

# The North-Eastern Naturalist

Issue 163 : JUNE 2004

**Patrons:** Mr. L.H. Cairns, O.B.E. and Mr. B. A. Farquhar O.A.M.

**President:** Revel Munro, "Kanara Neika", Telita. Ph. 63 542254 [home] 0409 542251 [ mobile]

**Vice President:** Graham Cashion, Cox's Lane, Branxholm.

**Secretary / Treasurer:** Jill van den Bosch, 311 East Minstone Road, Scottsdale. Ph 63 523004. e.mail :jillv@iprimus.com.au

**Editor:** Louise Brooker, 482 East Minstone Road, Scottsdale. Ph. 63 522122 [home] 0427 522123 [mobile] e.mail: brooker@vision.net.au

**Committee:** Denny Walter, Ross Coad.

**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.**

**JUNE 19th**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & GUEST SPEAKER**

Meet at Brooker's - 482 East Minstone Road, Scottsdale at 10.30 am. Annual General Meeting begins promptly at 11 am. This will include some special presentations. Lunch 12—1 pm. Then at 1pm. Guest speaker : Dr. Bob Mesibov will deliver a power point presentation titled "**Millipedes, Maps and Mysteries**" revealing some remarkable observations about the distribution of millipedes in Tasmania.

**JULY 10th**

## **CAMERON REGIONAL RESERVE**

Mike Douglas has prepared and will lead an easy 4.5 km.walk beneath the Mt. Cameron Range. This walk includes a forgotten branch of the historic Mt. Cameron water race and other interesting features. Meet at 10am. On the Waterhouse Road, 7.2 kms east of the Old Port Road junction and 3.3 kms. West of Gladstone [Grid Ref. 820652] Mike's ph....63 561243.

**AUGUST 14th**

## **QUEEN VICTORIA MUSEUM : LAUNCESTON**

Here's another fantastic opportunity to see behind the scenes at the Queen Victoria Museum. Peter Duckworth has agreed to show us the bird collection. This will be a two hour visit beginning promptly at the front entrance of the Royal Park section of the Museum at 12pm. Suggest people have lunch beforehand.

**SEPTEMBER 11th**

## **NORTH EAST PARK : SCOTTSDALE**

It will be three months since the completion of the Green Corps project in the park, so its a good time to inspect the changes and have a working bee in the endemic section. Not heavy work....light weeding, planting out, moving interpretation signage etc. Then afternoon tea at Jill and Ron's across the road. Come whenever you can from 10am. onwards.

► **Members are reminded that subs are now due: \$15 at A.G.M. or by mail to the Treasurer.**

# news / views

## Some good news and some bad.....

Great news in a recent Advertiser- Scottsdale's Weekly Newspaper. The heading tells it all:

"Clearfelling on Mt. Scott put on hold".....with a subheading of "waterwatch highlights deficiencies in planning".

Ever since its inception, Dorset Waterwatch has watched over the upper catchment of the Brid and the Great Forester Rivers. In 2001 it conducted a community based audit which highlighted deficiencies in planning and correctly identifying streams in the area. Forestry Tasmania then withdrew the plan at the time and it had not been reactivated since.

Recently, though, Dorset Waterwatch was called to a Forest Practices Plan briefing one day before the operation was about to begin. During their discussions which took place at the site, the Supervising Officer for Gunns listened to the group's concerns willingly and in a spirit of co-operation, withdrew the starting date of the operation to allow further ground surveys to be conducted.

The group expressed concerns that much of the area was unsuitable for logging and plantation establishment because of a high level of surface and sub-surface water. In other words the plan had failed to correctly identify streams within the coupe— streams which often disappeared underground and then reappeared further down the slope.

Once Gunns considered the ground survey results, nearly two thirds of the coupe which consisted mostly of rainforest, was removed from the logging plan.

Congratulations, Kim and your group for maintaining a serious and professional attitude and relying on factual evidence in all your negotiations. Your group has set a great example to the community showing the positive results of vigilance and hard work.

## Community Based Auditing

Since 1998, Philip Tattersall has been working with a group called Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors looking at new ways to bring community directly into the environmental management process. He believes members of the community are the ultimate "responsible persons" for in their hands lies a vast amount of knowledge and this can play a vital role in resource planning and action.

The test case in 1999-2000 on the Diddleum Plains, began with an examination of the forest practices plan and after a long process of enquiry ended with the above success story.

Since then the TCRA has been involved with a number of other cases and has published a number of journals which consist of case studies containing reports about soil, water, floral and faunal values, archaeology and other upper catchment issues relating to specific logging coupes. As well, there are copies of faxes and letters between individuals, municipal councils, Forestry Tasmania and politicians along with maps, tables and graphs.

The journals have been prepared in a very professional manner and so far have been purchased by people in government departments and municipal councils. Those who want to be truly informed of the issues

would find them fascinating reading. I have a copy to lend. [L.B.]

## Blue Tier Update:

16/04/04.... A sad day for the Blue Tier ! After many months of campaigning and 34 days encamped at the boom gate on the Anchor Road where logging was expected to take place, the Friends of the Blue Tier lost the fight and were asked to move.

Our friend Deny Walter writes. . . .

"The Friends group, led by Lesley Nicklason and supported by Beris, Lorraine and Fran had kept a peaceful vigil at the entrance to Coupe GC 134d. until early on the afternoon of the 15th April, when a Forestry Tasmania officer read out orders issued by Mr. Creak forcing the group to relocate outside an extraordinarily large exclusion zone. It was at this stage that three of the party decided to TRESPASS."

.... "The F.O.B.T. has worked tirelessly over many months to activate and arouse the St. Helens community and to alert the Break O'Day Council of the potential dangers to the town's water supply if logging were to take place. A community based audit was embarked upon to investigate the basis on which F.T. felt justified to log this sensitive coupe"

Deny was one of those arrested at the site of Coupe 134d and he pleads with readers to " get behind the friends, and support them. There will be more coupes, more exclusion zones, more implacable regulations and curtailments of citizens' freedom of movement. It is the community who, ultimately is responsible for the health and well-being of the environment"

The campaign to save Blue Tier has been based on the potential for nature based tourism, which in the Regional Forest Agreement was recognised as being more valuable than other pursuits.

