

The North-Eastern Naturalist

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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.

The Club conducts outings on the second Saturday of the month.

FEBRUARY 9

BLACK CREEK ROCK POOLS.

A low key, minimal impact, leisurely, less than one kilometre walk that culminates at a spectacular set of pools on Black Creek, where we will luxuriate, swim and relax. After lunch [if you can bear to leave the site] I propose an exploratory wander along some tracks by the Cascade River behind Derby. Meet at 10am at the Mount Paris Dam Road turnoff opposite the Branxholm Cemetery. Leader: Lou Brooker 6356 0381.

MARCH 9

BUSH FOOD DAY - LITTLE MUSSELROE BAY - Hosted by Dee Mills.

We will walk a little and see what is possible to gather at this time of year as well as observing what is available in other seasons. After this we will all be involved in preparation and cooking; there is a large area at camp for food preparation and plenty of gas for cooking of bush food dishes. Dee has gathered acacia seed-so muffins and pancakes are a possibility. Bring your recipes and ideas so we can learn from each other. Take left turn a little out of Gladstone [C844] to **Little M. Bay**. Meet at 10am at a clump of trees on the right coming down the hill towards the beach - signed by a red arrow. Camping also available. Leader: Dee ph. 0428564118

APRIL 13

THE SKYWALK - MT. CAMERON RANGE.

A 6km return bushwalk, graded 'rough', on the south-west peak. Mainly through trackless woodland, but includes a walk up a moderately steep 400 metre rock slab—the skywalk. No scrambling involved. Meet at 10am at the junction of the Waterhouse Road and the Old Port Road, which is now signposted, 10 km west of Gladstone. Leader: Mike Douglas 6356 1243. .

MAY 11

WALK & TALK WITH PATSY CAMERON - TOMAHAWK

Local Aboriginal elder Patsy Cameron will lead an Aboriginal Heritage "Walk and Talk" in and around the Tomahawk area. Patsy will share her extensive knowledge of Aboriginal culture, local plants and animals, and bush tucker. Meet at 10am at the Fire Station in the middle of Tomahawk. Leader: Jay Wilson 6356 1512.

JUNE 8

BLACKMANS LAGOON.

The recent clearing of pines at Blackmans Lagoon has left a gap in vegetation cover. Peter Hodgetts is very knowledgeable about the area and will provide a guided tour of Blackmans Lagoon wetland area. We may also have an opportunity to assist with revegetation of the area (subject to confirmation), so bring tools. Meet 10 am at Blackmans Lagoon. Leader: Jay Wilson 6356 1512.

**OCTOBER 12,
13**

Proposed Field Nats Federation weekend will be in Spring at Port Sorell staying at Camp Banksia October 12th & 13th. Hosted by Central North Field Nats.

NEWS AND REPORTS

AGM - August.

Seventeen members attended this year's AGM. and enjoyed a delightful lunch and a talk by Roy Skabo afterwards.

Many became enthused by Roy's positive stories about volunteering, and asked for the links he referred to in his talk.

Here they are for those who were interested.

A key to Tasmanian Native plants:

www.utas.edu.au/dicotkey

Tasmanian Herbarium, containing Tas. Flora Online:

www.tmag.tas.gov.au/Herbarium/Herbarium2.htm

Australian Plant Society in Launceston: www.apstasnorth.org

Australian Plant Society in Hobart : www.apstas.com

Natural Values Atlas: www.naturalvaluesatlas.tas.gov.au

Threatened Plants Tasmania: www.tpt.org.au

Other Field Nat. Club's web addresses.

Central North Field Nat's.:

<http://www.disjunctnaturalists.com/>

Tasmanian Field Naturalists [Hobart Club] :

<http://www.tasfieldnats.org.au>

Launceston Field Nats.: <http://www.lfnc.org.au>

Burnie Field Nats. : <http://burniefieldnats.com/>

Vale Gwen Armstrong.

We were sorry to hear that Gwen had passed away a couple of months ago. She and her husband Ern had been founding members of the club when it came into existence in 1972. Those of us who knew her will remember her as a gentle, cheerful woman.

Also Clover Davey:

An adventurous soul with a great sense of humour, who again was part of the N.E. Field Nats. at its inauguration. We are sorry to see them go.

In the Fingal Valley - September.

