



NEWSLETTER: FEBRUARY 2011

Field Trip: Reef Island – 12 February

1997 at Nyora..

Our first field trip for the year was a joint excursion with Ringwood Field Naturalists to Reef Island, on the eastern side of Western Port Bay. This a noted wader site which is an island at high tide but can be accessed on foot at low tide. It is vegetated with a fringe of mangroves, giving way to salt marsh plants including samphires and saltbush, with the highest points supporting Coast Beard-heath. The day was fine, partly cloudy, with a moderate breeze.

Migratory wader numbers were small, with some speculation that the very wet summer has led to fewer birds travelling this far south. However we were delighted to find some small flocks of Ruddy Turnstones, Red-necked Stints and Pacific Golden Plovers. Grey-tailed Tattler and Curlew Sandpiper were also seen.

Other shorebirds included numbers of Royal Spoonbills and White-faced Herons, Red-capped Plovers, Masked Lapwings and Black Swans. A single Pied Oystercatcher was also seen. Other birds sighted included Swamp Harrier, White-fronted Chat, various cormorants, terns and gulls.

There was a considerable number of Chequered Swallowtail butterflies (*Papilio demoleus*) (pictured below). According to Bernard D'Abrera, these butterflies are common in North Queensland, and sporadic elsewhere. They are more common inland than on the coast, and down south at least are rarely seen, but when seen are in large numbers. This was certainly the case on Reef Island, where we must have seen 20 or more. The last time we saw them was in November



Lee Denis

Also seen were numerous spiders waiting on their webs between the low shrubs - these were mainly a horned jewel type spider (pictured below), yet to be identified.



Judy Smart

Bird List: Reef Island February 12, 2011			
Black Swan	Swamp Harrier	Red-capped Plover	Singing Honeyeater
Australian Wood Duck	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Masked Lapwing	White-fronted Chat
Little Pied Cormorant	Grey-tailed Tattler	Pacific Gull	Willie Wagtail

Pied Cormorant	Ruddy Turnstone	Silver Gull	Grey Butcherbird
Little Black Cormorant	Red-necked Stint	Caspian Tern	Australian Magpie
White-faced Heron	Curlew Sandpiper	Crested Tern	Little Raven
Australian White Ibis	Pied Oystercatcher	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Welcome Swallow
Royal Spoonbill	Pacific Golden Plover	Noisy Miner	

Madagascar, The Island Ark

Club member Heather Ducat gave a presentation at our February meeting on her recent trip to Madagascar. This island off the east coast of Africa is of enormous interest because of its high proportion of endemic species.

Despite its position, its flora and fauna has more affinity with Asia and Australia than with Africa. This is because in the breakup of Gondwanaland, Madagascar drifted away from Africa with India and Australia, later breaking away from these continents and drifting back towards Africa.

Madagascar has an extraordinary diversity of species - for example, 1000 orchids, 285 birds, 80+ lemurs, all endemic to Madagascar, plus interesting animals such as chameleons, civets

and tenrecs (like a cross between a shrew and a hedgehog).

Madagascar was only settled by humans 2000 years ago - Malays and Indonesians arrived by boat, later joined by Africans and the French when it was a colony (1890 – 1960).

It has three distinct vegetation zones running North/South: on the Western side, dry thorn scrub characterized by baobabs; down the Centre the Central granite plateau; then on the Eastern edge rainforest.

After seeing Heather's photos and hearing her descriptions, everyone wanted to go to Madagascar.

Cape Schank-Bushrangers Bay

For our December field trip we walked the coastal track between Cape Schank and Bushrangers Bay. The weather was overcast with occasional showers until afternoon when a severe squall hit. Quite a few Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters were seen, but overall the bird count was relatively low. However the real interest in this walk lies in the geology, with rugged coastal cliffs formed by faulting that formed the Peninsula.

The trail passes through the narrow strip between pastures and the high cliffs, with a cover of medium-sized shrubs, before descending through Banksia woodland to the beach at Bushrangers Bay. This is a high energy beach split by a small creek (Main Creek), which on this day was running swiftly, with a substantial lagoon at the top of the beach.

After lunch we walked down to Cape Schank itself along the extensive boardwalk. Here instead of a sandy beach there is a shingle beach composed of housebrick-sized cobbles rounded by the wave action, clanking against each other as each wave recedes. Unfortunately on the way back we were caught in the brief but intense squall and got back to the cars very wet indeed.

Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve – December 2010

We went to Langwarrin looking for birds and found a few, but nothing like the numbers we have seen at other times. We did see 3 different orchids though - Hyacinth orchid (*Dipodium*

roseum), Horned orchid (*Orthoceras strictum*) and Large Tongue orchid (*Cryptostylis subulatum*). We also saw a blotched blue tongue lizard and lots of skinks.

Bird List Langwarrin FFR 6/12/2010			
Black faced cuckoo-shrike	White eared honeyeater	Yellow robin	White ibis
Red wattlebird	Satin flycatcher	Fan tailed cuckoo (heard only)	Eastern rosella
Brown thornbill	Kookaburra	Rufous whistler	
White naped honeyeater	Grey fantail	Golden whistler	
Yellow faced honeyeater	Spotted pardalote	Grey shrike thrush	

We were surprised not to see dusky woodswallows, which are usually present at this time of year.

Braeside - February 2011

After the recent heavy rains we thought that Braeside Park might be washed out. There was water everywhere, especially at nearby Waterways Estate, where the water had come up close to the roads in places.

We saw 30 bird species, at Braeside, the highlights being a pair of Blue billed Ducks, and a Sparrowhawk,

We were also delighted to see two tortoises sunning themselves on a log.

The frog chorus was in full cry, and included common froglets, pobblebunks, spotted marsh frogs, plus others we were not sure of.

Coot	Dusky Moorhen
Purple Swamphen	Black tailed Native Hen
Hoary headed Grebe	Australasian Grebe
White-faced Heron	Great Cormorant
Little Pied Cormorant	Pelican
Black Swans - 2 on nests, plus goslings	Little Grassbird
Pied Butcher-bird	Striated Pardalote
Clamorous Reed-warbler	Red-browed Finch
Superb Blue Wren	Magpie
Red rumped parrot	Noisy Miner
Magpie-lark	Sparrowhawk
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	
Eastern rosella	Rainbow lorikeet
Welcome swallow	Indian mynah

Bird list Braeside Park February 2011	
Chestnut Teal	Black Duck
Blue billed Duck	Hard-head

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Events can be found at our website.

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