The F.O.B.T. group have proven the potential of the area over the last year and especially over the last few months - the organised walks hosted by the 'Friends' have attracted 700 people, and that's not including people who have visited the area independently.

Slightly better news....the camp has moved about 1 km up to the Lottah crossroad onto a private block of land and it is a great spot...close to the exclusion zone barricade and right in line for all the tourists going up to the Tier. The group will continue to be present at the new camp to provide information and a cuppa to passers by. While they were at the base camp they had over 300 visitors. They have invited all who care to visit them for a chat and a cuppa.

## North East Bioregional Network

[some notes from Volume 1, Issue 1 of the Network's Newsletter]

This group was formed in 2003 as a response to ongoing degradation of the environment in N.E. Tasmania.

The group intends to

- protect and restore bioregional ecosystems
- work in partnership with groups such as Tasmanian Land Conservancy to purchase and covenant private land for conservation.

- share information and network with groups and individuals.
- promote the ethical concept of ecological protection and restoration as an intrinsic value.

Its newsletter lists the “hotspots” in the North East, gives information about conservation, deforestation, and water issues and notes on upcoming events.

The contacts for the Network are Patricia O’Donnell 63 7222418, Eo Greensticks 0438 571291, and Todd Dudley 63 761049. Membership is \$10 p.a.

Todd has kindly told people about our outings, proving the value of this new network. Thanks Todd.... we hope it works both ways.

### **Duncraggen Hill**— report by Mike Douglas

“I recently visited Duncraggin Hill to view the 130 ha of logging now underway”.

Remember, Mike took us on a visit to the area in January 2003?

“I had been told by Forestry Tasmania’s planning officer that selective logging would take place, but was rather disappointed by the scene on the slopes above Platypus Pool” .

Evidence of yet another definition of what “selective logging” means.

“In effect F.T. have carried out a clearfelling operation with retention of seed trees and some small patches of regrowth only”.

### **Next Round of Green Corps Projects.**

Green Corps is a Commonwealth Government initiative delivered by Job Futures and Greening Australia. Programs run for 6 months and provide on-the-job and accredited training in Conservation Land Management and Youth Development for young Australians.

Any 17-20 year old is invited to apply for the up coming projects. Interested applicants need a genuine interest in their own leadership development; a willingness to be part of an educational program and be prepared to make significant contributions to environmental and community projects. Green Corps is a positive, proactive, educational opportunity for young people. The program aims to provide participants with confidence and the skills for any future work or study.

There are positions available for the following new projects:

Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden Project: Based out of Burnie, focusing on horticultural, building and interpretive projects.

Sykes Sanctuary Project: Based out of Railton this project will be focusing on rehabilitating the Sykes Sanctuary, undertaking flora and fauna surveys and construct-

ing picnic tables and walking tracks.

Southern Midlands Show Team: Based in Glenorchy and the Southern Midlands. Tasks will include stone bridge restoration, tree planting and preparing and helping to run the Royal Hobart Show.

Dru Point Project (Start date August 2004): Based in Margate.

If you know anybody who would be interested in participating in a Green Corps program, please pass on this information or ask them to contact Neri Jamieson in the Green Corps State Office on (03) 62236377 or Email: [nerij@tas.greeningaustralia.org.au](mailto:nerij@tas.greeningaustralia.org.au).

Alternatively they can apply on the Green Corps website: [www.greencorps.com.au](http://www.greencorps.com.au)

### **How tall can a tree grow?**

Source: Internet article by Michael Hopkin.

It might sound like an unanswerable question, but researchers working in California's redwood forests have placed the theoretical height limit at 130 metres: the height of a 35-storey skyscraper.

They discovered that despite the moistness of the ground far below, the leaves at the treetops struggle to get enough water, so they are effectively living in constant drought. The difficulty of getting water so far up into the sky is what ultimately constrains growth, suspects the research team.

For California redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), the tug of gravity and the friction between the water and the vessels through which it flows mean that fluid cannot be dragged any higher than 122-130 metres, the researchers conclude in this week's *Nature*<sup>1</sup>.

Similar growth limitations could apply to other species around the world, such as the eucalyptus trees of Tasmania, which can exceed 70 metres, Koch says. Although shorter than redwoods, they may also have a theoretical 'drought ceiling', he suggests. "They could experience the same water gradient but at a lower height."

Reference: Koch, G. W., Sillett, S. C., Jennings, G. M. & Davis, S. D. *Nature*, **428**, 851 - 854, doi:10.1038/nature02417 (2004). **[Article]**

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# in the douglas apsley national park

The E road had been seriously eroded by the floods earlier in the year and we were glad we were in 4 wheel drives as we headed upwards into the hills behind the coast. Mike Douglas, our leader today, is very passionate about this national park and recalls his many visits to other parts of the park which are no longer accessible.

The park consists of a deeply dissected dolerite plateau ranging in altitude from 40-700 metres. It is a diverse region of steep, rugged boulder-strewn gorges, several waterfalls and with rocky spires overlooking the coastal plain. It comprises 16,000 hectares, stretches 16 kilometres from north to south and includes the catchment of the Douglas, the Apsley and the Denison Rivers.

Sixty bird species have been recorded in the park and twenty seven mammal species [including eight bats]. The park is an important habitat for the Southern Greyling, one of the country's most endangered fish. But above all else, the area has been reserved for its floral richness with more than ten recognized forest communities. It certainly is the largest remaining single area of undisturbed dry sclerophyll forest and contains a number of poorly reserved endemic native plants.

