



# North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

## The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

Number 194: September 2016

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**MISSION STATEMENT:** It is the mission of this club to encourage the study, appreciation and preservation of our natural and cultural environment, the animals, plants, geology and landforms, including those of the coastal and marine areas in the North East region of Tasmania.

**From the President:** With the AGM—our social event of the year—behind us, we can look forward to another year of exploring the natural and cultural environment of this area.

Many thanks to Lou Brooker for hosting the AGM again. I think we all went away inspired by Liz Znidarsic's enthusiasm and passion for her study of those cryptic little birds, the rails, and look forward to seeing another presentation by Liz.

As always, we welcome suggestions from members for new places to explore and offers to lead an outing. Contact Lou or me with any thoughts.

A warm welcome is extended to new members Ruth Cuff and Julie Rundle, and to Helen and Denis Richards from Latrobe; we look forward to meeting you at one of our future activities.

### Photos of north-eastern Tasmania



Pyengana Valley – photo by Lesley Nicklason



North-East Forest Snail - photo by Ross Coad

# Program for September–December 16

*NB Please read the notice at the bottom of this page about the cancellation process*

## **SEPTEMBER 10: CUBE ROCK - MT. CAMERON RANGE**

Scenic outing to Cube Rock where the endemic granite heath should be flowering. A walk on a good track, steadily uphill for two kilometres with some steep rocky sections near the top. Meet at 10.00 am at the Little Blue Lake car park on the Gladstone Road [signposted], or if you wish to carpool, meet at the Pavilion car park, Bridport, at 8.30 am.

Leader: Mike Douglas 6356 1243.

## **OCTOBER 8: ROY SKABO'S BINALONG BAY**

Roy will lead this outing to his favourite parts of Binalong Bay and surrounds. The focus will be on botany. There will be the opportunity for staying overnight/camping. Meet at 10.00 am at the junction of Binalong Bay Road and The Gardens Road, 2 km south-west of Binalong Bay. Some accommodation is available for Saturday night. Explorations on Sunday morning as well.

Leader: Lou Brooker (contact Lou on 0417 149 244 if accommodation is required).

## **NOVEMBER 12: ANSON'S BAY**

Exploring the tracks with Jenny Bicanic. Meet 10.00 am. Directions: Turn right at the fork at the bottom of the hill entering the bay. At the next fork, turn left into Melaleuca Place. Look for the gate on the left that has a sign reading 'Bicanic'.

Camping welcome. BYO everything.

Leader: Jenny 0429 041 580.

## **DECEMBER 10: GROOM RIVER TRAIL - BLUE TIER**

Join Lesley Nicklason on a walk that starts at Crystal Hill, drops to the Groom River and follows it to join the Big Tree track. 2–3 hours walking time. There's a steep section down to the river, so moderate fitness is required, but only a steady pace is needed to complete the walk in good time. Could have afternoon tea at the recently finished picnic table there. Meeting place to be advised.

Leader: Lesley 0400 557 418.

### **Cancellation of Field Nats Outings**

*If there is unpredictable and severe weather, or for any other reason, it may occasionally be necessary to cancel with short notice. Here is the process for cancellation: an outing will be cancelled if the leader considers that the conditions are not safe. If an activity is cancelled, a global email will be sent by 0700 (i.e. 7.00 am) on the day of the outing. If members are uncertain, it is their responsibility to contact Jill, Lou or the leader. Note that phone reception is not always available, so you may have to try alternative numbers.*



## APRIL 2016: MERTHYR PARK, LILYDALE FALLS AND RAIL TUNNEL

Article and photos by Chris Forbes-Ewan

In near-perfect weather, about 20 members and guests enjoyed three walks near Lilydale.

The first walk was through Merthyr Park, a 48-hectare bushland reserve adjacent to Second River, and 2.5 km north-west of Lilydale.

Kerryal Willis, President of the Lilydale Landcare Association, provided us with a brief history of the park and described the work conducted by her Association to return it to something like its natural state.

In 1938 the area that now forms the park was given to the Lilydale Municipality by the owner, a wealthy British aristocrat. This is indicated by a plaque at the entrance to the park, which reads:

This reserve was presented by Lord Merthyr of Saundersfoot, Great Britain, to the Municipality of Lilydale for the use of the public for all time - 1938.

