

The North-Eastern Naturalist

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Patrons: Mr. B. A. Farquhar O.A.M.

President: President: Ross Coad, P.O. Box 275, Scottsdale 7260. phone: 63 523269
mob. 0417 190046

Vice President: Mike Douglas ph. 6356 1243

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

Editor: Louise Brooker, 33 Westwood Street, Bridport 7262. ph. 0417 149 244
e.mail: brooker@vision.net.au

Committee: Denny Walter, Revel Munro, Pam Bretz.

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.

AUGUST 11

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING : BRIDPORT SCHOOL HALL.

Guest Speaker, Brigid Morrison, who is doing a PhD. on the ecology of the salt-marsh and the effects of rising sea levels. Meeting: 11am. Lunch at 12.30 : bring lunch to share, some heating available. Talk begins at 2pm. Contact person: Lou 0417 149 244

SEPTEMBER 8

THE QUARRY RESERVE - BRIDPORT.

Easy walk of 5 to 6 kms through a patch of bush that has potential for field naturalist and recreational activities. You may be shocked by what you see. Meet 10 am at the car park opposite Southern Shipping just over the Brid River Bridge. Leader : Mike Douglas 6356 1243

OCTOBER 13

ORCHIDS ON MT. CAMERON.

After last year's fires, everything looks set for a great year for orchids. Debbie has noticed heaps of leaves and we have a wonderful opportunity to follow up on our previous observations . Meet at 10 am at the junction of Tomahawk Road and Old Boobyalla Road -10 kms west of Gladstone and 12 kms east of Tomahawk turnoff. Leader : Debbie Searle.

NOVEMBER 10

A LOOK AT PART OF THE RATTLER RANGE.

There is the threat of Forestry / Gunns cutting a road through the Mt. Victoria Forest Reserve. We want to see this amazing piece of rainforest one more time. A quite easy "there and back" walk on fairly flat ground. Meet at the junction of Aah Foo Road and Mt. Paris Dam Road [signposted] 12kms from Branxholm or 8kms from Weldborough at 10am. 4WD not essential but it would be good to have as many as possible. Leaders : Lesley and Revel—63542254.

news and reports

Check out our new web address. Learn how to navigate it and add to it at the coming AGM.

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

Federation Get together

The Spring Federation Get-together will be hosted by the Launceston Field Nats. Club and held on the East coast on the 16th, 17th and 18th November. The accommodation venue is the Seaview Holiday Park, Bicheno and outings will be held to the Douglas Apsley Park and the Winifred Curtis Reserve. Contact Louise if you are planning to attend.

We have been advised that the TFNC, who are scheduled to host the Federation Get –Together in **March 2008**, have booked Tiger Hut, Liawenee, Central Plateau for the weekend 14-16 March. This is an exceptionally interesting area and an opportunity to camp here and study the area is **special**. Details early next year.

Lectures on Tasmanian Devil Disease.

In partnership with the State Government and the Tasmanian Devil Facial Tumour Disease Program, the University has organised a series of free public lectures, two of which have been delivered already. The aim is to provide comprehensive updates on the state of knowledge of the fatal and infectious disease that is threatening the devil population, and what is being done to save the species in the wild.

The final lecture in the series will be delivered on Wednesday the 12th September at the Queen Victoria Museum Inveresk Theatre at 6pm. It is titled "Insurance Strategies and Wild Management".

Dr. Steven Smith, the manager of the DFTD Program, will deliver an overview of the program and Professor Hamish McCallum will talk about wild management of the devil on the Forestier Peninsular and the possibility of using offshore islands.

Farms in the North East.

[observations made by Lesley Nicklason]

In the Pyengana valley there are 16 farms. Of these, 5 have been completely converted to *eucalyptus nitens* plantation, 6 have been partly converted, a further 2 have private timber reserve status but have not yet converted - leaving just 3 farms in that beautiful valley that have resisted the advances of the private timber companies.

The valley has lost 5 families - the houses standing empty surrounded by tree crops, the soil and water contaminated by chemicals - the narrow country roads choked with log trucks which place the lives of road users in danger every day.