- 8 -

It is a small group that has risen to the challenge of this walk, although few among us would have called ourselves "fully fit". The pace set by leader Mike Douglas allows for plenty of verbal exchange, and along the flat but rocky path at the edge of Thompson's Marshes, we certainly manage to catch up on all the news of the past month. Someone remembers meeting *Veronica* here on their first walk into the park, so we are looking for blue flowers, although we suspect it is far too late for those. *Veronica formosa*, named after Saint Veronica and called the Tasmanian speedwell, is certainly here in proliferation, most of the plants being about a metre tall, but it's the wrong time of the year for flowers. We notice its similarity to the hebes and parahebes; indeed some plants appearing in this genus are now classified as Parahebe.

Our search for "blue" however, is completely satisfied, although in an entirely unexpected way !

Here and there we see a purple brachyscome daisy; then some wahlenbergia, but as we walk into the wetter, denser forest, there is a feast of blue berries. *Dianella tasmanica*, the flax lily loves the shady moist sites, as does *Drymophila cyanocarpa*, the native solomons seal. Quite often this plant develops only a single curved stem, with a few berries, but here the plants are quite robust with many branches supporting a profusion of blue berries. They are quite spectacular ! And of course there is *Billardiera longiflora*, the climbing blueberry .

In this 'botanical paradise' there are many more berries. Two specimens of the coffee berry *Coprosma hirtella*, are noted but no berries seen. The fruits of the native olives, *Notelaea ligustrina*, are at varying stages of ripeness and therefore different colours: some white, some red, through to dark purple. Down in a gully where a stream trickled over rocks and in and out of pools, we see the mountain pepper, *Tasmanian lanceolata*. In a patch of wet sclerophyll we see the black [poisonous] berries of *Pimelea drupacea* and here too we are surprised and delighted to find the heart berry, *Aristotelia peduncularis* .

*Cyathodes pendulosa* is a threatened species occurring only on the east coast. The description [1] notes similarities to *C. divaricata* and *C. parvifolia*. We can't be certain, but the plants we see certainly hold their big pink berries in a pedulous fashion.

One of the reasons for protecting this area as a national park was that it contained 14 of the state's endemic Eucalypts. Before our attention turned to berries, we saw *Eucalyptus pauciflora*, *E. rodwayii*, *E. amygdalina*, *E. ovata* and *E. viminalis* on the margins of Thompson's Marshes. In the gorge near the falls is *E. obliqua*, and in the mid-section of the track—*E. delegatensis*.

## in the Douglas Apsley National Park contd.

On one of the many short stops along the way we see a drill hole, a remnant of times when geologists were surveying the area to ascertain the quality of the 160 million year old coal deposits which lay in faults under the dolerite. Areas in the vicinity were worked on a small scale from the 1850's : Dalmaine for example. It seems there is plenty of coal beneath this park but it lies in faults and is "dirty". [ask Rev-el what that means!]

The park is dominated geologically by Jurassic dolerite and Triassic sediments and most of the park's landscape has been moulded by the action of water flowing over millions of years. As we lunch at Heritage Falls, we imagine this impressive place in a time of flood and pondered the massive energy brought to bear over the ages to form such an impressive drop with its deep plunge pool at the base.

We are lucky with the weather. A few drops of rain at lunch time didn't bother us really, it only made the rocks a little slippery on the return upriver. Here's Mike with his favourite piece of bushwalking equipment.

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### References:

1. Threatened Plants of the Tasmanian Central East Coast by J.B. Kirkpatrick, M.J. Brown & A. Moscal.  
Draft Management Plan for State Forests in the Douglas Apsley Region by Forestry Commission Tasmania.  
"A Victory for Ecological Integrity" by Helen Gee 1990.

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### Other plants seen but not included in report:

Acacia mucronata— around river margins  
Acacia mearnsii [black wattle in flower]  
Leptospermum lanigerum  
Melaleuca squamea—widespread in Thompson's Marshes  
M. ericifolia—river margins etc.  
Hibbertia riparia [guinea flower] rather different in appearance from H. riparia in Bridport area.  
Tetralochea pilosa  
Westringea rubraefolia endemic.  
Davesia ulicifolia [native gorse]  
Leionoma squameum subs., retusum [formerly Phebalium]  
Callistemon viridiflorus [green bottlebrush] Common on the first half of the track. Endemic.  
Hakea epiglottis S shaped fruits. Endemic  
Beyeria viscosa [pinkwood] with distinctive three lobed woody fruit. Near H.F. camp.  
Micranthemum hexandrum  
Monotoca glauca [currant wood]  
Bedfordia salicina [cabbage musk]

## Some notes from our fungi foray on Elephant Pass: May 1

We had met in the warmth of the dining room at the Pancake Parlour and Sarah had given us a pretty thorough introduction to the world of fungi. We were a mixed bunch. The Central North members had driven big distances to join us, and the feeling was one of conviviality. Sarah's last words as we set out on the foray were "go slowly, stay together, and share what we see where its growing before we cut and collect".

For some, it took five minutes to get to the turn-off. For others, it took five minutes to advance one metre, such was the diversity of fungi along the roadside.

Quoted at the time "We must never be anxious to complete the journey" [someone]

Important equipment ..... a bucket, a magnifying glass or hand lens, a knife, maybe a trowel for digging and a mirror.  
The latter to view undersides of fungi.

Its important to learn a few acronyms before you start.  
l.b.f.....little brown fungus.  
a.b.m.....another blooming mycena  
b.f.g.....referring to a fungus that's a bit far gone  
t.f.g.....too far gone  
At the same time creative attempts are always rewarded

Carl and Robina told an amusing story about gathering enough 'slippery jacks' last season to make a soup. They gave some to Pam, but after experiencing the unexpected laxative effect of the mushrooms, were quick to rush next door to warn her. Luckily the soup was still in Pam's freezer.

Here we are on Mt. Elephant. It seemed serendipitous that Jac should find a small [was it plastic or china?] elephant a bit broken and dirty sitting on a fallen log by the side of the road.  
It had probably been ages since anyone had scoured this roadside with such keen eyes.