Lord Merthyr approved the establishment of a small tip (0.4 hectares) in 1965. This was intended to be for only seven years, but this was later extended to 30 years, together with an increase in the area of the tip to six hectares. The dumping of garden waste resulted in replacement of much of the native flora with weeds, and the site was also used as a graveyard for unwanted cars.

In 1985 five hectares were cleared and planted with *Eucalyptus nitans*.

In 1995 the Launceston City Council invited the recently-formed Lilydale Landcare Association to assist in rehabilitating Merthyr Park.

About 20 years later, the park has undergone a remarkable transformation. There is now no sign of the old tip, and although the *E. nitans* stand remains, the



New undergrowth showing recovery of the natural flora at Merthyr Park



predominant plant species are now all natives. These include (but are not limited to) Prickly Beauty (*Pultenaea juniperena*), She Oak (*Allocasurania verticillata*), Black Peppermint (*Eucalyptus amigdalina*) and the Sag (*Lomandra longifolia*).

Rehabilitation of the area has also been of great benefit to the fauna, with many native species of birds, mammals and reptiles inhabiting the newly-restored bushland.

Two major walking paths have been established. We walked each path and were surprised not only by the beauty, but also the diversity of scenery in such a small

area.

The conversion of a wasteland into a place of beauty and serenity—not to mention a safe haven for native species of animals—constitutes a wonderful achievement for the dogged members of the Lilydale Landcare Association.

Merthyr Park is well worth a visit if you haven't already been there (or a repeat visit if you have).

Heading towards Lilydale from Scottsdale, turn right at the junction of Second River Road and Lilydale Road, one km north of Lilydale, and look for the sign 'Merthyr Park'.



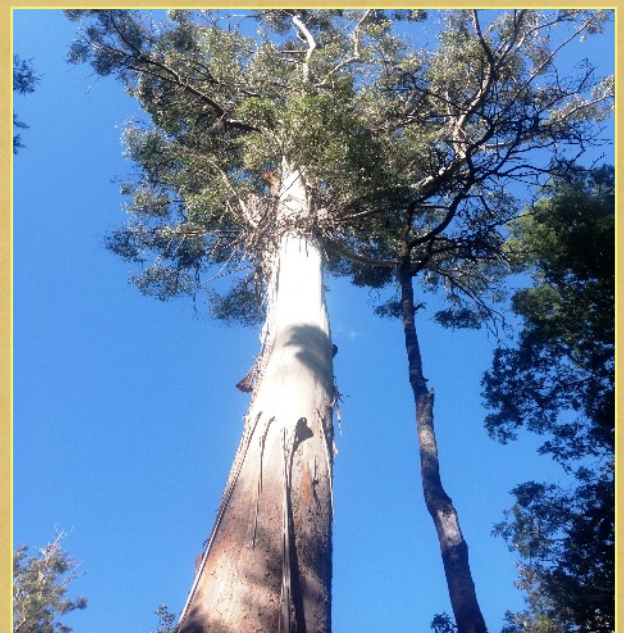
**Serene and tranquil, Second River forms one border of Merthyr Park**

Our second walk was from the Lilydale caravan park to the Lilydale Falls.

There are two waterfalls. The first is about a 10-minute walk from the car-park along a well-maintained path that follows the very attractive river, whose banks are dotted with man ferns (aka soft tree ferns), dogwoods and wattles. A 'staircase' track leads down to the base of the first waterfall.

The second waterfall is a few minutes further on, and involves climbing a (moderately) steep rise through some spectacular scenery, including some magnificent specimens of *Eucalyptus regnans* (see photo at right). The second waterfall is seen from a platform that affords a spectacular view of not only the fall but also the surrounding lush vegetation.

At the second waterfall we were greeted with a cacophony of bird noises, and sharp-eyed 'twitchers' identified a



***Eucalyptus regnans* beside the path to the Lilydale Falls. Known in Tasmania as 'swamp gum' or 'stringy gum', *E. Regnans* is the world's tallest flowering plant.**



gorgeous pink robin (*Petroica rodinogaster*), a grey fantail (*Rhipidura albiscapa*), and a Tasmanian thornbill (*Acanthiza ewingii*). Further above, a majestic wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax fleayi*) kept a watchful eye on proceedings while 'making lazy circles in the sky'.

The wedgie apparently didn't trust us (or perhaps was fascinated by our behaviour) because he (or possibly she) followed us all the way back to the caravan park.



