



PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia

NEWSLETTER: JUNE 2017

Birding at Gordon Rolfe Reserve, Tyabb 3rd April 2017

Gordon Rolfe Reserve, and the adjoining North Westernport Conservation Reserve, comprise one of our regular birding spots. This year we visited in autumn instead of our usual practice of visiting in spring. The difference was stark, with bird numbers less than half what we were used to.

We were amazed to find the wetland completely dry – so dry we were able to walk across it. It was carpeted with Glaucous Goosefoot (*Chenopodium glaucum*), an annual herb which flowers in summer (December to May), so is not in evidence when the wetland is flooded. Clumps of Cumbungi (*Typha* sp.) and Water Ribbons (*Triglochin procera*) indicated that there was moisture somewhere below.



Glaucous Goosefoot - Photo: Lee Denis

There being no water there were naturally no water birds, nor were there the usual raptors or smaller birds in the reeds or around the margins. Our final count of 21 species was

well below our usual springtime counts of 45-55. The accompanying list below indicates that only the most sedentary of birds remain at this location over summer. Previous counts in spring were 2015: 43; 2013: 48 and 2012: 55. – Lee Denis

Bird List For Rolfe's Reserve 3rd April 2017

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| White-faced Heron | White-eared Honeyeater |
| Australian White Ibis | New Holland Honeyeater |
| Eastern Rosella | Eastern Yellow Robin |
| Laughing Kookaburra | Grey Shrike-thrush |
| Superb Fairy-wren | Grey Fantail |
| Spotted Pardalote | Grey Butcherbird |
| Brown Thornbill | Australian Magpie |
| Red Wattlebird | Grey Currawong |
| Little Wattlebird | Australian Raven |
| Noisy Miner | Mistletoebird |
| Yellow-faced Honeyeater | |



The 'Wetland' at Rolfe's Reserve - Photo: Lee Denis

Peter Beddowes Northern Territory 12th April 2017

Peter has a history of trying out new places on exchange and staying on. He came out to Australia from the UK on a one year ranger exchange in 1994, and never went home. Then in 2014 he went to the Northern Territory, Watarrka

National Park, for a six month exchange, and stayed on for three and a half years. Watarrka is famous for the Kings Canyon walk, and is west of Alice Springs.

Comparing the Northern Territory to the UK, Peter pointed out that the UK is about 250,000 square kilometres, the Northern Territory 1.4 ml sq km; the population of the NT is 225,000, compared with 65 million in the UK.



Wall of the Canyon - Photo:Peter Beddowes

Watarrka is 1000 sq km, with 3 aboriginal communities and 220mm per annum rainfall on average. The Kings Canyon walk around the rim is 6 kilometres, starting with a steep climb known as Heart Attack Hill, then following the edge of the canyon to the Lost City, a geological formation reminiscent of the Bungle Bungles, then to the Garden of Eden, a waterhole with lush plants, and back down to the car park. Many visitors are unprepared for the strenuous walking combined with the high daily temperatures, and the four emergency response stations on the walk are well used. Overseas visitors in particular would visit in the summer when temperatures are in the 40s all day, and get into distress.



Perentie - Photo:Peter Beddowes

There are 260 plants in the area, some of the well known

ones being the Desert Oak, a Casuarina which grows in a pencil shape until it reaches the water table when the growth spreads out; the quandong, an edible fruit; the holly grevillea, sandpaper fig, desert rose, cycads and parakeelya.

One of the major weeds is buffel grass, which was originally planted at Alice Springs airport to keep the dust down. It grows vigorously and out-competes local grasses, burns fiercely and has altered the burning regime. There are 120 birds; animals such as the euro, hopping mice and the mala; and an astonishing 78 reptiles, including the inland taipan, perentie (sand goanna) and thorny devil.



Garden of Eden- Photo:Peter Beddowes

Controlling feral animals is a big issue. There are 1½ million camels and they can smell water from 90 km away. In one program 2 professional shooters shot 4500 camels and 5000 brumbies in one week, and this hardly dented the population. Cats are difficult to control, and they are currently trialling robots which dispense 1080 poison to kill cats.