A useful reference for beginners might be "Australian Fungi Illustrated" by I.R. McCann.

**A very successful day !! Special thanks to Sarah for sharing her knowledge and to Pam for her generous hospitality.**

## Fungi list

*Amanita muscaria* fly agaric  
*Amanita xanthocephala* pretty grisette  
*Amauroderma rude* red-staining stalked polypore  
*Boletus sp.* bolete  
*Calocera sp* pretty horn  
*Clavaria amoena* yellow club coral fungus  
*Clavulina sp ?* Coral  
*Daldinia concentrica* cramp balls  
*Exidia sp.* witch's butter  
*Flamulina velutipes* velvet foot  
*Galerina hypnorum* moss galerina  
*Geastrum* earth star

*Heterotextus miltinus* yellow jelly bells  
*Hypholoma sp.* sulphur tuft  
*Macrolepiota clelandii* slender parasol mushroom  
*Marasmius elegans* velvet marasmius  
*Marasmius sp.* Maze gill  
*Mycena austrororida* slimy white mycena  
*Mycena sanguinolenta* bleeding Mycena  
*Mycena viscidocruenta* ruby mycena  
*Peziza (repanda?)* spreading brown cup fungus  
*Psilocybe subaeruginosa* blue-staining psilocybe  
*Rickenella fibula* little pin  
*Russula sp. (White)*  
*Schizophyllum commune* split gill  
*Stereum hirsutum* hairy stereum  
*Stereum ostrea* gold-lip stereum  
*Stropharia semiglobata* dung round head  
*Trametes versicolour* rainbow fungus  
*Uredomycladium* rust fungus (on wattle)  
*Zelleromyces sp.* gastroid lactarius  
*Fomitopsis lilacinogilv* lilac shelf fungus ]

List Compiled by Sarah Lloyd

**A letter written by Sarah Lloyd on behalf of Birds Australia, & Birds Tasmania opposing the subdivision of land next to the Winifred Curtis Reserve, Scamander.**

I'm including this letter here to reinforce what we members know and feel are the values of the Winifred Curtis reserve. The information may be useful if members are involved in representations to B.O'Day Council or feel moved to make public comment about the issue. Ed.

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**REGARDING: Conservation significance of the land at Scamander proposed for a Subdivision (DA 432-03) by Smartgrowth Integrated Architecture and Urban Design Pty Ltd and Numero Ace Pty Ltd.**

Over the past several years I have made several visits to the Winifred Curtis Reserve and environs with field naturalists groups and with members of Birds Tasmania. We have all been impressed not only with the botanical richness of the area and the number of bird species present (see attached list) but also with the health of the area in question. There are very few non-native plant "weeds" and the eucalypts are showing no signs of stress or dieback. I believe that it is one of the last remaining intact habitats of its type along the east coast as similar areas have been cleared for housing development in recent years.

The area comprises a diversity of vegetation types. On the western side, where the proposed 101-lot subdivision is to be located, the forest is dominated by ironbark *Eucalyptus sieberi* and coastal peppermint *E. amygdalina*. To the east of this area is coastal white gum *E. viminalis* forest with the wetter low lying areas dominated by Black (Swamp) Gum *E. ovata* with a dense tall understorey layer of paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia*.

Inland from the dunes are stunted honeysuckle *Banksia marginata*, prickly moses *Acacia verticillata* with an understorey of sags *Lomandra longifolia*. Throughout the area - and particularly under the ironbark and peppermint - is a rich diversity of understorey and ground layer plants. These are characteristic of coastal heathlands, which comprise some of the most botanically rich areas in the state.

This variety of vegetation types supports a high diversity of insects and other invertebrates, many fungi species and a corresponding diversity of birds. Coastal areas in Tasmania contain some of the best bird habitat in the state. This is because the mosaic of vegetation types, such as dune vegetation, dry sclerophyll forests, wet swampy areas and lagoons all occur within a relatively small area. As well, the variety of plant species means that there is always something in flower to provide a year round food source for nectar feeding species such as Eastern Spinebill and Crescent Honeyeaters. These nomadic bird species are dependent on the rich nectar source provided by plants such as heath *Epacris impressa* and flowering banksias to sustain them, especially during lean times in winter. Similarly, nomadic flocks of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, a bird that is believed to be declining because of the loss of suitable breeding habitat, periodically visit coastal heathlands to feed on the flowers and old cones of the banksias.

Some particularly important habitat features in the area include:

**Large trees:** A range of bird species including the endemic Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Black-headed Honeyeater and Yellow Wattlebird favour large trees as they provide a greater area on which to forage.

As well, studies have demonstrated that eucalypts from the subgenus *Symphyomyrtus*, such as the white gums and black gums found at the site, have significantly higher nutrients in their leaves than those of eucalypts from the subgenus *monocalyptus* and support a greater number and variety of bird species.

**Logs and litter** on the ground are essential components of a healthy ecosystem. Fungi, which are vitally important to the health of most plants through mycorrhizal relationships, play an important role in breaking down this dead wood, returning nutrients to the soils in the process. Insects and other invertebrates move into the dead wood after the fungi have initiated decay and these in turn become an important food source for birds, reptiles, frogs and small mammals. The cool environments under logs provide refuges for a range of frog and insect species.

**The wetlands and lagoons** situated between the dunes and the forest support large animal populations, particularly invertebrates, frogs and birds. These areas are especially vulnerable to excessive nutrient levels that can build up where this sort of development occurs and where the disposal of stormwater has not been adequately addressed. A build up of nutrients causes undesirable algae to flourish and smother plant growth. Increased turbidity also causes the health of wetlands to deteriorate, with a reduction of invertebrates from a wide diversity of species to just the common species.