**The first of the two Lilydale Falls, which are readily accessible from the Lilydale Caravan Park on Lilydale Road**

The third walk was to the disused railway tunnel near the township of Tunnel.

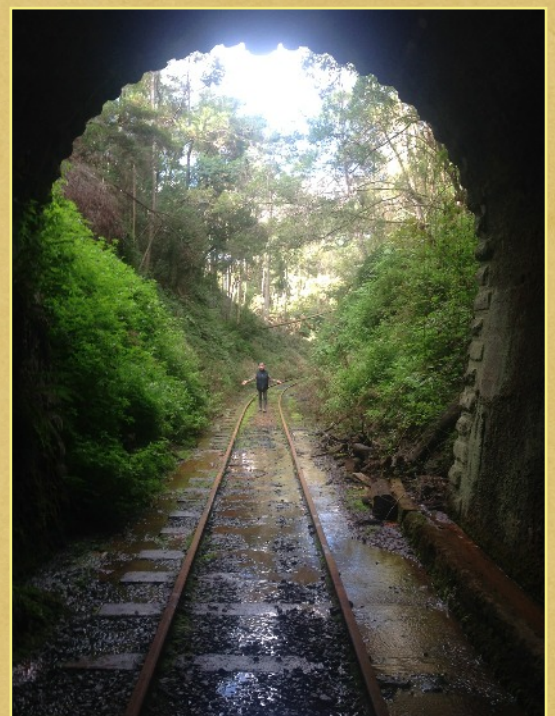
This is accessible by road and then on foot. Driving from Lilydale towards Lebrina, we turned left along Cronin's Road (directly opposite 'Bleak House'). After a few hundred metres we stopped at a parking area adjacent to the old railway line and walked to the left along the line. The tunnel is about 400 metres from the parking area.

On the day we visited, the path was wet but walkable; waterproof shoes (or even rubber boots) would be appropriate.

Completed in 1888, the tunnel is an impressive structure at approximately 800 m in length.

One of our members, Jenny Bicanic, remembers going through the tunnel on a train when she was a young girl.

Everyone enjoyed the day, which was made even more memorable by the sighting of so many wonderful birds at the Lilydale Falls.



**Club member Britt Weeks provides perspective on the size of the railway tunnel near Tunnel**



## JULY: SLIDES AT THE SCOTTSDALE LINC CENTRE

The activity for July consisted of presentations by members and guests at the Scottsdale Linc Centre, with Lou Brooker as Chair. A total of 15 members and guests attended.

Members Lou Brooker and Ross Coad showed slides of some of their favourite parts of Tasmania, and Jay Wilson presented on one part of his recent trip around Australia.

In addition, guest speaker Dr Mehrdad Abbasian, from Devonport, showed some of his many slides of Tasmanian wildlife, including a platypus that has made its home in a farm dam less than two kilometres from the centre of Scottsdale.

On the grounds that a picture is worth a thousand words, this report consists mostly of photos provided by Lou, Ross, Jay and Mehrdad. Many thanks to all four for their generosity in sharing their artwork and vast knowledge.

### 1. Mehrdad Abbasian



**'Mystic Morning'**



**Great Egret (*Ardea modesta*) in flight**



**Pink robin (*Petroica rodinogaster*)**





Mehrdad took this photo of a platypus in a farm dam near the intersection of William Street and Golconda Road, about 1500 m from the centre of Scottsdale.

The platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) and the Echidna are unique in being the only egg-laying mammals. Because they are mammals, the mother suckles the young (which is known as a 'puggle') after the egg has hatched.

According to the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, platypus are common and widespread, but there is concern about the potential for an aquatic fungus to substantially reduce their numbers.

## 2. Jay Wilson

Jay recently returned from the 'trip of a lifetime'. Driving around much of Australia, he was particularly taken with the natural beauty of the far north of this vast country.



**Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory**

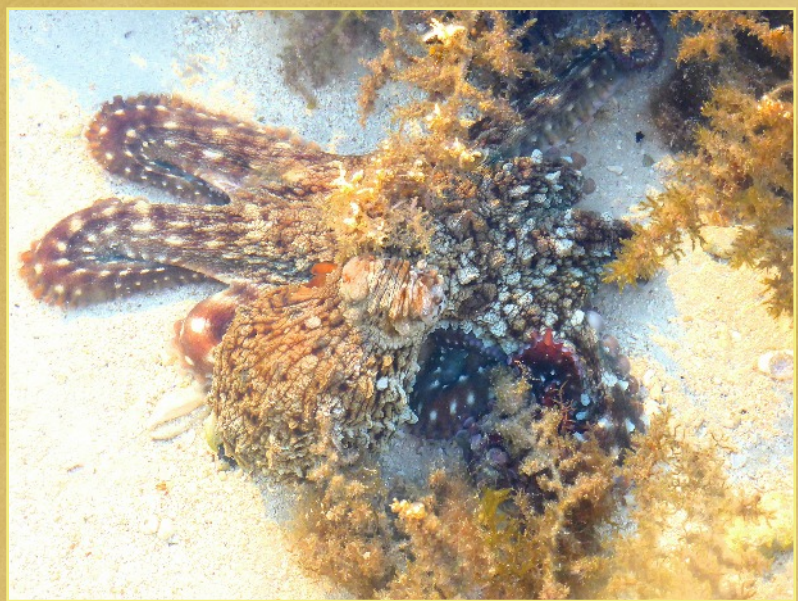
About 240 km east of Darwin, Kakadu is the largest national park in Australia, with an area of nearly 20 000 square km. It is home to a wide range of rare and endemic plants and animals, including more than one-third of Australia's bird species and one-quarter of its freshwater and estuarine fish species. More than 2000 plant species have been recorded. Rock paintings have been found that are 20 000 years old, making them some of the oldest artwork in the world.

Source: <https://www.environment.gov.au/topics/national-parks/kakadu-national-park>





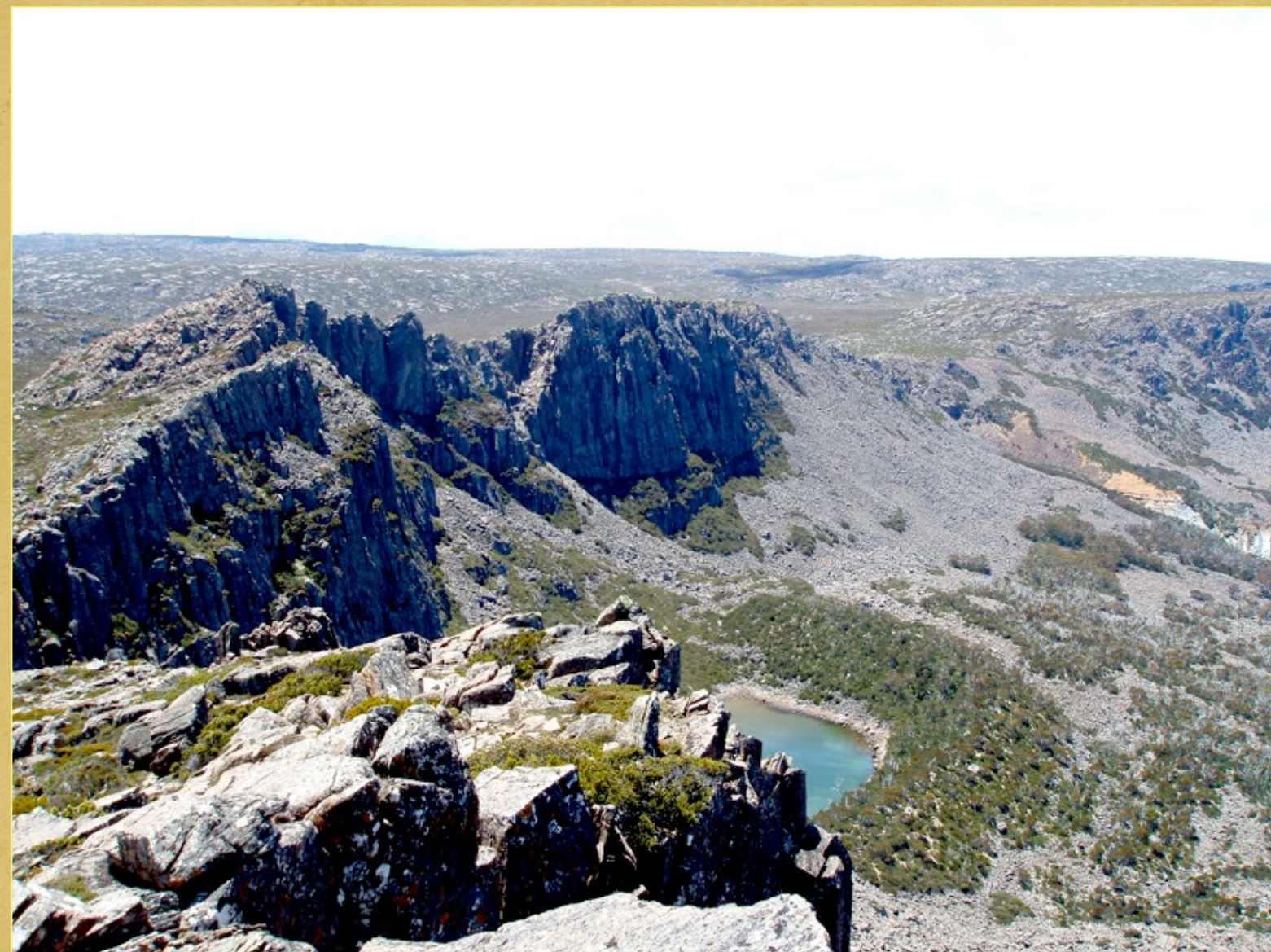
**Dale Gorge at Karinji National Park, in the Pilbara region of WA**



