



NEWSLETTER: JUNE 2018

**Maranoa Gardens, Balwyn
17th February**

Maranoa Australian Native Botanic Gardens had their beginnings as a private garden in 1901, before being taken over by the City of Camberwell (now part of the City of Boroondara) and opened to the public in the 1920s. Their information brochure claims that they contain "around 4000 different Australian native plants".



Photo - Lee Denis

The relatively compact area (less than three hectares) contains a number of zone plantings, including temperate woodland/heathland, arid, dry sclerophyll forest and rainforest — the latter divided into four types. There is a small section of lawn, but most of the area is devoted to plantings. The appeal is greatly enhanced by a small stream that runs through the garden.

Plants that particularly took my interest included a hybrid Flame Tree, *Brachychiton x rosea*, (a hybrid between *B. acerifolius* and *B. populneus*); *Callitris macleayana*, a Cypress Pine with interesting bark, called Stringybark Cypress-pine; a very large Tuckeroo (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*); the Firewheel Tree, (*Stenocarpus sinuatus*),

and its relative *Stenocarpus salignus* (Scrub Beefwood); a multitude of Casuarinas including *C. obesa*; and a number of unusual Acacias.

Part of the adjacent Beckett Park has been developed as an indigenous flora reserve, containing species that were found in the area before urbanisation — all were familiar from the Peninsula, including such species as *Burchardia umbellata* (Milkmaids), *Arthropodium strictum* (Chocolate Lily), and *Thelymitra pauciflora* (Slender Sun-orchid), under a canopy including Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*). It contains the classifications Grassy Woodland and Plains Grassy Woodland.



Photo - Lee Denis

Being late summer there were relatively few plants in flower; a visit in late winter or spring would reveal many more. — Lee Denis

**Central America and Mexico
Heather Ducat
14th February 2018**

This is Heather's 16th talk to us, which is quite an achievement.

Heather and family visited Mexico in 1984, and Central America in 2011. She started, as always, with the geology. The Isthmus of Panama is a land bridge between North and South America. It was created by uplift and volcanoes, and

is the newest major piece of Earth (apart from some islands), being only 3 million years old. It is part of the Pacific Rim of Fire, and prone to earthquakes, volcanoes and uplift. The animals which colonised this new land were those that could swim or hop – rodents and primates. Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama are the main countries of Central America.

The Mayan civilisation of Central America was active from 1000 BC to 1500 AD, and was a series of sophisticated independent city states. They had no iron tools, but crafted the local rock — limestone — with obsidian. They worshipped the jaguar. The civilisation originated in Guatemala, and gradually moved north to Southern Mexico due to soil exhaustion and drought in the south. The Spanish arrived and conquered in the 1500s.

The lowland jungle of South Mexico was alive with birds and howler monkeys, as well as 4 other species of monkey (capuchin, squirrel, spider and night). There were 5 species of Toucan, bromeliads everywhere, and less attractively, tarantula spiders up to 30cm across.

Next stop was Guatemala City, in a spectacular setting of a ring of active volcanoes.

Costa Rica has one third of the country protected in National Parks and reserves, and base their economy on

tourism. They haven't had a military since 1948, a unique policy. The statistics for their wildlife and vegetation are astonishing — in their Amazon type rainforest there are 1400 species of orchids, 2600 Bromeliad species, and 15,000 plant species. When Christopher Columbus arrived he was convinced he had reached China, because of the similar animal species such as deer and foxes, and plants such as oaks and pines. There are 120 species of mammals including ocelot and other small cats, sloths, anteaters, bats (100 species), raccoons, opossum, coati and armadillo.