**The dense understorey vegetation** present in the area provides shelter from predators, nesting sites and nesting material for a range of species including the Brown Thornbill, Superb Fairy-Wren and the endemic Tasmanian Scrubwren. It is also suitable habitat for a range of small ground dwelling mammals such as the Eastern Barred Bandicoot and New Holland Mouse.

There is suitable habitat and/or foraging sites within the area in question for a range of threatened animals, including:

**Swift Parrots**, currently listed as endangered, (Commonwealth Endangered Species protection Act 1992) have been observed in the area foraging on the flowers of black gum. These migratory birds breed only in Tasmania returning in August/September each year. One of their main migration routes is the narrow strip of land within 5 kilometers of the state's East Coast.



Breeding Swift Parrots are nearly always associated with Blue Gum (*E. globulus*) and black gum and the flowering of these trees, particularly blue gum, triggers their breeding. However, in years when this tree does not flower sufficiently to support breeding, the flowers of the black gum provide an important alternative. One of the continuing threats to the survival of the Swift Parrot is the clearing of their food source.

Post breeding, these birds disperse widely throughout the state. Nectar from the flowers and lerp insects that form on the foliage of trees such as white gum (*E. viminalis*) provide important sustenance later in the season.

These fast flying birds are particularly susceptible to collisions with windows, fences and other structures in their flight paths. This proposed development, to be located in one of their key breeding areas and on a major migration route, is likely to have an adverse impact on this species.

### **Eastern Barred Bandicoot**

This species is considered of high conservation significance in Tasmania because suitable habitat is being cleared for agriculture, forestry or housing developments. It favours areas of bush adjacent to grassy areas and requires dense vegetation for breeding, shelter and protection from predators. Thus the area in question is likely to provide suitable habitat for this species.

### **New Holland Mouse**

In Tasmania the status of this small native rodent has recently been upgraded from rare to endangered because it is restricted to the coastal dry heathlands in the northeast and east of the state. The area in question is likely to provide suitable habitat for this species.

It requires areas with botanically diverse, dense vegetation because these areas provide suitable foraging plants and protected breeding areas. These nocturnal mice feed mainly on seeds, flowers, leaves, fungi and invertebrates. The biggest threats to their survival includes habitat loss through vegetation clearing and coastal development, predation by dogs and cats and weed invasion in botanically rich areas which makes habitat unsuitable.

### **Conclusion:**

The development proposed for this site is totally unsuitable given the inherently unstable sandy soils, the botanically rich nature of the area and the wealth of animal species it contains.

Any attempt to clear only sections of the block in the hope that the remaining vegetation will be unaffected by the development is to misunderstand the sensitive ecology of such areas.

Any clearing favours the invasion of feral species, both plant and animal. Residents in such subdivisions invariably choose to plant gardens featuring extensive areas of lawn and garden beds using non-native plant species. Most of these plants require heavy applications of fertilizers to survive in the nutrient deficient soils characteristic of coastal areas, and many will inevitably become weeds and escape into the uncleared areas. This will change the floristic makeup of the botanically diverse vegetation eventually rendering it unsuitable for species such as the New Holland Mouse, and degrading the habitat for native bird species.

The excessive nutrients, both from stormwater and from cultivated gardens will also adversely affect the uncleared areas as the botanically rich coastal vegetation has evolved over the millennia to cope with the inherently low nutrient levels of sandy soils. Coastal heathland plants are unable to survive in areas where additional nutrients have been applied – either deliberately or inadvertently.

The location of houses and holiday cabins on the unstable sandy soils will have an adverse impact on the wetlands because eroding soils will increase turbidity in the water. Additional nutrients will also have an adverse effect on the wetlands and lagoons.

Chemical pollutants go hand in hand with such developments as residents wash cars, spray weeds etc. Not only will the wetlands and lagoons on the land itself suffer, but nearby Hendersons Lagoon, which provides shelter and foraging areas for a significant number of bird species, including Black Swan, Australian Pelican, Hoary-headed Grebe, Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck and White-faced Heron may also eventually be affected.

Domestic animals that belong to the residents of the subdivision, or those roaming from other areas in the town will have greater access because of the extensive networks of roads that are proposed. These animals will have an adverse impact on the birds and animals that now inhabit the area.

**This botanically rich area contains vital foraging and breeding habitat for a large range of invertebrates, frogs, reptiles, mammals and birds and should be seen as an important asset for the community rather than one to be cleared for development.**

**save the Blue Tier**

**the rape of tasmania**

**- by richard flanagan**

*The written history of corruption in Tasmania goes like this ...*

*In 1989, Eddie Rouse, Tasmanian media magnate and chairman of the Tasmanian logging company Gunns, became concerned that the election of a Labor-Green government with a one-seat majority might affect his logging profits.*

*Rouse attempted to bribe a Labor member, Jim Cox, to cross the floor, thereby bringing down the government and clearing the way for Robin Gray and the Liberal Party to resume power.*

*Cox went to the police, the plot was exposed, a royal commission and Rouse's fall from grace and imprisonment ensued.*

*But what of the unwritten history?*

Fourteen years after the bribery scandal, an ageing Tasmanian forester called Bill Manning, subpoenaed to testify in front of a Senate committee investigating the Tasmanian forestry industry, began slowly and methodically to unravel a tale of an environmental catastrophe on a vast, almost incomprehensible, scale; of industry connivance and government complicity. In any other state, such evidence would threaten to bring down the government of the day. His detailed, carefully presented evidence suggested that the forestry industry was not only systematically destroying globally unique forests, but poisoning the very fabric of Tasmanian politics and life.

Manning is no greenie hardliner. He is a man who has worked for 30 years in the Tasmanian forests, who believes the forests ought to be logged, but logged so that they remain for the future. Yet he alleged to the Senate committee that forestry management had been corrupted. At the hearing, he painted a picture of the illegal destruction of public forests on a scale so vast that it was transforming the landscape of Tasmania. Branding what was happening in Tasmania "an ecological disaster", Manning talked of how an "accelerated and unaccountable logging industry" was destroying wholesale native forests, "which are unique in the world for their flora and fauna".

