



North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

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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: As field naturalists, we have a keen interest in the study and preservation of our local indigenous flora and fauna.

Many of you may feel a sense of optimism for our natural environment following the recent federal election; candidates who stressed environmental issues were more successful than ever before.

Times like these can build positivity and enthusiasm amongst those who care—such as field naturalists like us—and who may be looking for

opportunities to direct that positive energy towards a good cause.

For example, an activity to restore the preferred floral balance is being planned for the Tasmanian Endemic Flora Park at Northeast Park, Scottsdale, and you may feel motivated to get involved.

More on that later; in the meantime, see you at the next regular monthly activity (see the Calendar on page 2 for details).

Members' photos of NE Tasmania



False Turkey Tail (*Stereum ostrea*)
– Susan McClenaghan



Male Blue Skimmer dragonfly (*Orthetrum caledonicum*) – Ruth Timperon



Common Fringe Myrtle (*Calytrix tetragona*) – Chris Forbes-Ewan

Program for Remainder of 2022

JULY 9th: Illustrated after-lunch presentation by Tasmania's pre-eminent bat researcher, Lisa Cawthen. Meet at 11 am at Lou Brooker's home – 20 Edward Street, Bridport. Bring lunch to share.

AUGUST 13th: AGM and Guest speakers.

Meet at 11 am at Scottsdale Library Meeting Room. Bring lunch to share (alcohol not allowed). Speakers: Debbie and Craig Searle – *Our Time Caretaking on Deal Island*.

SEPTEMBER 10th: Len Gillett will lead an outing to the Flour Mill Ruins on the Supply River.

We will walk out and back from Paper Beach on the Tamar River to Supply River Flour Mill Ruins – approximately 7 km return. It's mostly flat and easy walking, but beyond Flour Mill Ruins there is more challenging rock-hopping for those who want to do this.

OCTOBER 8th: Exploring Tomahawk (details to come later by email).

NOVEMBER 12th: Walking at Cape Portland; leader Dig Probert. Annual Camp (details to come later by email).

DECEMBER 10th: Bare Rock, Fingal Valley. Leader Roy Skabo (details to come later by email).

Cancellation Process: If there is unpredictable and severe weather, or for any other reason, including if the leader considers the conditions to be unsafe, it may occasionally be necessary to cancel with short notice. Here is the process for cancellation: a global email will be sent by 1900 (i.e. 7.00 pm) on the previous day, or by 0700 (7.00 am) at the latest on the day of the outing. A notice will also be posted on the website: netasfieldnats.com.au

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

(i) Scientists' ambitious plan to 'de-extinct' Tasmanian tiger

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/life/science/2022/03/02/tasmanian-tiger-scientists/>

(ii) Do insects, octopus and other invertebrates feel emotions? Evidence is building that they can

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2022-04-02/invertebrates-octopus-bees-feelings-emotion-pain-joy-science/100947014>

(iii) Listen to the Albert's lyrebird: the best performer you've never heard of

<https://theconversation.com/listen-to-the-alberts-lyrebird-the-best-performer-youve-never-heard-of-177627>

(iv) Answer by Gary Meaney to question 'Is there any land on Earth where vertebrates do not dominate?'

https://www.quora.com/Is-there-any-land-on-Earth-where-vertebrates-do-not-dominate/answer/Gary-Meaney?ch=17&oid=334207671&share=1f1cc296&srid=37iQt&target_type=answer

Finally, two URLs suggested by Committee Member Jay Wilson

1. For instructions on how to download the iNaturalist app, go to:

<https://tasfieldnats.org.au/data/documents/iNat-for-Field-Nats-Sept20.pdf>

2. Fantasy documents: Recovery Plans Failing Australia's Endangered Species

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/feb/20/fantasy-documents-recovery-plans-failing-australias-endangered-species>

MARCH: BIRD-WATCHING AT NATIVE POINT AND SWAN BAY

Article and photos by Ross Coad and Lou Brooker

Editorial Note: The report on the March activity consists of two related articles and an appendix. Ross Coad has written a general article about the activity, while Lou Brooker has provided a personal account of her involvement. The appendix—showing the names of the birds seen and/or heard on the day—was compiled by Anne Witherden and Ian Cameron, with Chris Forbes-Ewan identifying species names.

Article and photos by Ross Coad

Our March activity was a bird-watching expedition, first at Native Point Reserve, and then at Swan Bay.

Native Point Reserve is a 200-hectare reserve on the eastern side of the Tamar River, near Windermere. Swan Bay is just north of Native Point. Seventeen members attended the outing, which was led by Ian Cameron and Anne Witherden.

Managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service, Native Point Reserve contains two vegetation communities recognised as ‘Tasmanian Threatened Native Vegetation Communities’.

There are three stands of coast paperbark (*Melaleuca ericifolia*) swamp forest, one of which we walked through at the southern end of the reserve. *M. ericifolia* has fragrant flowers that attract birds, so it is useful for bird-spotting.

This swamp forest adjoins the sole example of the other type of threatened vegetation community in the reserve—a wetlands community.



Wetlands vegetation community with *Melaleuca ericifolia* swamp forest vegetation community in background

River, and is bordered by the introduced rice grass, also known as common cordgrass (*Spartina anglica*). This is an intertidal species impacting beaches and wetlands along the Tamar River, where the infestation is one of the world’s largest with this species. Rice grass was introduced in an attempt to stabilise the extensive mudbanks, and to make a channel for shipping.

Unfortunately, this turned out to be an environmental mistake—the rice grass is now severely impacting beaches and wetlands along the Tamar.

The two dominant plant species in the wetlands are an edible succulent known as samphire (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*) and silver tussockgrass (*Poa labillardierei*).

We were able to walk through the wetlands community because the exposed, almost dry mud formed convenient pathways between the patches of samphire and tussockgrass.

A mostly narrow band of swamp forest wraps around the wetlands community, except on the south-western end where it opens onto the Tamar



Wetlands vegetation community with dried mudflats between samphire (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*) and silver tussockgrass (*Poa labillardierei*)



Nest of white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)

Tamar River.

The rice grass was not the only invasive species we observed here; one of our group scooped up a small fish and identified it as an Eastern Gambusia (*Gambusia holbrooki*). Gambusia was illegally introduced to Tasmania in the 1990s, and was first sighted in the Tamar in 2000. It is thought that these fish eat mosquito larvae, but they also present a significant threat to native fish and frogs in the Tamar.

A few hundred metres from the wetlands community, close to the Native Point car park, we observed a small glade of ferns. The larger fern species consist of the soft tree fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) (also known as man fern in Tasmania) and the rough tree fern (*Cyathea australis*). Only a few examples of each were observed, and they were relatively small, having trunks with diameters of 30–40 cm (rough tree fern) and ~20 cm (soft tree fern), indicating that they may be 20–30 years old.

The most exciting observation was of a young white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), whose nest was spotted near the top of a melaleuca.



Samphire (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*)

This magnificent bird continually caught warm air currents, allowing it to effortlessly soar hundreds of metres in the air and then glide gracefully down as it surveyed its domain.

Our main purpose was to observe and record bird species. In this we were very successful, with a total of 34 species being either heard, seen, or both (see the Appendix on page 7).

Article and photos by Lou Brooker

I set off with the other 16 field naturalists, ambling together along the track, and we soon split into three small groups.

Every now and then everyone stops, looks up, looks through their binoculars and points. At that stage the conversation is along the lines: “Where exactly?”; “See that big eucalypt – right up in the top branches”; “Which eucalypt”? The conversation continues like this until, one by one, the little brown birds follow each other from branch to branch, and finally flit across the track to another tree.

Someone recognises them by their sound, a faint, high pitched warbling ‘tee-oow’, and there’s a light-bulb moment. “Ah, they’re the birds that have been invading my orchard, eating my figs”. We don’t really get a close look at these tiny birds, but we mark them on our list as silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*).

There are obviously many different birds in this reserve. We hear them in the top canopy of the peppermints (*Eucalyptus amygdalina*). We are trying to identify the birds by the calls we can hear, but this is not easy. It sounds as though the yellow-throated honeyeater (*Lichenostomus flavicollis*) is following us, or perhaps there are many of them. We don’t see them, though their call is unmistakable: ‘tonk, tonk, tonk’. Another one for the list.



Green rosella (*Platycercus caledonicus*)

Faintly in the background we hear the striated pardalote (*Pardalotus striatus*), apparently repeatedly saying ‘pick it up, pick it up’. Monotonous! I think it’s the one they call the ‘headache bird’!

The call of the yellow-tailed black cockatoo (*Zanda funerea*) could hardly be mistaken—it is a raucous ‘wee-oo, wee-ah’. They’re having a field day in the banksias.

I turn to go, and on my way back to base I’m lucky enough to catch sight of a pigeon bathing in a puddle on the track. I want it to be the wompoo pigeon, because I like the name, but when I check

later, I find that one’s not in Tasmania. It turns out it’s the common brush bronzewing (*Phaps elegans*). Its heavy flutter is distinctive as it escapes into the bush. Later in the day I hear its insistent call in the distance—a muffled ‘oom’ repeated over and over. I see a dusky robin (*Melanodryas vittata*) dart into the bushes too; both these birds are often seen on the ground.