At the Evercreech Reserve, about fifteen of us surround the giant *Eucalyptus regnans* at its base. Named "regnans" as a reference to the Latin "regnum" meaning kingship, these giants are the tallest tree species in Australia. They are referred to commonly as the **giant ash**, and marketed for their timber as Tasmanian oak. They are beautiful trees, impressive for their beauty and strength.

Also impressive for their height were the Mathinna Falls, our next stop. There was plenty of water over the falls, and they revealed themselves in stages as we approached them.

Then another 'short' drive to the third part of our outing— an assault on Mt. Young. Now Lesley! You said just a short walk, but you forgot to talk about the elevation! Ten minutes you said! Anyway....we all enjoyed the forest and we progressed at our varying rates towards the summit and enjoyed the views from the top. What was really nice was the hilarity and buffoonery being enjoyed by the tail end. It was fun!!

Thanks for leading Lesley - it was a great day.

Cascade River—November .

I think what made this outing so enjoyable was having two experts passionate about the story of the Chinese in the North East, happy to share their knowledge.

Revel and Trevor had very carefully reconnoitred the whole walk and fed way points into their GPS and we had that feeling that although we weren't on tracks, if we stayed together we would be safe.

So here we are wandering from one dwelling site to another fossicking for and taking photos of all the relicts of the mining past,

until we come to Ah Coon's store where we have lunch beside the old pig roasting oven.

Winding through this rainforest regrowth is the Cascade River, a quiet stream really, but picturesque with cameos of waterfern, boulders, riffles, a sandy bottom and water that is that suggestive lager colour.

Winding in and out along the line of walkers, were Fran's grandchildren, two other people who made the outing enjoyable. Their happiness to be out in the forest and their boundless energy and fun were like a breath of fresh air for us all.

Big thanks to Revel and Trevor! A great day.

Federation Weekend - Mt. Cameron - October.

For people living in the north-east, Hydro and all the allied sub-contractors building the Musselroe Wind Farm have been conspicuous on the roads and in the towns. The \$400million project is running to schedule and should be fully operational in July 2013.

Our club liaised with Hydro to prepare and present a weekend for the Federation of Field Naturalists.

The Saturday agenda consisted of a meet-and-greet at Gladstone, then a show-and-tell out at Cape Portland. Christina Guidici and Justin Couper from Hydro talked about the project and were happy to answer questions. Hydro also provided finger food for our Saturday evening meal for which we were grateful.

Our target for the day was a piece of heathland at Tree Point which, since the project got under way, had been de-stocked and fenced in order to protect the eight ephemeral species that had been found in a series of surveys conducted by NorthBarker Ecosystem Services in 2007, at the beginning of the project. The northern section of Tree Point Heath supports intact heathland, running two kilometres south from the point. The report found it to be extremely significant for the conservation of the threatened species there. It supports six that are state listed and two that are nationally listed. Turbines will not be installed at this site.

David Ziegeler had undertaken the field work for the survey and we were lucky enough to get him to lead the exploration there. Five metres onto the site, we were overwhelmed by the number of *Thelymitra antennifera* or rabbit ears. It was quite exciting because, although there were a number of species that **may** have been flowering, we weren't sure which, if any we would see this weekend. Other *Thelymitra* were observed—*flexuosa*, the twisted sun orchid, *rubra*, the pink sun orchid. I think we saw a "spotless *ixioides*"- the spotted sun orchid. I'm not sure I can say anything about that, since *T. ixioides* is the spotted sun orchid. Curious!

Ross Coad's pictures on the following page show field nats viewing the scene from Vinegar Hill with the Tregaron Wetlands below. Also left to right: 1] *Patersonia fragilis*, 2] *thelymitra antennifera*, 3] *Xanthorrhoea* spp. possibly *X. Arenaria* 4] Scott Bell, bus driver for a day, 5] Christina Guidici with map showing turbine sites. 6] David Ziegeler on left addressing part of the group at Tree Point.

A 'twitching' holiday.

by Louise Brooker

We didn't mean to turn into twitchers. In fact we'd made puns about 'twitching', 'ticking' and 'flushing', but here we were, on the first day of a holiday that would take us along the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, the Limestone Coast and then along the Coorong in South Australia, and we were doing it - checking our photos against the books. Making lists. Ticking. So from the very first day, we had become 'twitchers'.