"The clearfelling is out of control," he told the senators. "The scale of clearfelling in Tasmania is huge.

"Were it to be judged by the legislation that other Tasmanians have to abide by," he continued, "it would be found to be comprehensively in breach of Tasmanian law." But it isn't, because the Tasmanian forest industry is exempt from almost all Tasmanian laws that might check its excesses.

Manning told the committee that while the forestry industry claims that its Forest Practices Code is world's best practice, it is a code that is self-regulated by employees of logging companies, and "therefore has been so ineffectual as to render it virtually non-existent".

The culture of the forestry industry, he continued, had become one of "bullying, cronyism, secrecy and lies".

Manning's work in recent years had been as a forest audits officer, an industry policeman, working for the Forest Practices Board. In that time, he has issued tickets for 100 breaches of the Forest Practices Act, but no one was ever prosecuted. Finally, in frustration, he breached the state government body, Forestry Tasmania. Within two weeks, he told the hearing, he had had his ticket books taken away, and his authority to lay complaints under the Forest Practices Act withdrawn. Against his wishes, Manning was transferred out of the Forestry Practices Board into another government agency, Workplace Standards Tasmania.

When his questioning by senators was nearly finished, Manning wanted to make a further point.

"And then I am done," Manning said, "like a dinner."

Indeed he was.

In Tasmania, unsubstantiated rumours about Manning's health, along with other personal smears, began flowing.

He was portrayed as an unstable man with an unjustifiable grievance against his former employers.

Manning, who has declined all interviews, would have known this was coming.

And how, perhaps, could it be otherwise?

Huge money is being made out of destroying old-growth forests, and Manning's testimony directly challenged the culture of secrecy, intimacy and shared interest that seems to so firmly bind the powerful in Tasmania.

The logging industry's astonishing exemption from the Freedom of Information Act makes it difficult to uncover the truth of logging operations, and the precise relationship between government and industry - how much, for example, the loggers actually pay for crown forest owned by the Australian people.

Both the forestry industry and the government withhold key information, fudge definitions of forest types and felling practices, and distort statistics to prevent the truth of old-growth logging being publicly known, diverting debate into the dullness of disputed definitions and clashing numbers. Beyond, forests continue disappearing.

Some facts, though, are beyond any cover-up. Tasmania is the only state that clearfells its rain-forests. While the rest of Australia has either ended, or is ending, logging of old-growth forests, Tasmania is the only state where the destruction of native forests is being accelerated, driven by the greed for profit that can be made from woodchips.

While, like so much else in Tasmania, total woodchip production figures since 2000 are officially secret, figures

obtained recently by The Mercury newspaper in Hobart show that Tasmania's annual woodchip exports have for the first time exceeded 5 million tonnes - a figure estimated by the Wilderness Society to be more than 70% of the total for all Australia.

Clearfelling, as the name suggests, involves the complete clearing of logged areas, first by chainsaws and skidders, and then by intense firing started by helicopters dropping incendiary devices made of jellied petroleum - commonly known as napalm. In consequence, every autumn, the island's otherwise most beautiful season, china-blue skies are frequently nicotine-scummed, an inescapable reminder that clearfelling means the total destruction of ancient forests unique in the world.

In the island's west, the largest temperate rainforest in Australia, the Tarkine, is being clearfelled, and plans have been announced for logging the rare myrtle trees at its heart. In the Styx valley in the south-west, the world's last great unprotected stands of old-growth *Eucalyptus regnans* are being reduced to piles of smouldering ash. About 90% of old-growth *regnans* forests are gone, and just 13,000 hectares of these extraordinary trees remain in their old-growth form. Half of them are to be clearfelled.

These aptly named kings of trees are the tallest hardwood trees and flowering plants on Earth, some more than 20m in girth and more than 90m in height. Most will end up as paper or cardboard in Japan.

In logging coupes around Tasmania, exotic rain-forest trees such as myrtle, sassafras, leatherwood and celery-top pine - extraordinary, exquisite trees, many centuries old, some of which are found nowhere else - are often just left on the ground and burnt.

The World War I landscape that results from clearfelling is generally turned into large monocultural plantations of either radiata pine or *Eucalyptus nitens*, sustained by such a heavy program of fertilisers and pesticides that water sources for some local communities have been contaminated by atrazine. Blue-dyed carrots soaked in 1080 poison are often laid to kill native grazing animals that pose a threat to the plantation seedlings. The slaughter that results sees not only possums, wallabies and kangaroos die in slow agony, but other species - including wombats, bettongs and potaroos - killed in large numbers in spite of being officially protected species, some of which are rare.

There seems no end to the obscenity. Among Tasmania's many unique plants and animals is the endangered giant freshwater crayfish, one of the largest invertebrates in the world. Although technically protected, its very future is threatened by the frenzy of logging surrounding the creeks where it lives.

When a government-appointed expert panel recommended buffer zones of forest be preserved to protect the crayfish, these zones were reduced to a bare minimum, and the areas continue to be logged. "Clearfelling is going on at an incredible rate in their habitat," crayfish expert Todd Walsh says. "It's going berserk."

Yet in Tasmania the forest debate is not just about burning rainforests and threatened species. It is a disturbing story about the way in which information is controlled to benefit the very rich and very powerful, and about the way major political parties can become hopelessly compromised by their relationship with big business, to the extent of identifying the interests of their state with that of a billion-dollar monopoly. This goes beyond sizeable donations given by logging companies to both major parties, to a political sensibility that willingly altered the state's electoral system, under a Liberal-Labor deal in May 1998, to minimise Green representation.

Premier Jim Bacon's nickname is "the emperor", and the man widely perceived to be the power behind the throne is his deputy, Paul Lennon, a man who makes no apologies for his closeness to the old-growth logging industry, his public lunches and appearances with logging baron John Gay, or a recent trip to Scandinavia in the company of Gay to investigate pulp mills there.