I wander back to the river and settle down with *The Simpson and Day Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* on my lap to read about the birds I’ve seen so far. It’s fairly quiet here, although there’s the faint thrum of traffic across the river on the West Tamar Highway. But nearby I hear an unfamiliar and intermittent cracking sound. My curiosity gets the better of me and as I stand up, I can just see a family of three green rosellas (*Platycercus caledonicus*) on the ground; the cracking is the sound of them eating the seeds of the native cherry (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*). We scare each other; they emit a raucous ‘cussick-cussick-cussick’ sound as they fly away, and I nearly jump out of my skin! This is clearly their favorite feeding place—they

return twice more while I am sitting here.

Rather than the otherwise predominant *Eucalyptus amygdalina*, the forest I walk through on my way to the wetlands is an interesting mix of blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and native cherry. It's lovely!

Down at the water's edge, I come to the spartina marshland (home of the dreaded rice grass, described by Ross in his article).

Down on the river bank the light is hitting the paperbarks side on; a patch of soggy mud swallows my gumboots. I wait expectantly for a white-faced heron or a greater egret to pop its head up above the rice grass. There's plenty for them to eat here—I see the carapaces of crabs and I've heard about the mosquito fish (*Gambusia holbrooki*). Maybe a swamp hen (*Porphyrio melanotus*) or a Eurasian coot (*Fulica atra*) will appear—their footmarks are everywhere.

None of these do appear, but as I settle back on the bank, I suddenly hear the noisy, heavy flapping of wings, and as I look up, I see a juvenile sea eagle leave its lookout high on a dead tree and fly off into the distance.

The jury is out as to whether it's better to go birding by yourself or with a group—each has its own merits. It's been very satisfying to have these close encounters; I have eight birds on my list. I wonder how many the others have.



White-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)

APPENDIX: List of birds seen and/or heard at Native Point Reserve and Swan Bay. List compiled by Anne Witherden and Ian Cameron; species identified (via Google) by Chris Forbes-Ewan

Little Wattlebird – *Anthochaera chrysoptera*
Green Rosella – *Platycercus caledonicus*
Grey Butcher Bird – *Cracticus torquatus*
Corella – *Cacatua tenuirostris*[#]
Yellow-Throated Honeyeater – *Lichenostomus flavicollis*
Forest Raven – *Corvus tasmanicus*
Tasmanian Native Hen – *Tribonyx mortierii*
Kookaburra – *Dacelo novaeguineae*[#]
Dusky Robin – *Melanodryas vittata*
Brown Thornbill – *Acanthiza pusilla*
Crested Tern – *Thalasseus bergii*
Little Pied Cormorant – *Microcarbo melanoleucos*
Striated Pardalote – *Pardalotus striatus*
Silvereye – *Zosterops lateralis*
White-Faced Heron – *Egretta novaehollandiae*

Grey Fantail – *Rhipidura albiscapa*
Flame Robin – *Petroica phoenicea*
Olive Whistler – *Pachycephala olivacea*
Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo – *Cacatua galerita*
Yellow Wattlebird – *Anthochaera paradoxa*
Spotted Pardalote – *Pardalotus punctatus*
Pacific Gull – *Larus pacificus*
Brown Falcon – *Falco berigora*
Magpie – *Gymnorhina tibicen*
Welcome Swallow – *Hirundo neoxena*
Crescent Honeyeater – *Phylidonyris pyrrhopterus*
White-Bellied Sea Eagle – *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
Golden Whistler – *Pachycephala pectoralis*
Brush Bronzewing – *Phaps elegans*

Not native to Tasmania

APRIL 2022: FERNS AT NORTH-EAST PARK

Text by Ross Coad; photos by Ross Coad (RC), Debbie Searle (DS) and Chris Forbes-Ewan (CFE)

In April we conducted a ‘fern hunt’ at Northeast Park, which is directly behind the Scottsdale caravan park. Led by Debbie Searle, 21 members attended.

Debbie became particularly interested in ferns about six years ago, following her attendance at a workshop led by Mark Wapstra, and conducted by Threatened Plants Tasmania. The workshop included a visit to the fern nursery run by Michael Garrett, author of several books on Tasmanian ferns, including the well-known book *The Ferns of Tasmania – Their Ecology and Distribution* (1996).

[As an aside, if you happen to have the NE Field Nats’ copy of this book, its return would be greatly appreciated.]

Towards the back of Northeast Park, there is a reserve called the Tasmanian Endemic Flora Park, which was developed as an Australian Bicentennial Project.