This is happening everywhere in the North East.

Traffic on North East Roads.

[Lesley's comments again]

The current situation on northeast Tasmania's narrow winding roads is extremely dangerous. On the descent into Weldborough there are 7 corners where it is completely impossible for the trucks to stay on their side of the road and many more sections of the road (including Weld Hill Pass) where cars are forced off the bitumen in order to fit past the trucks. As logging has continued into winter on the slopes of the Blue Tier the road sides are now muddy with deep ruts from the truck tyres - exacerbating the danger. Recently erected signs have partly addressed the problem by warning motorists but it is a fact that up to 20 trucks per day take up the whole road on at least 7 occasions - totalling 140 potential accidents daily.

Macro-invertebrate Identification Workshop.

Thankyou Debbie Searle for running the laboratory session in June. Some of us had our loyalties challenged that day for it was the BIG MARCH against the Pulp Mill. Never-the-less, ten people attended the session and learned how to distinguish between different groups of water-bugs, for example caddis fly larvae [mudeyes] and to separate out some families. Once that is learned with the use of a microscope it is possible to pick them out with a good naked eye.

Four members of the Launceston Field Nats. took part in the workshop. Club members have been waterwatching at two sites at Skemps Reserve near Nunamara since October 2005. [Northern Tasmanian Waterwatch Newsletter]

Water Bugs again.

Due to popular demand there will be another waterbug training day using microscopes. Deb has invited all Field Nats. to the session, scheduled for Monday the 3rd September, during Adult Learners Week, at the Uni of Tas Newnham Campus. It will be in the Science and Aquaculture building which is in School St, near the football oval. Please feel free to pass this invitation on to other interested people .

The session will focus on using microscopes and keys to identify different families and groups of aquatic macroinvertebrates (waterbugs). With some families, once you learned them with a microscope, you can transfer that knowledge to the field with a good naked eye. This can help you to refine a river health assessment at a site using a method called Signal. Signal is more accurate if you can identify ,say, Leptophlebiidae and Baetidae mayflies rather than just record that mayflies were present.

Examining waterbugs down a microscope is a fascinating and beautiful area as you focus on all of the different body parts, for example, gills can look like tufts, leaves, feathers, long hairs, pearls, worms or pages of a book.

Morning tea, microscopes, reference books etc will be provided. Please bring along any books , e.g copies of the Waterbug Book and also fine tweezers if you have them.

Contact Debbie Searle , NRM North , Water Monitoring Team Leader on 03 6352 6536 or 0429 318 554. Email: dsearle@dorset.tas.gov.au

Cube Rock Outing

Minimal attendance [3] = minimalist report !!

Cube Rock, a huge square block of granite on the sky-line above Little Blue Lake, South Mount Cameron. Huge masses of granite covered in mosses and lichen. Dry and crunchy. Wet and slippery. Smaller boulders in the dry sclerophyll forest to walk on and around. Landscaped to perfection.

Stopping to look at the views through the top-growth of the *Eucalyptus amygdalina*. Then there it is just across the way from us. A massive single rock with a tiny topknot of vegetation growing from a hidden cleft.

Mike tells us about a time, in his youth, when with a friend they climbed the rock, they took coils of rope up the mountain and spent some time throwing the rope up until they managed to get it over the rock, to then clamber up the verticle smooth side onto the top.

news and reports

An interesting plant found growing in the shade at the base of the rock. A sprawling cress-like plant we hadn't seen before, it was *Rorippa gigantea* the long-style bittercress, a member of the Brassicaceae family.

How to Get Rid of European Wasps.

[extracted from Eucryphia, the newsletter of the Australian Plants Society Tasmania]

An APS member describes this method first reported in the Examiner—it only works in autumn !! It seems while wasps prefer sweet sugary foods most times, in autumn they gather meat to feed their larvae during winter.

You need a large plastic drink bottle, a handful of cheap pet-food mince and a bottle of 'Ant-rid'. Cut a large hole in the side of the plastic bottle, mix the mince with the contents of the Ant-rid bottle, and drop the mixture inside the bottle. Hang the bottle, by a string through the screw-on tap in a place easily accessible to the wasps but away from areas frequented by people.