Upon winning power in 1998, the Bacon ALP government quickly established itself as the most pro-big-business government Tasmania had ever had. Favoured companies received extraordinary treatment. One of Lennon's first acts as forestry minister was to make 85,000 hectares of previously "deferred forest" available for logging.

Not only did the woodchippers now have a political green light, they also gained a huge double shot of taxpayers' money. The first was through the Regional Forest Agreement, a government-industry plan which from 1998 on gave Tasmania \$76m of federal funds to spend on the establishment of plantations and associated infrastructure. The second was the federal tax breaks that established tree plantations as one of corporate Australia's favourite forms of tax minimisation from the late 1990s.

The Tasmanian government, which a century ago paid people to shoot the Tasmanian tiger, now provided every incentive to destroy old-growth forest. Gunns paid only paltry royalties to Forestry Tasmania for crown forests, then made record profits reducing them to woodchips. On private land, it made a second profit from the taxpayer-subsidised plantations with which clearfelled native forests were replaced.

In this way, forestry resources began to be systematically handed over to a single company's shareholders, those of Gunns - the profits of which Eddie Rouse had sought to protect with bribery in 1989.

The present Gunns board has among its directors former associates of the late Rouse. The 1991 royal commission found that present director David McQuestin, whose friendship with Rouse it characterised as "obsequious", was not "unlawfully involved as a principal offender", although his "compliance with Rouse's direction in the matter was "highly improper" - a "glaring breach of the requisite standards of commercial morality". Former Liberal premier Robin Gray is also a director of Gunns: the royal commission found that he "knew of and was involved with Rouse in Rouse's attempt to bribe Cox", and that while his conduct was not unlawful, it was "improper, and grossly so". John Gay, Gunns' managing director in 1989, now its chairman and CEO, was cleared by the royal commission of any involvement with the bribery attempt.

Peter Hay, a prominent political scientist and an adviser to the 1989-91 Field Labor government that replaced Gray's Liberal government, recently described the Bacon Labor government as "a Gray Liberal - government under

another name - to the point that Gray gave 'none-too-subtle instructions' at the last election that voters should return the Bacon government, rather than vote for the Liberals".

Gunns' shares were languishing at \$1.40 when the Bacon government came to power in August 1998. Its subsequent growth was dizzying. Within four years, it had recorded an increase of 199% in profits, with another 39% increase in 2002-03. With the acquisition of two rival companies, Gunns took control of more than 85% of logging in Tasmania. Five years after Bacon won government, Gunns was worth more than \$1bn, with shares regularly trading in excess of \$12. It had become both the largest logging company in Australia and the largest hardwood woodchip exporter in the world, its product flooding in from the state's fallen forests.

And so, at the moment Tasmania was acquiring a global reputation as an island of exceptional beauty, the forces that would destroy much of the island's unique natural world had been unleashed. This sad irony, denied in Tasmania, did not however escape the more astute of the world's media: over the past year, there have been major features in *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, on the BBC, in *Le Figaro*, *Sddeutsch Zeitung*, and *The New York Times* - mounting evidence that what is happening in Tasmania is now being seen as an environmental catastrophe of global significance. Yet what might be read about Tasmania's forests in New York or Paris is not information found easily in Hobart or Launceston. Apart from a few honourable exceptions, a generally craven Tasmanian media seems rarely to question or challenge the woodchipping industry. Necessary fictions are repeated until they become accepted as truth - that, for example, the industry's main concern is sawlogs, when even Forestry Tasmania has been recently forced to admit that sawlogs are chipped, and have been since 1972.

At the same time, the woodchipping industry spends up big on marketing, promotions and advertising, duchessing whoever it deems necessary. The Bacon government combines its considerable power in a small society with a large and ever-growing team of spin doctors employed on lucrative contracts to push soft stories of forestry success and ensure local media don't run stories hostile to old growth logging.

When Lindsay Tuffin's maverick web site, [www.tasmaniantimes.com](http://www.tasmaniantimes.com), ran a translation of *Le Figaro's* feature on the destruction of Tasmania's forests, Tuffin was rung by the government's communications director, Ken Jeffries, and threatened with legal action by the government for defamation if he didn't take the translation down. Tuffin refused. He and *Le Figaro* continue to wait for writs.

When Bacon first came to power in Tasmania, one of his most vaunted initiatives was a consultative process known as "Tasmania Together", which, he declared, would deliver a blueprint for the island's future that he would honour. Community leaders were chosen to front the process, and at public meetings around the island, they debated what Tasmania might become. They discovered that Tasmanians overwhelmingly wanted old-growth logging ended and, accordingly, Tasmania Together set a benchmark to end this practice in high conservation value forests by January 1, 2003. Independent polling commissioned by the Wilderness Society confirmed that 69% of Tasmanians supported this benchmark.

But in spite of the public's clear desire and Bacon's own promise, the government refused to contemplate any changes to existing forestry practices. Two high-profile community leaders, Anna Pafitis and Gerard Castles, were forced out because of their public opposition to what they regarded as government subversion of the process. Castles, a corporate communications consultant, wrote an article in *The Mercury* explaining his position. On the same day I met a prominent Tasmanian politician who flew into a rage at the mention of Castles' name. "The fucking little cunt is finished," he said in front of me and my 12-year-old daughter. "He will never work here again."

So it goes in the island-state. Castles' work is now entirely outside of Tasmania. To question, to comment adversely, is to invite the possibility of ostracism and unemployment, and the state is full of those who pay a high price for their opinion on the forests, the blackballed multiplying with the blackened stumps. It is commonplace to meet people in various positions and businesses too frightened to speak publicly of their concerns about forestry practices because of the adverse consequences they perceive this might have for their careers and businesses. In consequence of the forest battle, a subtle fear has entered Tasmanian public life; it stifles dissent, avoids truth.