This was the main focal area for our fern-related activity. Tuckers Creek runs through the park, providing reliable moisture for a range of ferns growing in and alongside the creek. Board walks provide a safe, easy means of navigating around the back end of the park, crossing the creek and winding around ferns and other native



Activity leader Debbie Searle identifying the scrubby ground fern (*Hypolepis distans*) – RC

plants, as well as some introduced weeds.

Debbie guided us to ferns that she had spotted and identified on a reconnaissance visit, and told us that she had found 13 species of native ferns at the park.

Prior to setting off to explore and observe ferns in the semi-natural setting, Debbie gave us a quick overview of the salient elements of fern morphology and terminology. By way of practical example, she described and showed samples of several ferns of similar form: the bracken fern (*Pteridium esculentum*); the false bracken fern (*Calochlaena dubia*, also known as the common ground fern and rainbow fern); the bat's wing fern (*Histiopteris incisa*); and the ruddy ground fern (*Hypolepis rugosula*). Although of similar general appearance, each fern had unique characteristics that distinguished it from the others. Debbie described morphological differences in grooves on the back of stems, appearance and arrangement of sori, texture and shape of leaves—all important aids to identification of these ferns.



Willis Walkway, Endemic Flora Park, Northeast Park, Scottsdale – CFE

We observed two other dimorphic ferns, the hard water fern (*Blechnum watsii*) and the fishbone water fern (*Blechnum nudum*). Both are similar in appearance to the soft water fern, but there are distinct differences. Each pinna (leaf) of the fishbone water fern is attached to the pinnae rachis via a broad base, whereas for the soft and hard water ferns, each pinna is attached to the rachis via a very short stem (a pinnae rachis). The hard water fern can be distinguished by its new foliage which is pink, turning to a coppery colour, and eventually dark green.

A kangaroo fern (*Microsorium pustulatum*) was also observed growing on a man fern alongside the Willis Walkway. This fern is polymorphic, having fronds that vary greatly in appearance, including sometimes having the

One of the first ferns we saw alongside the boardwalk was a man fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*), also known as the soft tree fern. This species will be readily recognised by most field naturalists, although at a distance it might be confused with the rough tree fern (*Cyathea australis*), which is not present at the park.

Growing on the man fern was a common fork fern (*Tmesipteris obliqua*). This fern is epiphytic, meaning it grows on another plant, in this case, typically a man fern.

Not far from the man fern, Debbie pointed out a soft water fern (*Blechnum minus*)—a dimorphic fern having both vegetative and fruiting fronds.



Fork fern (*Tmesipteris obliqua*) growing on a man fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) – RC

appearance of a kangaroo foot, hence its common name. The kangaroo fern observed during this activity was strap-like in appearance, without any of the branched or forked forms associated with its name. Like the fork fern, the kangaroo fern is epiphytic.



Kangaroo fern (*Microsorium pustulatum*) – DS



Frond of a king fern (*Todea barbara*) – RC

Mother shield ferns (*Polystichum proliferum*) are common and were easily found in the park. The name of the fern derives from its ability to develop small ferns (bulbils) towards the end of its fronds.

Less common, but also in this part of the park, there is a king fern (*Todea barbara*). This fern has a trunk, as does the man fern, but unlike the cylindrical trunk of the man fern, the trunk of the king fern is irregular in shape. We observed that the sporangia of the king fern were densely packed and not grouped in regularly arranged sori, as we had seen with other ferns.



Frond of fishbone water fern (*Blechnum nudum*) – RC



Scrambling coral fern (*Gleichenia microphylla*) – RC

Throughout the Tasmanian Endemic Flora Park and fringing the edges of the large pond towards the back of North-East Park is the scrambling coral fern (*Gleichenia microphylla*). This fern appears occasionally as isolated plants, but more commonly as a mass of plants covering several square metres and falling, or *scrambling*, over logs in its path (hence its name). Finally, the delicate fronds of filmy ferns (*Hymenophyllum sp.*) were observed. These are small epiphytic ferns with fronds that are only one cell thick.

In total, 14 species of ferns were observed; one more than Debbie had anticipated.

This was an enjoyable and successful day, with members learning about the many different ferns so readily accessible at Northeast Park and the Tasmanian Endemic Flora Park.

Editorial Note: Debbie put together a comprehensive set of 'field notes' about the ferns of Tasmania. These field notes are available on the NE Field Nats website at:

http://www.netasfieldnats.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/FERNS-OF-NE-TASMANIA_explanatory-notes-by-Debbie-Searle.pdf

MAY / JUNE 2022: FUNGI SPOTTING AT EAST DIDDLEUM

Text by Chris Forbes-Ewan; photos by Chris Forbes-Ewan (CFE), John Davey (JD)

Editorial note: This walk was originally planned for May, but inclement weather forced its postponement to June.