Peter enjoyed working with the indigenous rangers, and told us one of their jokes – they refer to blow-in white workers as ‘white goods’. Like white goods, the visiting workers last for a year then break down and have to be replaced – **Judy Smart**.



Sherbrooke Forest

22nd April 2017

Ten members and visitors gathered at Sherbrooke Picnic Ground on a fine mild morning, many with one thing in mind: lyrebirds! The first thing we noticed was that no-one had brought a map! After studying the information board we decided the simplest start was to follow the sign that said "Sherbrooke Falls". Almost immediately we took the wrong path – under advice from the technologically advanced who had satnav on their phones. We were aware pretty soon that we weren't heading to the Falls, but one path in a forest is as good as any other for a Field Naturalist. That's our story anyway.



Photo: Lee Denis

We followed the track all the way to the nearest road, where there was no option but to turn around. On the way we spotted some interesting plants – towering Mountain Ash over an understory of tree ferns is not something we see every day. Actually there were not that many plants that you cannot see on the Peninsula, with various species of *Blechnum* (Water Ferns), *Microsorum* (Kangaroo Fern), Brakes including *Pteris comans*, (Netted Brake), both Soft and Rough Tree-ferns, and Common Bracken.

Mid-story plants included both *Acacia dealbata* and *Acacia melanoxylon*, *Pomaderris aspera*, *Pittosporum bicolor*, *Coprosma quadrifida*, *Olearia argophylla* and *O. lirata*. Vines and creepers included *Pandorea pandoreana* and *Clematis aristata*. As I said, most of these can be seen in Greens Bush.

Fungi were relatively few, with the bright orange bracket *Stereum ostrea* being well represented, together with a coral fungus, possibly *Ramaria filicicola*. Birds were more heard than seen, but Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos, Crimson and Eastern Rosellas and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were sighted, together with a Kookaburra and White-throated Treecreeper; small birds included Eastern Yellow Robin, White-browed Scrubwren, Brown Thornbill, and Grey

Fantail. We heard, but did not see, Golden Whistler, both Grey and Pied Currawong, Grey Butcherbird, and Eastern Whistbird.



The Old Man of the Forest? - Photo: Lee Denis

On the return walk to the track to the falls, the benefits of taking the road less travelled were demonstrated by an extended view of a male Lyrebird. Deep in the undergrowth (clear to see but very difficult to photograph) he went through his repertoire – which largely consisted of the bird calls we had been hearing! The Cockatoos and Kookaburra we did see, but the rest may well have emanated from the Lyrebird.

Returning to the Falls track we found that the crowds had arrived, with a steady stream of people taking this track – no Lyrebirds to be seen here! There was a trickle of water in the Falls, but hardly enough to justify all of the selfies being taken on the bridge.



At lunch in the picnic ground, our confidence in identifying birds from their calls being shaken, we did not count King Parrot until a pair landed on a tree above us.

After lunch we decided to make a visit to the nearby Alfred Nicholas Gardens – donated to the state by the Nicholas family of Aspro fame. Dating from the late 1920s, these gardens consist primarily of exotic plants, but under a canopy of Mountain Ash. Maples, Ginkgos, Sequoias and Liquidambers, with Azaleas, Rhododendrons, Hydrangeas and Camilleas, and some old varieties of Fuschia, make up an older-style garden (19th century hill station is apparently the style) set amongst tree-ferns. A (very) steep slope (even steeper on the way back up) leads to a small lake, and the whole environment is a delight to the plant lover. – **Lee Denis**.

Birding at Seaford Wetlands

1st May 2017

Seaford wetlands hold many attractions for birdwatchers, but at this time of the year for us the interest is primarily in Flame Robins. Heather, our local scout, reported good numbers, so seven members arrived at Austin Rd on a day that was fine enough, but with a cold blustery wind. The birds were sensibly avoiding the exposed pondage adjacent to the viewing platform (apart from a few ducks and Lapwings) so we set off to the west.



