The North-Eastern Naturalist

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Web address: http://www.netasfieldnats.org.au

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.

MAY 9

MUTUAL TO MOORINA.
A gentle 5km walk on a marked track along the banks of the beautiful Ringarooma River. Meet at 10am at the Mutual Road turnoff 1km from Derby on the Tasman Highway to Winnaleah. This is a one-way walk and a car shuttle will be arranged.
Grade: Easy. Contact: Louise Brooker 6356 0381

JUNE 13

LAIR ROCK - MT. CAMERON RANGE
A 1½ hour walk to Lair Rock, the biggest rock on the Mt. Cameron Range on a marked track. Grade: easy/medium. Meet on Waterhouse Road approx. 57 kms east of Bridport and 3.5km West from the Gladstone Store. [yellow tape on tree]
Contact: Mike Douglas 6356 1243.

JULY 11

AUSTRALIA HILL - BLUE TIER
A 2½ hour easy loop walk; includes relics of the Summit and Compere Mines and petroglyphs on rocks across the summit of the hill. Be prepared for **weather**—the area is exposed.
Meet 10am Poimena. Contact: Lou Brooker 6356 0381

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Outing to Skemp Field Study Centre, 14.03.09

Ten NE Field Nats met at Myrtle Park on March 14th, a balmy autumn morning, for a day at the John Skemp Field Centre. For most, it was a first visit to the centre, which was built in 1988 by Launceston Field Naturalists on land bequeathed to them by John Skemp, himself an ardent naturalist, writer and artist.

We were greeted by a thoughtful phone call from John Simmons from LFN just checking that we had evaded the burglar alarm and that all was well. Indeed, all **was** well; the kettle was on for morning coffee and we were admiring the excellent facilities, including various ingenious modes of mouse-proofing. Warnings from Leonie and Adrian that the St Patrick's Day celebrations had already been washed out in Westbury by a severe storm did not deter us from lingering and pouring over the various maps of walks on the property. Besides, the sun was shining.

Funny how quickly the weather can change in Tasmania! Approaching black clouds spurred us into action and we set off, without a map, or a plan. Ten minutes of wandering aimlessly saw us rectify that and we chose to follow the waterfall track. As the property was originally a farm, there are still remnants of old buildings, an orchard and various exotic trees; the group spent some time "poking about" and wondering what had been what in times past. Down the track a way, a single *Eucalyptus brookeriana* was of interest for its unusual spreading growth habit.

From open paddocks the track now took us through a forested area, a mixture of eucalypts, myrtles, acacias and some impressive Dicksonia antarcticas. Winding down steeply we reached the waterfall and creek – it had obviously been a dry summer! Despite some fairly recent rain there was little evidence of fungi, one notable find was a spectacular red sea-star stinkhorn. The botanical features of the day were the berries. *Sambucus gaudichaudiana,* the native elderberry, with its edible, but not very tasty white currant-like berries was prolific. Down by the river was the dainty *Aristotelia penduncularis* with its heart berries less evident, perhaps because of the dry season. Other berries seen were *Coprosma quadrifida, Solanum laciniatum*, *Tasmannia lanceolata*, some spectacular *Dianella tasmanica* and *Drymophila cyanocarpa* (native solomon's seal).

Our timing was perfect. The threatening clouds began dripping large splats as we hurried along the last few metres of the track. By the time we were comfortably settled under the verandah for lunch, the storm struck. There was no choice but to scurry inside and watch a spectacular thunder and lightening show for the next half hour. Fortunately there was plenty of interesting historical reading and photographic material to fill in an hour or so after lunch, by which time the rain has eased and we decided to wend our way home after a relaxed and enjoyable day.

Report by Jill van den Bosch.

The following are excerpts from a foreword to the last of John Skemp's books *My Birds*. It is written by T.E. Burns, and gives a little insight into the man.

"John Rowland Skemp, B.SC., Tasmanian naturalist and author, retired to the mountain valley farm which his father and uncle had won from primevil forest.

…. "soon he and his friend Herbert J. King began to record the observations they made together, John with his sketching pencil and Herbert with his colour camera. Out of this experience arose a desire to write a book about the bird life of the valley which would be a companion volume to his *Memories of Myrtle Bank* and *Letters to Ann."*

Unfortunately it wasn't possible to find a publisher and it was twenty years later, on his deathbed, that John attempted to salvage the great work he had planned.

"By his will, J.R. Skemp sought to preserve the mountain valley for posterity by placing it in the hands of the Launceston Field Naturalist Club, hoping that the descendants of the birds he loved would ever find a home therein."

Members of the club have put thousands of hours of voluntary work into the centre. They have extended the many habitats in the valley with their plantings; they have built and marked tracks; they regularly take water samples for analysis and they have built and now maintain the Field Study Centre as a comfortable place for themselves and visitors. It is a credit to the Club and a great example of how members of a club can work together.

The Field Study Centre is available for hire: John Elliott, the club's secretary is also the bookings manager at 6344 9303.

Waterhouse Lakes / Conservation Area.

[some notes made in preparation for the outing on 14.02.09.]

Reservation
1996 as a Conservation Area.
On the Register of the National Estate for its heathland, wetlands, species diversity, rare plant values and aboriginal values [shell middens, lithic scatters, and stone quarry]

Management plan/issues
Relatively recent 2001. Lots of local input especially from "traditional users". Problems include hunting, shooting, making new tracks.

