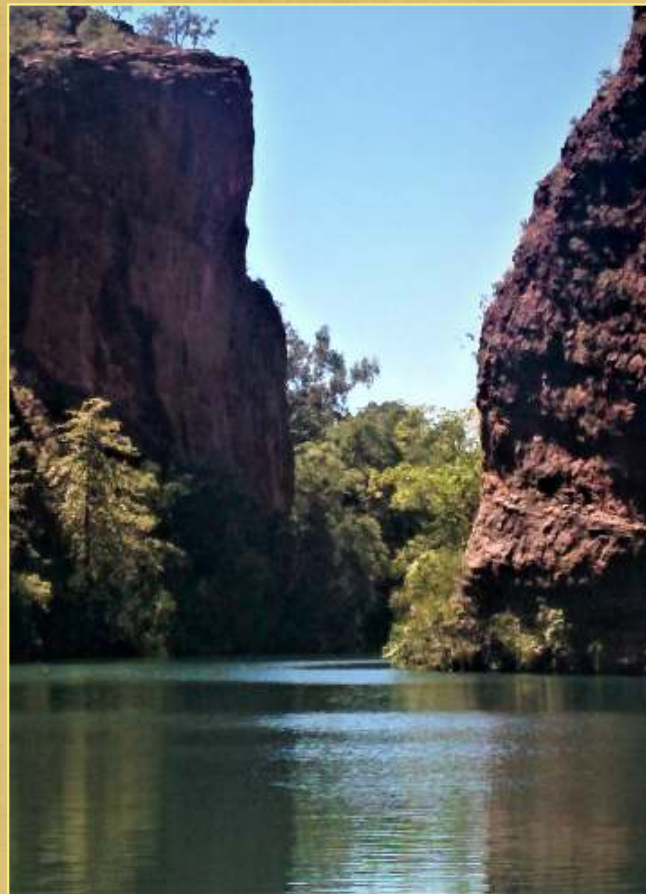


Cave spider (*Hickmania troglodytes*) in Derby tunnel (RM)

Sue Wilson then made a presentation on her recent adventure to Boojamulla National Park at the Lawn Hill Reserve in Queensland, north-west of Mt Isa.

Sue described the Riversleigh fossil site discovered in the 1980s that opened the area to tourism development. Until then this area had been a cattle station call Lawn Hill.

The area near the Lawn Hill river is incredibly beautiful, with deep gorges and other interesting geographical sites created by the limestone foundations that underpin the area and are responsible for the huge fossil deposits.



Lower gorge in Boojamulla National Park, Lawn Hill Reserve, Queensland (SW)



Second Derby Tunnel (RM)

during and after a very pleasant lunch of soup and sandwiches. The film focussed primarily on epic bird migrations, some of which span distances of over 5000 km. The close-up aerial photography of cranes, geese, ducks and other birds was simply stunning!

Sue's presentation was followed by an Academy Award nominated film called 'Travelling Birds', which was enjoyed before,



Steep Island – Northwest Coast (JJ). An interesting island of volcanic origin, Steep Island has a huge natural amphitheatre and a sea tunnel through one end.



Lagoon's Beach Conservation Area (JW)

The afternoon was topped off with a series of lively 'Where am I?' photo quiz presentations by Lou Brooker, Len Gillett, Jay Wilson, Jeff Jennings and Roger McLennan. The object was to determine (or guess) the location of the photo presented. Lou Brooker was the undisputed champion at identifying the locations of these photos.



A group of North-East Field Nats up the creek (Constable Creek, that is) – LB



Cairn on Vansittart Island, Furneaux Group (JJ). Vansittart Island was once a temporary home for Tasmanian Aborigines and also the site of the wreck of the Farsund sailing ship, 1912.



Sunset at Trent Water (JW)

AUGUST 2019: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND INVITED PRESENTATION ON CHATHAM ISLAND

Text by Jay Wilson and Chris Forbes-Ewan, with Steve Cronin; Photos by Steve Cronin

Editorial note: Our 2019 AGM was conducted in August at the home of Lou Brooker, long-serving Secretary of the North-Eastern Field Nats. A brief summary of the meeting outcomes, written by Lou, is shown on page 1 of this newsletter. The AGM was followed by a very interesting and informative invited presentation on the Chatham Islands by Steve Cronin.