A few years ago I'd read a great book by Sean Dooley called "the Big Twitch", an amusing, well written story about how the author tried to spot as many of Australia's birds as possible in a calendar year. The result was a world breaking 703 birds. One of the fun parts of his book was the "Glossowary" at the back. There, Sean defined a twitcher as "an extremely dangerous creature with a nasty reputation, especially in Britain. It's essentially a birder who indulges in the act of twitching. Most birders here would admit to occasionally indulging in a little bit of twitching behaviour and if they don't, they are most probably dirty rotten liars or total dudes." I think I prefer the Macquarie Dictionary definition : *n*, "a bird watcher who lists different sightings of birds". I'm not at all embarrassed by adopting the name. One million people in the U.K. are registered birders and 25 million in the U.S. list bird watching as their main leisure activity. One of the other terms in the "Glossowary" in Sean Dooley's book is the term "lifer". It refers to a bird a twitcher has never seen in their life before. In this slightly indulgent piece of writing I'm referring to my own lifers, although I'd prefer to call them "personal firsts"

So, we're on this holiday. We've just got off the Spirit of Tasmania; we pull up in a car park at Point Addis, down near Bell's Beach; we haven't even had time to read the interpretations about the place, when I look around and see my travelling companion talking to a total stranger. They're deep in conversation. He's telling her about the Rufous Bristlebird, a rare and threatened species which, if we're lucky, we'll see here. After a minute or two, a car pulls up, another guy wanders over, total stranger, joins the conversation. He wanders off with a thumping great lens in front of him and before we can even read the interps. he comes back with a photo of this "rare" bristlebird. And with this experience, our lives as twitchers has begun and it doesn't seem so 'strange' to be bird watchers after all.

In the Great Otway National Park, we are expecting koalas, not this amazing plethora of birds. Oh yes, there're blackbirds, and wrens, and even the bassian thrush we're slightly familiar with, and there's that 'rare' bristlebird again. But we didn't expect to see the satin bowerbird, the yellow robin or the red-browed fire-tailed finch, so accustomed to being near people. We almost step on the Fairy Wrens, they're so numerous. They're under our feet, hopping on the table, one even sits momentarily on my knee.

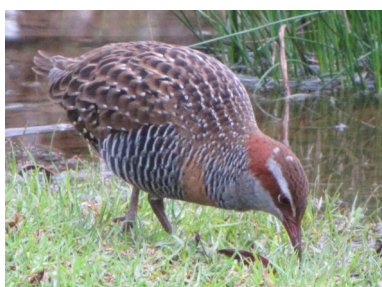
Down by the Glenelg River there is the Buff Banded Rail, a very elegant bird with exquisite markings. Reasonably shy and always alert, it flicks its tail when frightened and runs quickly for cover if threatened. It snoops around the periphery of the campsite feeding on insects and invertebrates, keeping close to the cover of the nearby long grasses.

Over the South Australian border and in the lakes that lie behind the stunning coastal landscape of the Limestone Coast, are flocks of banded stilt, avocet, black swan and many species of duck. The stilts are in large flocks wading or swimming where the brine shrimp are plentiful. They are nomads on these ephemeral salt lakes, saltmarshes and estuaries. Avocets, are basically stilts with upturned beaks. They feed by swinging their bill from side to side whilst wading through the shallow water. Sighting the red-necked avocet is for me a personal first.

The other very exciting personal first sighting happened when we least expected it. From the Wimmera River at Dimboola to the South Australian border is the Little Desert National Park. This 132, 000 hectare Mallee park began its life as a small reserve set aside for the preservation of the Mallee-fowl. Everywhere one walks in the park, one is made aware of the possibility of seeing the mallee-fowl. On every map there is bound to be a site marked "mallee-fowl mound". But wary and watchful, this large quiet-moving fowl is seldom seen in the wild. At least that has been my experience after three visits to the Little Desert. Its possible I have seen one before and not known because the fowl has the habit of freezing when approached, thus becoming nearly 'invisible'. I mentioned the mound this is a highly specialised incubating mound made of decomposing vegetation mixed with sand, which the male works tirelessly at constructing and which the eggs are laid into.

So we're on our way into the Wyperfeld National park in Central Western Victoria, and just one instant after seeing one of those cautionary 'mallee-fowl ahead' signs, casually crossing over the road right in front of us was a pair of mallee-fowl. Of course we groped frantically for our cameras and it was as if they knew that, but as soon as we hopped out of the car to photograph them, they became their usual cryptic selves and dissolved into the scenery.

Three of my 'lifers':
Buff banded rail,
Red-necked avocet,
and the Eastern Yellow Robin.



Macquarie Dictionary.
References: The Slater
Field Guide to Austral-
Birds. Pub.
Landsdowne.