Wasps will enter the bottle attracted by the meat. Some will be killed by the ant-rid they consume with the meat and die in the bottle, but others will carry the poisoned meat back to the nest where it will kill the larvae, and any other wasps, that eat it. Ant-rid is environmentally friendly and poses little threat to other creatures.

Chile's missing lake.

[Source: The Weekend Australian 14th/15th July]

I was particularly interested to read the story about a lake in Chile which abruptly disappeared.

Park rangers in the Bernardo O'Higgins National Park were stunned during a routine visit in late May this year to find a forty metre deep crater where a large lake had been a few months earlier. The area is extremely remote, 2000km south of the capital, Santiago, and can take up to three weeks to access.

Experts are hypothesizing about possible causes related to global warming and seismic activity. One glaciologist suggests the cause may be a phenomenon known as glacial lake outburst floods. As glaciers retreat, glacial lakes form behind natural dams of ice or moraine. These relatively weak dams can be breached suddenly, causing the lake to drain. The lake is fed by two glaciers and both of them are receding, so the water level of the lake could have risen with the increasing flow from the melting glaciers.

Long Point Reserve.

The Tas. Land Conservancy has begun an ambitious project to restore the woodlands at Long Point. Their volunteers will plant 5000 seedlings this year, including eleven woodland species grown from seed collected locally.

The transformation of the reserve has also seen the number of threatened plant species found at the reserve rise to three, with the recent discovery of the rare saltmarsh plant *Wilsonia rotundifolia*.

This joins another rare saltmarsh species, *Wilsonia humilis*, and an endangered woodland shrub, the clasping leaf heath, *Mela-leuca pustulata*.

Many of us saw the reserve in the summer, and will appreciate the huge task required to restore it from paddock to nature reserve. If anyone is interested in becoming a volunteer, or even going once to plant seedlings or remove gorse, they could phone

the TLC office on 6225 1399 or send an Email to :
volunteer@tasland.org.au

[from the Tasmanian Land Conservancy Newsletter, Issue 13]

Brown Mountain Reserve.

The 86 ha Brown Mountain Reserve, rising to 745m and encompassing Ironstone Creek, is close to the northern boundary of Mt. Field National Park in the Derwent Valley.

The Tas. Land Conservancy is in the final stages of accepting the transfer of this reserve. The Brown Mountain Association's members approached the TLC to manage the reserve, thinking the TLC would be the best long-term custodians for the reserve.

Wedge-tailed eagles are known to have nested on the reserve in the past and it is hoped that the *Eucalyptus obliqua* and *E. regnans* forest will again host this magnificent species.

The protection of the reserve dates back to 1994 when three local residents decided to raise the \$60 000 purchase price to protect it from logging.

[from the Tasmanian Land Conservancy Newsletter, Issue 13]

The Case FOR Weilangta

Court cases are difficult, time consuming and slow. The Weilangta case began four years ago. It centred on the threat posed by logging in the Weilangta Forest to three state and federally listed endangered species: the Weilangta Stag beetle, the migratory Swift Parrot and Tasmania's Wedge-Tailed Eagle.

This important forest opposite Maria Island on the east coast and less than 50km from the city, is also home to 34 endemic plants species, eleven of them threatened, as well as 47 bird species.

After twelve months in court, Justice Marshall's decision was a landmark for threatened species everywhere. He ruled that logging in Weilangta was having a significant impact on all three species and was therefore illegal because it was not in accordance with the Regional Forest Agreement [RFA]

Forestry Tasmania has lodged an appeal against every aspect of the Weilangta judgement and this appeal will be heard in August. Adding to the rising political momentum on the forests, the second review of the RFA is due by November 2007. The Resource Planning and Development Commission did the last review but its anybody's guess who will do it this time.