The rugged and windswept southern cliffs of Chatham Island

Steve spent nearly four years on the Chatham Islands, working as the Programme Manager Biodiversity, Recreation and Historic with the Department of Conservation.

The Chatham Islands archipelago is part of the largely submerged continent of Zealandia, and is approximately 800 km east of the South Island of New Zealand. The main island—Chatham Island—is roughly the size of Flinders Island. Approximately 16 percent of the land area is in reserves, with the balance being mostly cleared.

In the 19th century whalers and sealers used the islands, and German missionaries also lived there. The main industries today are agriculture and fishing.

Most of the land on Chatham Island and on the outlying islands is owned by Pacific Islanders, who constitute the majority of the population of approximately 600. The original Polynesian inhabitants—the

Moriori—are thought to have been derived from Māori settlers who moved from New Zealand to the island archipelago around 1500 CE. Over the following centuries the descendents of the original Māori immigrants developed their own culture, which differed considerably from that of their forebears.

The Chatham Islands are colder than most of New Zealand and proved to be unsuitable for the cultivation of crops typically grown by Polynesians.

As a result, the Moriori reverted to a hunter-gatherer form of subsistence, with most of their food being of marine origin. The largest part of the Moriori diet came from shellfish such as paua (abalone), kina (a species of sea urchin), cockles and tuatua (a bivalve clam that is a close relative of the pipi). Other marine animals contributing to their diet included fish, fur seals and seabird chicks.

Due to a lack of materials suitable for rock carving (such as the greenstone used by Māori in New Zealand), the artistic urges of the Moriori found expression in the form of dendroglyphs (incisions in tree trunks) called *rakau momori*. Another major difference between the Moriori and their Māori ancestors was the adoption of a policy of peaceful resolution of conflicts. Intentional bloodshed was banned, and disagreements were solved by consensus or non-lethal duels.



Moriori Rakau Momori

The Moriori flourished under these circumstances, and it is believed that the Chatham Islands had a population of about 2000 at the time of first contact with Europeans in the late 18th century.

Unfortunately, the policy of peace at any cost led to a rapid decline in the number of Moriori from 1835, when invading Māori—whose culture included a propensity to engage in war—killed or enslaved

nearly all the local inhabitants. A decree from the New Zealand Government freed the Moriori in 1863, but by this time the population had collapsed beyond the point where recovery might be expected. The last full-blood Moriori died in 1933, just under 100 years after the Māori invasion.

Steve's work focussed primarily on habitat and species protection for the often endangered island flora and fauna. Although the Chatham Islands are small in area, and are cold and windswept, they have a surprisingly rich bio-diversity, including about fifty endemic plants that have adapted to the harsh climate, including the Chatham Islands forget-me-not (*Myosotidium hortensia*).

Many seabirds use the islands as breeding grounds, with a number of bird species (both seabirds and land-based birds) being endemic. Steve reported that

the population of the endemic black robin (*Petroica traverse*) at one time was reduced to only one female and four males, the female mating only with the oldest male. Following many years of protection and careful management, the black robin population is now approximately 300, but it suffers from a lack of genetic diversity.



Chatham Island forget-me-not (*Myosotidium hortensia*)



Black robin (*Petroica traverse*) – an endangered species that is endemic to the Chatham Islands

Several marine mammals are found in the sea around the Chathams, including New Zealand sea lions, leopard seals and southern elephant seals.



Southern elephant seal (*Mirounga leonina*)

Steve discussed the challenges in managing these and other species, many of which are endangered, and described the problems caused by invasive species such as cats, rats, possums and gorse.

He also related a number of personal experiences that helped to make his stay on the island memorable, including kayaking in solitude on the picturesque Te Whanga Lagoon, and camping on precarious perches on the cliffs of the south coast of Chatham Island.



Kayaking on Te Whanga Lagoon



Camping on the cliffs of the south coast of Chatham Island

Steve said that he was greatly assisted in his work by the enthusiasm of the locals for all things environmental. He showed pictures of working bees that included whole families who turned up to help.