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Galls and psyllids

Finding some eucalypt leaves containing insect galls on our walk in the Evercreach Reserve prompted this investigation. We had cut the galls open and with the aid of a hand-lens had been able to see a tiny white grub secreted inside.

The distinctive red ball-shaped lumpy tumours on the surface of the leaf are formed when the insects inject chemicals into the leaf and induce a rapid growth containing starch and other nutritious tissues. The stimulus appears to come from the saliva of the larva. In order for the galls to be formed, the insect must choose the time when plant cell division is rapid, usually in the spring in temperate climates like Tasmania. The rapid growth causes a concentration of resources from the surrounding plant tissues. Once the gall is formed the larvae develop inside until fully grown, using the habitat as a food source allowing the insect to feed without having to chew through tough plant tissue or hard-to-digest plant chemicals like oils and tannins. An added bonus is its protection from predators.

Gall-inducing insects include gall wasps, gall midges, gall flies, aphids thrips, scale insects and psyllids. Usually these insects are species-specific and sometimes tissue-specific on the plants they gall. So the galls we found on the leaves of the *Eucalyptus regnans* may be unique in appearance. Other galls on other plants may be smooth, spiny or fuzzy, and resemble everything from marbles and ping-pong balls to dunce caps, saucers and sea urchins.



One of the most commonly seen galls on *Acacia longifolia*



Although on a desert Eucalypt, this gall is similar to the one seen at Evercreach.



Dunces cap? This is one of the unusually shaped lerp.



This lerp a fuzzy, round ball on a Eucalypt desert species.

Not all swollen structures bearing insects are galls. Many are help-mate insects providing a vital pollination or protection service to the host plant. Sometimes plants form galls to ward off attacks of bacteria, fungi, nematodes and mistletoe. Remarkable fossil galls have been found on extinct seed ferns and conifers dating back more than 200 million years. Although most galls probably do not harm the host too much, they do involve some form of parasitism and generally do not benefit the host.

One particular insect, the psyllid, excretes a honeydew on the leaf surface and the sugars and amino acids crystallize in the air causing strange things on the leaves that look like fuzzy pieces of cotton wool. They are actually a protective covering (a 'lerp') for an insect. Adult and nymph psyllids are both sap suckers rather than gall makers, and heavy infestations can cause leaf drop.

Because they have piercing and sucking mouthparts, lerp insects belong to the insect order *Hemiptera* (hem-IP-tera), or true bugs. Both adults and nymphs are sap-suckers, feeding on the sugar-rich sap of the plants on which they're found. Any waste from feeding is excreted by nymphs as a sweet fluid, and this is woven into shape to then harden in air, forming the lerp. The lerp is mainly made of sugars, with small amounts of fats and proteins. Different species make different types of lerp, some look like shells, while others look like scales, cones, horns, fans, or even woven baskets. They're seen usually on native plants, especially *Eucalyptus* and *Acacia*.

Sugary lerp is a traditional Aboriginal bushfood, and lerp on the leaves of gum trees were described by European settlers and biologists in Australia in the first half of the 19th century. As lerp was eaten widely across Australia, they are known by many names in different parts of the country.

Now for a story about the forty spotted pardalote—not totally unrelated to the topic. Found only in Tasmania and with their numbers decreasing in recent years because of land clearance, fragmentation of its preferred habitat and climate change, its population is now down to 1500 birds. It is listed as endangered under both the state and federal legislation.

Diet-wise, this bird is fussy. This tiny bird spends its time high among the branches of the white gum or manna gum - *Eucalyptus viminalis* - sipping manna, the sweet sticky secretion peculiar to this tree, and lerp, the sugary secretions produced by psyllid insects. It also eats the psyllids. Other invertebrates on its menu are insects such as beetles, flies, bugs, wasps and caterpillars, although it is also known to feed on millipedes and spiders. In the warmer months of the year though, and coinciding with the breeding season, manna is the major source of food.

The problem is - in most areas this particular eucalypt is at grave risk of succumbing to die-back. Which means the '40 spot' as it's familiarly called, is running out of housing and food. Planning for the recovery of the "40 spot", is not just a simple matter of planting more *E. viminalis*, although restoring white gum habitat is vital. Success of revegetation projects has been variable. Now, on Bruny Island, a project aims at enabling white gums to regenerate naturally by fencing and controlled browsing.

This is a story illustrating the intricate balance that exists in nature and the prices that are paid by species when man intervenes.