Wetlands
Build up of dunes at the coast impedes the drainage of the plains—largest body of water in excess of 50 hectares. Changeable in nature due to channel digging to drain farming land, dune movement.

Read from management plan [page 23]

Little Waterhouse Lake
Protected by an international agreement RAMSAR significant waterfowl habitat - nine other sites in Tasmania
Criteria : 1] it is a particularly good representative example of a natural or near natural wetland, common to more than one biological region.
2]it is of special value for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a region because of the quality and peculiarities of its flora and fauna.

Blackman's Lagoon—fishing allowed
Galaxiella pusilla—Dwarf galaxias - rare
Lotoria raniformis - vulnerable—prob. most imp. site in the state for the green and gold.

Flora scheduled under *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 w*hich may be found near the wetlands. All are classified as rare.

Wilsonia rotundifolia	Round leafed wilsonia
Lepidosperma viscidum	Sticky sword sedge
Microtis orbicularis	Swamp onion orchid
Potamogeton pectinatis	Fennel pondweed
Schoenus brevifolius	Zig-zag or short leaf bog rush
Tricostularia pauciflora	Needle bog rush
Triglochin minutissimum	Tiny arrow grass
Wolfia australis	Smallest flowering plant in the world
Hibbertia virgata	Growing only in the north-east
Pultanea palaecea	Only found at Croppies Point, Bridport and Little Waterhouse Lake

Waterhouse Lagoons. 14.02.09

It was exciting looking inside the boxed kit which I picked up from Debbie Searle a few days before our outing to the Lagoons at Waterhouse. It contained scoop nets, sieves, trays for water and specimens, ice cube containers, plastic spoons with holes in them, pipettes and magnifiers. One of the very best things in the kit was the reference "The Waterbug Book" by John Gooderham and Edward Tsyrlin. As well as providing an identification guide to the animals that inhabit our fresh waters with easy-to-use keys to all the macro-invertebrate groups, this book also contains anecdotal and behavioural information and notes about habitat, ecology and natural history of species. It's a gem !

Reactions were mixed when it was suggested we go off and get water samples and bring them back for observation and identification. The edges of the lagoon were pretty boggy and the risk of drowning in the mud looked pretty high. This sorted the sheep from the goats; luckily there were a couple of goats who were prepared to get 'down and dirty', and samples were duly returned for observation.

The mood changed as soon as we looked in the water. There was excitement, especially for those whose first time it was to look closely in the water. Beetles and nymphs darted everywhere. There were diving beetles, water-boatmen, backswimmers, mites, damsel-fly larva, caddis-fly larva, snails and a couple of pea shells. The diversity was amazing.

So for a couple of hours people embarked on their own journeys of discovery. Some used the keys to try and find out WHICH damsel-fly larva, while others did intense studies on one particular type of water-bug.

The caddis fly larvae attracted the most attention because of the many different types of buildings they construct to protect themselves throughout their acquatic laval life. Caddis flies are probably best known by fishing enthusiasts who tie lures to resemble the adult fly and the laval stage. Ecologically, they are an important source of food for fishes while scientifically they are an indicator of water health.

They belong in the Order Trichoptera. [from Greek *trich* - "hair" and *ptera* - "wings"] Having hairy wings, they are closely related to Lepidoptera - the moths and butterflies. In Australia there are around 500 species of caddis fly and they are placed into 26 families. Only one family is marine.

The adult caddis flies resemble a dark winged moth living in the vicinity of creeks, streams, lakes or swamps, hiding in the vegetation during the daytime and flying about more in the darkness. The moth stage is much shorter than that of the laval stage which can last for anything from a few months to a year. The adults' job is simply to reproduce; they do not feed, and only ingest fluids. They have been seen in mating swarms which fly away when disturbed. They are awkward fliers and may only travel short distances. Their eggs are deposited in the water where they hatch and, as larvae, begin feeding on algae and diatoms. Some consume micro-organisms and some are fiercely predacious.

Now we get to the most interesting bit…..the building of shelters. Caddis flies are considered to be underwater architects because they can build intricate cases - or caddis, to retreat into for safety. Our text categorises them as carpenters, stonemasons, and spinners, according to their choice of building materials. This choice is very much influenced by what is available and the speed of water-flow in their habitat. For example, here, where there isn't any flow of water and an abundance of plant matter available, they construct their cases from sticks or lengths of stalk cut to precision and glued together with silk. In the family of Glossosomatids the cases are formed from hard wearing sand and gravel which need to withstand fast flowing water and the odd rolling pebble. The Helicopsychid makes a case from small grains of sand that looks like a small snail shell—complete with spiral. There is a family of free-living caddis fly which use silk to construct nets in which to catch smaller animals and detritus that drift in the current. These nets are sticky and held in shape by vegetation. The larvae spend a lot of time in a lean-to attached to the side of the net.
All caddis flies use silk to construct their cases and some use only silk. The silk is spun from an organ on the underside of the head called the labium and can vary in colour from cream and golden to dark brown and black.

Adult caddis fly. Cased caddis fly Free-living caddis fly

References: The Waterbug Book by John Gooderham & Edward Tsyrlin.
Australian Museum Online: www.bugwise.net.au