All you should know, but wouldn't want to know about ... **ATRAZINE.**

Atrazine is a herbicide manufactured by the Swiss company Syngenta [formerly Siba Geigy]. Six hundred tonnes of it is used annually in industrial scale logging and cropping. If the Federal Government achieves its 20:20 vision for forestry that figure could go up to five thousand tonnes by 2020. What's important to know is that use of this herbicide was banned by the European Union in 2005, and the US Environment Protection Authority identified it as a "potent human carcinogen" in 2000.

Most countries have a "human health level" which triggers an alert for chemical contamination. The HHL for atrazine in the EU before it was banned was 0.5 parts per billion. The US level is 3ppb. In Australia the HHL for atrazine is a whopping 40 ppb.

Yet, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority which is responsible for registering and regulating agricultural and veterinary chemicals says "atrazine poses no undue hazard to most users". Its worth noting that this authority was funded solely, at least in 2005, by the chemical companies it regulates.

So the APVMA permits 80 times more atrazine in our water than the EU permitted before banning it and 13 times more than the US allows. As no systematic water testing is done after spraying and rainfall, the health alert is largely irrelevant.

Many studies have found atrazine to be an endocrine disruptor, meaning it interferes with hormonal function.

A couple of weeks ago in Launceston, at a forum organised by TAP—Tasmanians Against Pulp Mills, Tyrone Hayes, a professor of integrated biology at the University of California, Berkeley, told the three hundred strong audience about his laboratory findings. He found atrazine chemically castrates and feminizes wildlife and reduces immune function in both wildlife and laboratory rodents. It also induces breast and prostate cancer, retards mammary development, and induces abortion in laboratory rodents. Given atrazine's solubility in water, aquatic animals such as fish and amphibians are at great risk. Studies in human populations suggest that atrazine poses similar threats to humans. Men who live in areas where Atrazine is used have measured 0.1 ppb in their urine. Men who administer it have levels 24 000 times the level that castrates and feminizes frogs.

Hayes claims on his website www.atrazinelovers.com that already 60% of all amphibians are in decline and a third are threatened or endangered. He outlined the results of his studies which found atrazine to be chemically castrating frogs at an exposure of 400 times less than the APVMSA's health level. He was offered \$US2million to continue his research "in a private setting" but declined, so he could continue his trials from his own laboratory so as to keep his findings in the public sphere.

He took a very public stand in Tasmania refusing to drink any of our water.

Atrazine is highly mobile and travels in rainwater. Huge quantities of it return to the earth in rainfall and snow. This way, it can travel as far as 1000 kilometres from its point of application, and end up contaminating even pristine habitats. Atrazine has persisted in groundwater in France even though it hasn't been applied there for fifteen years. Thus, if we stopped using it today, it would be another whole generation before we were free of it.

So why are we still using it in Tasmania despite all the evidence and despite the fact that in many places it is being replaced successfully by Roundup? From time to time, atrazine contamination makes headlines in Tasmania. In 2004 Alison Bleaney, a general practitioner from St. Helens went public for the first time with research she said could suggest a link between increased levels of cancer in the region and increased use of atrazine and simazine on eucalypt plantations. The incidence of cancers relating to endocrine disrupters like digestive tract cancers, breast, prostate and cervical cancer all showed a statistical increase since 2002.

Bleaney, who shared the podium at the TAP forum with Tyrone Hayes, says "it's a bit late to start talking about a precautionary principle after these chemicals have been tossed around the state for the last ten years". Nevertheless, Alison works tirelessly to lay bare both the complexity and the risks associated with the use of chemicals in catchments. She has shown in the Journal of Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors Incorporated [Volume 3 No. 3] the causes and consequences of dysfunction on the part of those responsible for human and environmental health. The three hundred people at the forum at which she spoke voted unanimously to recommend that the Government disallow any further use of atrazine in Tasmania.

After being disturbed [yet again] about the health of our water, I decided to ask a few people what they thought about the fact that atrazine had been found in our water at various times in dangerous levels. In fact I found a huge degree of innocence - no I'll call it ignorance. "What is Atrazine?" many of them asked.

References: The Australian Financial Review Wed. 2 March, 2005.
: The Weekend Australian Financial Review May 7-8, 2005.
: www.atrazinelovers.com
: Journal of Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors Incorporated [Volume 3 No. 3]