Last year, Susan and Shane McClenaghan welcomed us to their spectacular bush property at East Diddleum, where we did the ‘fungi walk’, as described in an article in the June 2021 edition of the North Eastern Naturalist. Sixteen people attended last year’s walk.

Word must have spread about how magnificent their property is, because nearly double that number (31) eager members and guests turned up for this walk, expecting to experience something special. They weren’t disappointed.

The property of 120 hectares has been in Susan’s family since 1917, when her great-grandfather settled here. It was selectively logged in the 1940s, but there is little evidence of that now—it has the look and feel of largely untouched Tasmanian bush.

Over the past century, or thereabouts, a central grassy area has been established, and various small buildings erected, so while it is definitely ‘in the bush’, the property has some of the comforts of home. Shane and Susan have a house in Launceston and use their bush property as a ‘home away from home’ to escape the city on weekends and during holiday periods.

To say that they have an idyllic refuge is almost an understatement. It is a paradise for fungi lovers especially, but also for anyone who values the peace and tranquility of the Tasmanian bush.



Hygrocybe mavis (no common name found) – CFE

Susan told us that more than 500 species of fungi have been identified on the property. Many date back to the time of Gondwana, the great southern continent that comprised the current continents Antarctica, South America, Australia, and Africa, together with the Indian sub-continent, until it started to break up about 180 million years ago. Unsurprisingly, some of these fungi are also found in South America.



Hygrocybe firma (vermillion waxcap) – JD

This area is also one of the principal sites for commercial harvesting of wild-growing Tasmanian pepperberries (*Tasmannia lanceolata*). Harvesting of the pungent, peppercorn-like berries is in full swing, with more than 150 kg having already been picked at the time of our visit.

Having completed the superb fungi walk last year, Susan led us on a different route this time—first along a narrow dirt road lined on each side by mixed forest, including towering *Eucalyptus delegatensis* (gum top stringy bark), *Nothofagus cunninghamii* (myrtle), *Acacia melanoxylon* (blackwood), *Phyllocladus aspleniifolius* (celery top pine), *Atherosperma moschatum* (sassafras), and numerous ferns, including *Dicksonia antarctica* (man fern in Tasmania, soft tree fern on the mainland).



Tree-lined dirt track at start of the walk – CFE

In this area the bush was not dense, so walking was easy, but we couldn't help noticing the dozens of small tea trees that had been toppled recently by strong winds.

Fortunately, the sun shone for most of the day, and although the wind whistled threateningly at treetop level, the air was reasonably still at ground level.

We made slow progress, because about every two or three minutes there would be a whoop of delight—an attractive fungus or group of fungi had been spotted, so photos needed to be taken and attempts to identify the fungi had to be made.

Then we left the road and started making our way through the bush, past mostly small trees and shrubs, and often with sphagnum moss under-foot. We enjoyed walking among pepperberries, tea trees (*Melaleuca* sp.), celerytop pine (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*), myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*), cheesewood (*Pittosporum bicolor*), various wattles (genus *Acacia*), and a few impressive specimens of two species of eucalypts—stringy gum (*E. Regnans*) and *E. delegatensis*.



Sphagnum moss and mixed forest – JD

At one stage, Mother Nature did threaten to send snow our way, but in the end she relented and decided that light sleet was all the punishment we deserved for disturbing her peace.

During the walk we saw many attractive fungi, including the ever-popular *Mycena interrupta* (pixie's parasol), and 'coral like' *Hericium coralloides*, along with *Singerocybe clitocybe* in both pink and brown forms, *Gastroderma australe* (southern bracket fungus), and *Lanzia lanaripes* (little black tacks). We also saw several species belonging to the genus *Russula*; some of the Gondwana origin fungi, such as *Polyporus nigrocristatus* and *Descolea phlebophora*; and coral fungi, including *Clavulinopsis amoena*.



Mycena interrupta (pixie's parasol) – JD



Gastroderma australe (southern bracket fungus) – CFE

Eventually, we reached the end of the bush. We then had the option of returning to the grassy area where Susan and Shane's small house and other buildings are located, or taking another path that led to the source of the Brid River before commencing the return walk.

This was our second visit in a little over 12 months to Susan and Shane's property. Everyone who attended either of the visits will be hoping that this walk wasn't our last one in this magnificent natural environment.



Brid River close to its source – JD



Polyporus nigrocristatus – a Gondwana origin fungus bearing a striking resemblance to a scallop shell – CFE



Lanzia lanaripes (black tacks) – JD