Rodents are not as numerous as in South America, but there is the Agouti, like a large guinea pig, and the spiny rat. It is a birdwatchers' paradise with 14 woodpecker species, 78 flycatchers, 338 humming birds, and so on. Reptiles include the basilisk (known as the Jesus Christ lizard, because it runs across water), skinks, geckoes, iguana and crocodile. And did I mention the 1250 species of butterflies? — **Judy Smart**

Birding at The Briars 5th March

Our efforts to visit The Briars had been unsuccessful for some time — there always seemed to be some reason for keeping us out, from re-construction of the boardwalks to vermin control to high winds, but we made it this time. Unfortunately, with our long dry summer, like much of the Peninsula The Briars seemed dull and lifeless. All of the dams around the walking tracks were dry, and the bush seemed eerily quiet, so much so that our total of 36 species came as a surprise. Quite a few of these were seen on the two lagoons at the bird hides, including several species of

duck, a White-faced Heron, Australasian Grebe, Coot, Moorhen, Swamphen and Welcome Swallow.

Amazingly only two small honeyeaters — White-eared and New Holland — were seen, along with Red and Little Wattlebird and Noisy Miner

Our final sighting for the day came when five emus strolled out of the bush to feed on an open grassy clearing.— **Lee Denis**



Photo - Lee Denis

Bird List for The Briars 5th March 2018			
Emu	Purple Swamphen	Eastern Rosella	Eastern Yellow Robin
Black Swan	Dusky Moorhen	Laughing Kookaburra	Grey Shrike-thrush
Australian Wood Duck	Eurasian Coot	White-browed Scrubwren	Magpie-Lark
Pacific Black Duck	Masked Lapwing	Brown Thornbill	Grey Fantail
Grey Teal	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Red Wattlebird	Grey Butcherbird
Chestnut Teal	Galah	Little Wattlebird	Australian Magpie
Australasian Grebe	Long-billed Corella	Noisy Miner	Little Raven
White-faced Heron	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	White-eared Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Swamp Harrier	Rainbow Lorikeet	New Holland Honeyeater	Common Blackbird

Frankston Nature Conservation Reserve 18th March

We were planning to go to Mt Macedon but the Extreme Fire Danger rating and high winds predicted made us decide at the last minute not to go. A few of us went to the FNCR and were pleasantly surprised, not expecting to see much on a hot morning.

Our first stop was the Reservoir, where among the usual water birds were a pair of musk ducks, and 3 blue-billed ducks. While we were admiring them a Brown Goshawk flew down and landed on the beach of the reservoir, rested for a while and then flew low over the water, causing a great deal of duck-diving.

From there we walked the Kookaburra Walk, and as to be expected there was little in flower, apart from *Persicaria* sp. and Angled Lobelia in the water channel. A Meadow Argus butterfly posed on the *Persicaria* for us.

Non-indigenous native plants dominate the flora on the walk – *Acacia elata* (Cedar wattle, from Northern NSW), *A. prominens* (Gosford wattle), *A. pycnantha* (Golden wattle) and *A. dealbata* (Silver wattle), as well as garden Grevilleas, Hakeas and Coastal ti-tree. *Pittosporum undulatum* is there of course, but doesn't dominate due to the competition from other garden thugs. The Friends of

FNCR have removed masses of Sollya – bluebell creeper from WA, but there's more to go.

We saw a few bush birds along the way and ended with a tally of 19, which was good for the conditions.

In the car park we met Hans Brunner who was very pleased because he found a young koala's scat on the track. — **Judy Smart**

Frankston Nature Conservation Reserve 17th March 2018	
Blue-billed Duck - 3	Spotted Pardalote
Musk Duck - 2	Brown Thornbill
Australian Wood Duck	Noisy Miner
Pacific Black Duck	Eastern Yellow Robin
Australasian Grebe	Golden Whistler
Hoary-headed Grebe	Grey Fantail
Little Pied Cormorant	Grey Butcherbird
Brown Goshawk	Australian Magpie
Eurasian Coot	Welcome Swallow
Laughing Kookaburra	

Reptiles of the Mornington Peninsula David De Angelis 14 March 2018

David is an environmental consultant, and co-ordinated a Swamp Skink survey of Parks Victoria properties on the southern Peninsula with the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria and Parks Victoria. Our member Lee participated in this survey. This survey built on work already done by Malcolm Legg and Norm McKinlay.