Australasian Grebes - Photo: Lee Denis

Despite some of us becoming distracted by the abundant palm trees in the backyards we were soon able to add some birds to our list, including a close-up view of Australasian Grebe. Only four or five Pink-eared Ducks could be seen on the shore, together with Pacific Black Ducks and Chestnut Teal – these three species the only ducks sighted. More Aussie Grebes, and abundant Hoary-headed Grebes, could be seen on the water, together with Coots and a lone White-faced Heron. Throw in some Swans and Swampens and

that accounts for pretty much all of the waterbirds – at least until later.

Bush birds were in abundance, however, including at least 5 male Flame Robins, maybe twice as many females. Yellow-rumped Thornbills were also present. We are always pleased to see Red-browed Finches; honeyeaters were represented by White-plumed and New Holland, as well as Red and Little Wattlebirds. The only raptors seen were Black-shouldered and Whistling Kites, while the only parrot things were Corellas of undetermined species.



Flame Robin



Yellow-rumped Thornbill

Photos: Lee Denis

After lunch at Velimir's nearby house – pleased to get out of the wind – most of us continued from Armstrongs Rd to the Downs Estate, where we saw more Flame Robins – or the same ones again perhaps – and, on Eel Race Drain, a flock of Royal Spoonbills, a couple of Great Egrets, and a Pelican. A few more bush birds including a Swamp Harrier and Spotted Pardalote, brought our total for the day to 46.

Thanks to Velimir and Savica for their hospitality. – Lee Denis.

Bird List For Seaford Wetlands 1 May 2017

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Black Swan | Great Egret | Masked Lapwing | Brown Thornbill | Eastern Yellow Robin | Red-browed Finch |
| Pacific Black Duck | Australian White Ibis | Silver Gull | Yellow-rumped Thornbill | Grey Shrike-thrush | European Goldfinch |
| Chestnut Teal | Royal Spoonbill | Spotted Turtle-Dove | Red Wattlebird | Magpie-Lark | Welcome Swallow |
| Pink-eared Duck | Black-shouldered Kite | Crested Pigeon | Little Wattlebird | Grey Fantail | Golden-headed Cisticola |
| Australasian Grebe | Whistling Kite | Long-billed Corella | Noisy Miner | Willie Wagtail | Common Blackbird |
| Hoary-headed Grebe | Swamp Harrier | Rainbow Lorikeet | White-plumed Honeyeater | Grey Butcherbird | Common Myna |
| Australian Pelican | Purple Swamphen | Superb Fairy-wren | New Holland Honeyeater | Australian Magpie | |
| White-faced Heron | Eurasian Coot | Spotted Pardalote | Flame Robin | Little Raven | |

Roger Standen
Wildlife of Far North Queensland
10th May 2017

Roger set off up Cape York from Cairns to see as much wildlife as possible, visiting the Atherton Tableland, Musgrave, Lakefield and Iron Range. He wasn't interested in reaching the tip of Cape York and didn't bother to go there. He did have four wildlife species he hoped to see and photograph – the green python, eclectus parrot, star finch and palm cockatoo.

Roger started off his presentation with the tent spider, a giant golden orb spider which nests communally in a nest metres wide. This is unusual behaviour for spiders, which are usually solitary. Dragonflies and damselflies are one of his special interests – up north they have pigment in their wings, unlike southern ones. Other notable insects were cockroaches, spectacular butterflies, ant lions and termites, which were busy setting up tracks under his ground sheet.

Reptiles were impressive – wood frogs, Roth's tree frog, water python, monitor lizards, skinks, fresh and saltwater crocodiles and the much searched for green python, one of his target species, which was eventually found, and is iridescent green.



Green Python - Photo - Roger Standen

Fauna – apart from the ubiquitous cattle and pigs, he saw arboreal white tailed rats, the northern brown bandicoot, the melomys mouse, rat kangaroo, the beautifully marked striped possum, agile wallaby and Lumholtz's tree kangaroo, which climbs up trees, but cannot turn, and has to go down trees backwards.