It also obscures the reality that logging old-growth brings little wealth and few jobs to struggling, impoverished rural communities. According to Graham Green, of Timber Workers for Forests, in 1980 there were 205 registered sawmills employing 3000 Tasmanians - today there are less than 40 sawmills employing 1350 people. Under Gunns' tendering system, many contractors are squeezed hard, and a large proportion of their income goes on servicing debt for the heavy machinery necessary for their work. While the industry boasts of its wealth creation, such wealth is concentrated in one company, Gunns, and while it makes its profits primarily in Tasmania, the great majority of Gunns' shares are owned by mainland institutions. It has been estimated that less than 15% of Gunns' profits remain in the island, where the largest individual shareholder is John Gay himself.

Tasmania itself remains the poorest state, with the highest levels of unemployment, and 36% of its population dependent on government welfare. You're unlikely to see Mercedes in Maydena, or Saabs in Geeveston.

Perhaps, predictably, one of the last defences seized on by politicians on six-figure salaries is that they stand solidly with the working class in this battle. Paul Lennon's routine claim that 10,000 jobs are at stake if old-growth logging is ended exaggerates figures by including the great majority of forestry workers employed not in old-growth logging, but in softwood logging and milling, in plantation maintenance and regrowth logging, and in making paper out of imported pulp. Such assertions avoid the truth: jobs are disappearing in old-growth logging not because of conservationists, but because of mechanisation. The Hampshire woodchip mill near Burnie - the biggest in the southern hemisphere - employs just 12 people. A recent report in *The Australian Financial Review* revealed the Tasmanian industry in its entirety had shed more than 1200 jobs since 1997.

Like Lennon's previously expansive claims - of, for example, eco-vandalism in the southern forests in 2002 (no proof ever produced); or that ending old-growth logging in Western Australia had left more than 4000 people unemployed (categorically refuted by the West Australian government) - I have seen no evidence for the figure of 10,000 jobs. It is double the number (5430 people) that even allies such as the head of the National Association of Forest Industries, Kate Carnell, claim for the entire Tasmanian industry, and triple the general industry figure

(3200) given in the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data. Old-growth logging - as separate from the rest of the much larger forestry industry - is estimated by Timber Workers for Forests to employ only 320 people.

There is in all this a constant thread: the Bacon government's real mates are not workers, but millionaires. Behind the smokescreen of statistics, beyond the down-home cant of "timber folk" peddled by the woodchippers' propagandists, is a simple, wretched truth: great areas of Australia's remnant wild lands are being reduced to a landscape of battlefields in order to make a handful of very rich people even richer. Yet this giving away of such an extraordinary public resource as Tasmania's forests, propped up by the taxpayer, while making a quick buck for the big end of town, now threatens Tasmania's broader economic prospects.

A growing weight of financial analysis suggests that the economics of plantations (with which native forests are being replaced), dependent on global pulp prices rising, are not assured but are a huge gamble for Tasmania, whose government, as the AFR put it, has "tied the state's economic future to the success of Gunns and its tree farms".

Key industries such as tourism and fine foods and wines trade as much on the island's pristine image as they do on the products they sell. There is growing concern in all these industries - in which job growth is concentrated - at the relentless damage being done to Tasmania's name by images of smouldering forest coupes.

Tourist operators become ever more embarrassed at explaining away endless clearfells, processions of log trucks, the strange vistas of single-species plantations. Scenic flight pilots take routes that avoid the scenes of devastation that run up to the very boundaries of world heritage areas. Those who use the forests for other products and businesses - the boatbuilders, the furniture makers - find it more difficult to get the timber they need. Tasmania's unique leatherwood honey industry faces great problems as the last stands of accessible leatherwood trees are destroyed. Organic farms suffer because of the use of poisons.

Furniture-makers such as the acclaimed Kevin Perkins argue for an export furniture industry, marrying the talents of the island's renowned designers with Tasmania's unique timber, selectively logged from low conservation value old-growth forests. He is one of many who argues that selective logging, properly done, can maintain the integrity of a forest as a whole, leaving it intact in all its beauty and ecological diversity, employing more people rather than less, and having a bias toward smaller, locally owned businesses rather than a monopoly.

"The wood would cost more to obtain," he says, "but it should cost more, and we should treat it in the manner of precious stones. A tiger myrtle veneer should cost as much as diamonds because it is even rarer and, in my view, more valuable. People ought to be paying a small fortune for a Tasmanian-made myrtle dining table in Berlin or Boston." Such a table fetches \$20,000: the same timber as woodchips sells for a few cents.

One era's diamonds is an earlier epoch's coal: the Bacon government's current enthusiasms include finding a business partner with which to build an electricity power station fired with trees from native forests.

It is little wonder that many Tasmanians now worry that the woodchippers' greed destroys not only their natural heritage, but distorts their parliament, deforms their polity, crows their media and stunts their society. And perhaps it is for that reason that the battle for forests in Tasmania is as much about free speech and democracy - about a people's right to exercise some control over their destiny, about their desire to have a better, freer society - as it is about wild lands.

The fate of the forests long ago ceased to be a green issue in Tasmania, and has come to be seen as an issue about Tasmania's future; an issue that has joined in opposition a myriad of ordinary Tasmanians of all political persuasions and backgrounds.

Since woodchipping began 31 years ago, Tasmanians have known the unspeakable sadness of great forests of mystery transformed into ash. For 31 years, they have watched as one more extraordinary place after another of their country has been sacrificed to the woodchippers. Beautiful places, holy places, lost not only to them, but forever. Tasmanians have lived the woodchippers' deceit all their lives and have borne dumb witness to the great lie that delivers wealth to a handful elsewhere, poverty to many of them, and death to their future. And at the end of 31 years, the majority of Tasmanians want an answer to just one question:

How can this rape of Tasmania be allowed to continue?

*[article originally appeared in the December 2003 issue of the Bulletin; republished here with permission of the author]*