**Colourful octopus at Ningaloo Marine Park, north-western WA**

### **3. Ross Coad**

Ross took us on a pictorial journey through the wild and mountainous country near Stacks Bluff, on the Ben Lomond plateau, and also showed some of his favourite photos of Tasmanian flora.



**A tranquil tarn (a mountain pool, formed in a cirque excavated by a glacier) between Stacks Bluff and Denison Crag**





Alpine yellow gum (*Eucalyptus subcrenulata*) on Crystal Hill, N-E Tasmania



Red fungus

#### 4. Lou Brooker

Lou showed photos of one of her favourite parts of Tasmania, Lake Augusta, in the Central Plateau of Tasmania



The shimmering sands of Lake Augusta



Male Mountain Katydid

When full, Lake Augusta covers an area of about 1300 hectares and has been described as being 'a bleak place but with it's own raw beauty'. It is fed by the River Ouse and James River.

Lake Augusta is close to Liawenee, which regularly features on the weather report as being the coldest permanently-inhabited Tasmanian town.

The Mountain Katydid (*Acripeza reticulata*, pictured above right) is a member of the bush cricket family. Female and male Mountain Katydids differ in that the male can fly, while the female is flightless.

Although fewer members attended than last year, everyone present seemed to enjoy the smorgasbord of photos, and we appreciated both the artistry and efforts made by Mehrdad, Ross, Lou and Jay to inform and entertain the audience.

I would especially like to thank Mehrdad for making the long trip from Devonport, and for providing more photos (some of which will grace future issues of this newsletter).



## NEWS OF THE BLUE TIER

Text and photos by Lesley Nicklason (Friend of the Blue Tier)

As anyone who has visited the BlueTier over the last few years will be aware, the roads were in terrible condition and it was dangerous to travel in the area.

The good news is that Lottah Road and the road up to the top of the Tier have been upgraded, and the vegetation beside them has been slashed. No longer will your car be scratched or will you get a fright when an oncoming vehicle looms out of the overgrown bushes.

This is thanks to great work by Break O'Day Council staff, overseen by a pair of eagle-eyed supervisors! (See photo at right.)

The Blue Tier tracks are in great condition and ready for spring walkers to enjoy. The one downside of the mountain bike influx is that some riders have been using the walking tracks (Big Tree and Mt. Poimena in particular), creating a dangerous situation for walkers when the cyclists come hurtling down the tracks.

I have almost completed the loop again to get some signage: World Trails => Break O'Day Council => Dorset Council => Parks and Wildlife.

Hopefully, someone will eventually take responsibility, and signage will indicate which tracks are specifically for walking and which are for bikes, so we can all enjoy the magnificent Blue Tier in safety.



A pair of Eagles supervising the restoration of Lottah Road



Lottah Road before restoration by Break O'Day Council



... and after restoration

### FURTHER READING

The following articles are suggested by Committee Member Jay Wilson as being of potential interest:

(i) Octopuses are (perhaps literally) out-of-this-world:

<http://www.globalpossibilities.org/scientists-conclude-octopus-dna-is-not-from-this-world/>

(ii) Love the Fig (from the New Yorker):

<http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/love-the-fig>