The birds of FNQ are spectacular, and so were the photographs – the magnificent rifle bird, brolgas, black necked stork, orange footed scrub fowl and Papuan frogmouth. Eclectus parrots were one of his targets – they have a high mortality rate before they find the protection of a hollow, but he was directed to a well-known nest site, and found them. Star finches were easier to see. The palm cockatoos were much more difficult – it took four round trips of 50km to eventually see and photograph them at dusk. They were worth the effort – the following is taken from Roger's article in Mornington Peninsula Birdlife

newsletter of March 2017:



Eclectus Parrots - female is red, male is green

Photo - Roger Standen

These birds are very impressive. The large crest is very prominent but the massive bill is even more striking. The bright crimson cheek patch is set off against the dark grey of the rest of the plumage and can be variable in intensity of colour and size of the skin patch. The feathers are black in colour but have a coating of powder down that makes them look a deep grey. The lower mandible can be covered by the feathers around the face just as those of the yellow-tails that carry the genus name Calyptorhynchus that means 'covered bill'.

Despite spending much time in the forest and surrounding areas, I only saw the Palm Cockatoos at that one site apart from the odd one flying overhead. They would have been very hard to see if they didn't have their regular roosting areas.



Palm Cockatoo - Photo - Roger Standen

Another great birding experience was a visit to Artemis Station where the owners maintain a healthy golden-shouldered parrot population, a bird which is struggling elsewhere. Roger has another article in the same Birdlife newsletter with more detail about the golden-shouldered parrots, which I recommend to you. – Judy Smart.

Churchill National Park & Lysterfield Lake

13th May 2017

A leaderless group of eight field nats gathered at the allotted time (well most were there on time) and place and bundled into two cars for the short journey out to Churchill NP where we met up with Di Peters who already had several birds for the day's list.

Getting over the inertia of deciding where to go was a bit like being on a leadership course, who takes over, who sits back, who can be co-opted to drive this rudderless group? A trip to the trig point was determined to be the best thing to do before lunch, but no-one mentioned when lunch was expected to be.

We enjoyed the most glorious weather and had a great stroll to the top of the hill (the trig point is in Lysterfield park, not Churchill), but despite the claims of spectacular 360° views of Melbourne, the trees had blocked nearly half the view. What we could see was very impressive, e.g. looking down to Arthurs Seat. It was interesting to note what appeared to be a tool to measure air-borne sediment on the edge of the very active quarry immediately to the north of the parks.



Trig Point - Photo: Lee Denis

Fungi were present in many forms. At least 17 species were photographed and probably double that were seen. Identifying these fungi was not anyone's strong point although Lee recognised a few including the perennial bracket fungus (*Ganoderma australe*) and one I later identified as possibly Slender Parasol (*Macrolepiota clelandii*)



Macrolepiota clelandii

Photos: Rog Standen



Ganoderma australe

The botanists checked a few trackside plants, and a remark

was made about the relatively few weeds noticed (though our cheerful President would no doubt have seen more had she been there). Grey Kangaroos were readily seen lounging beside the track and one crossed the track between members of the group as we strolled along.



Photo: Lee Denis

The bird list was growing very slowly but a couple of small feeding groups bolstered the numbers. A Fantail Cuckoo, Golden Whistler, several honeyeaters (including New Holland, Yellow-faced, White-eared and White-naped), Grey fantail and Spotted Pardalote were among others at one point and brought the tally up over 20 species.

Red Wattlebirds were in abundance, but no Littles were seen or heard. No raptors were seen all day, which was a surprise to most of us. The Scarlet Robin, though only seen by a break-out group of two members, was probably the bird of the day. Few insects were encountered but one beetle was seen by all and was found to be a Red-headed Pasture Cockchafer (*Adoryphorus coulonii*), even though it was all black.



Muttonwood in fruit - Photo: Lee Denis

Lunch was welcomed as it was past 2pm when we returned to the cars. When nourished, we went on a short stroll around the nature walk where there was a conundrum for

the plant people. A thicket of what people thought was Muttonwood had them confused because the trees were bearing large clusters of a bright berry that no-one recognised as having seen before. Several pauses and discussions were held to compare notes what this plant could be. All was revealed after Lee got back to the cars and looked up the book to see a clear image of the purple fruit against the plant Brush Muttonwood (*Myrsine (Rapanea) howittiana*).

At this point we had 28 bird species on our list and Di couldn't accept that so went searching for another two. Di was successful in getting Red-browed Finch and Kookaburra. While waiting for her return, the rest of the group decided to check out Lysterfield Lake and another seven birds were seen in transit. The lake was glorious -

calm water with a beautiful late afternoon sky. Another 12 species were seen there bringing the total for the day to 48. The grebes were a highlight with terrific views of an Aussie grebe that had caught a fish and proceeded to position it ready for swallowing and then completing the task. This was watched from the dam wall and the bird was at the water's edge. A White-faced Heron stalked along the edge and was remarkably adept at not slipping on the mossy boulders. The coots were in a typical Coot pattern with hundreds spread across the lake in a long narrow line.

A long, but rewarding and enjoyable day was had by all and we returned home in the darkening sky that showed a very unusual cloud formation protruding up from the horizon around the setting sun. It was like a giant jet stream – **Rog Standen**.

Birding at Bulldog Creek Rd 5th June

Another quiet winter birding outing – both in terms of participants and birds (four of the former, 27 species of the latter). Apart from Wood Ducks apparently seeking out nesting hollows, and Wedge-tailed Eagles circling overhead, the main points of interest for the day were orchids and fungi. Several patches of Nodding Greenhoods in flower, and many leaves of Mosquito (*Acianthus*) and Tongue (*Cryptostylis*) orchids were found by the roadside, together with some woody pore fungi, puff-balls, and the inevitable Fly Agarics under the pine trees.



Photo: Lee Denis

During our walk a local landholder pulled up to talk to us and he ended up inviting us to visit his property, which we did after lunch. His property is largely open Messmate woodland, with mostly a low understory of Ghania and Bracken, and scattered Acacias. Presumably this represents the original landscape before clearing for farming. There

were as few birds here as along the road, and the same species of orchid leaves (quite abundant). We were intrigued to see that almost all of the Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) trees had their outer bark rubbed off up to about chest level. Our first thought was cattle rubbing against them, but there were no signs of cattle. Theories welcomed.

Also completely non bird related, we noticed a Sallow Wattle (possibly *Acacia longifolia* subsp *sophorae* – although these plants seem to hybridise with almost anything) with most of its phyllodes showing a “blister” near the upper end, and, on closer inspection, a zig-zag track leading from the very tip. Opening these blisters revealed small white caterpillars about 3mm long. So far we are unable to identify the insects involved – the internet does not provide any information, so possibly this insect is undescribed. Further investigations are underway – some have been collected and pupae have been developed. We will report if we find anything has hatched.



Phyllode 'blisters' and their inhabitant - Photo: Lee Denis

Later inspections at our usual haunts showed that these blisters are common on Sallow Wattles at many different

locations, although by my observation not as many on each plant where there are many plants. The Sallow by Bulldog Creek Rd was fairly isolated. We have checked, but have

not found these blisters on any other Acacia species. To be continued. – **Lee Denis**

Ella Boyen, Langwarrin Woodlands Landcare, Current Projects and Story So Far

14th June

Langwarrin Woodlands Landcare Group is a very new group, with its first meeting in August 2015. It started when Ella applied for a grant for feral animal control on her own block, and then convened a public meeting. The group now has 73 member properties ranging across the Langwarrin area from Cranbourne Botanic Gardens in the north, east to Cannons Creek and south to Frankston.

The group's first focus was rabbit control, and its statement of purpose has developed and expanded now to controlling pest plants and animals so as to improve biodiversity, with particular focus on protecting southern brown bandicoots, koalas, sugar gliders and echidnas.

They obtained a PPWCMA grant of \$25,000, which led to a dramatic decrease in rabbit numbers. Another grant of \$4300 has been used to fund a trailer and a program of speakers and workshops. Their distinguished speakers and leaders have included Gidja Walker, on chemical free weed control, Malcolm Legg on nest boxes and habitat, Jeanette Swain on habitat structure, Leon Costermans on geology and vegetation, plus living with snakes, propagation and seed collection and rabbit and fox control. They are using cameras to monitor fauna.

To facilitate administration efficiently Ella has embraced

technology – mailchimp for the newsletter, eventbrite for booking participants to events – at low or no cost, canva, for graphic design, and ecommerce, online accounting and of course the website, which tells the story so far and coming events, plus Facebook.

Their successes have been many in such a short time – the group is well known in the local area, grants have helped with recruiting, the workshops have reached lots of people, and members have learnt a great deal. The ongoing challenges are to get people more involved and participating, and also to keep the message positive and inspiring.

There is another new Langwarrin resident environment action group – FLOW – Friends of Langwarrin Outdoors and Waterways, started by Suzie Webster to bring attention to the litter being dumped in and near Boggy Creek and to promote and improve Langwarrin's environment. They can be found on Facebook.

Langwarrin Woodlands Landcare website is www.woodlandslandcare.org and well worth a visit. – **Judy Smart**.

Moonlit Sanctuary 17th June

The Club's last excursion to Moonlit Sanctuary in Pearcedale was about ten years ago. On that occasion it was a night tour. This time we decided to visit by daylight, with the objective of seeing some birds and animals that some of us have never seen before – such as Orange-bellied Parrot, Eclectus Parrot, and Regent Honeyeater.



Regent Honeyeater - Photo: Lee Denis

Normally most of our members would much prefer to view wildlife in its natural habitat rather than in a captive environment, but a visit to such a facility provides an irresistible opportunity for a field naturalist to see birds and animals we quite possibly will never see otherwise (although ticks on the life-list are off the agenda). Many of the birds and animals here have been rescued from bad situations, either as adults or as juveniles, and there is good reason to doubt their capacity to survive if left to their own resources.

Moonlit Sanctuary is involved in a number of captive breeding programmes, including for Orange-bellied Parrot, Tasmanian Devil, Southern Bettong and Bush Stone-curlew. Some of these programmes are aimed at re-introduction to the wild.

Some of the birds to be seen include Barking Owl, Eclectus Parrot, Banded Lapwing, Major Mitchell Cockatoo, Red-tailed Black-cockatoo, and Regent Honeyeater. Mammals included Pademelon, Red-necked Wallaby, Tammar

Wallaby, Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat, and a couple of young individuals of the Kangaroo Island subspecies of the Western Grey Kangaroo. A Spot-tailed Quoll could just be seen peeping out of its house.

Not that all of the wildlife was captive – a great many birds including Coots, various species of ducks and Cape Barren Geese were free to come and go. A pair of Yellow-billed Spoonbills landed beside the small lake while we were there.



Photo: Lee Denis

A large purpose-built aviary housed a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles. One astute birder noted that one of these birds was missing some talons; while excited to see these magnificent birds in such close quarters, we were a bit saddened to see them confined in this way. In fact both were rescued birds which are unlikely to survive in the wild, and their aviary was the first such aviary in Australia, according to a story in the Frankston Leader.

There is an animal display, similar to the one at Healesville where a trainer demonstrates some of the capabilities of the animals; it included a dingo as well as various birds. There is even a bush foods garden, although it is fair to say that it was not one of the leading attractions.

The Sanctuary is very popular with the public and so plays an important role in public awareness of the natural world. In an era of Leadbeater's Possum versus logging, Hooded Plovers versus dogs and horses on beaches, and many other similar conflicts, we as field naturalists would have no hesitation in favouring measures to ensure the continued existence of species which we never see and perhaps are not even aware of; this may not be a majority view however. Heightening public awareness that a habitat shelters a great deal below the surface which is worth preserving, even if unknown to us, is a worthwhile objective. - **Lee Denis**.

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 Activities can be found at our website.

President:
Coralie Davies
0425 763521

Treasurer:
Linda Edwards
95846790

All correspondence to
Secretary
Judy Smart
51 Wimborne Ave
Mt Eliza 3930
mandjsmart@gmail.com

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Newsletter edited by Lee Denis

www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au