Victorian reptiles are in crisis – none are extinct, but 14 are critically endangered, 11 endangered and 10 vulnerable, making 30% of them threatened. This compares unfavourably with birds, who receive a lot of attention, at

19% threatened. Other unhappy statistics are – amphibians 43% threatened, mammals 22% and freshwater fish – 55%.

First discussed were some species commonly seen but not in early records — the Common Long-necked Turtle, found in freshwater, and possibly introduced from elsewhere in Victoria, and the Southern Marbled Gecko (common north of the Divide), which it is not certain if originally found in Melbourne. The Common Scaly-foot, or Legless Lizard, is indigenous to grasslands in Gippsland, Bendigo and west of Melbourne.



Swamp Skink. Photo - Lee Denis

The Mornington Peninsula has a staggering 15 species of skink. Most are basking skinks, using sunshine to warm themselves, but some live in shaded forests, and use the warmth of composting litter to function. McCoy's Skink lives in deep forests, in only a few locations. The Eastern 3-lined skink is more widespread and basks. The Southern Water Skink lives in tall forests near water, which need to be open enough to allow it to bask. The Delicate Skink looks similar but has a plainer back. The Garden Skink is widespread in drier habitat. Bougainville's Skink is rarely seen — it needs sand and loose soils to burrow in, and has a reddish tail. White's Skink lives in forest, heaths and grasslands, and also burrows.

Some more are: Metallic Skink, Southern Grass Skink, Weasel Skink (has a white spot behind the eye and rufous stripes, and is becoming more common in gardens, as it is shade loving).

The subject of the survey — the Swamp Skink — is a distinctive and attractive gold/bronze colour and lives in

swampy areas and paperbarks. It generally needs sedges for basking, but perversely has been found sometimes preferring weedy grasses. Its stronghold is Chinaman's Creek Rosebud, and also Warrangine Park. The survey hoped to find them in numbers in Greens Bush, but few were found.

The Glossy Grass Skink (Rawlinson's) is also vulnerable — its core habitat is neglected paddocks in the outer east suburbs with few trees, poor drainage and dense grass. This is prime industrial land which does not help the GGS.

Blue-tongue Lizards: the Blotched is found at higher elevations, and the Common (Banded) is more adaptable and likes grasslands. Both are found near the Frankston area. The Jacky Dragon lives in drier woodlands, and often shelters in fallen timber. The Lace Monitor was originally found here, but there are only a few records and it is not known if it is still here.

Snakes: the Eastern Brown Snake needs drier habitat, and there are fewer records of them. The Lowland Copperhead lives in damp habitat and eats frogs. The Eastern Small-eyed Snake —there are few records for the MP, more in the Melbourne region. The White-lipped Snake is the smallest snake on the MP (to 45cm) and uses a wide range of habitats. Tiger snakes are often in swamps and water courses. The Red-bellied Black Snake does not belong to the MP and when listed is generally a misidentified Lowland Copperhead, which has a reddish stripe on the side.

David also encouraged us to make Lizard Lounges — a reptile friendly garden with shelter and basking opportunities such as timber, tiles, tussock grasses and food plants such as Rhagodia. They also need protection from predators of lizards: foxes, dogs, cats and black rats.—

Judy Smart

Birding at Cranbourne Botanic Gardens 9th April

Numbers were well down — to four — for this outing, and although we wished we could tell the no-shows they had missed a great day, unfortunately the birds were largely no-shows as well (although Di kept telling us that if we had been there an hour and a half earlier we would have seen many more birds, as she did). Starting at the Stringybark car park our first sighting was a Fan-tailed Cuckoo; sightings were few and far between until we reached the wetland, where there were some ducks (Grey Teal of female Chestnut Teal? We decided on the former), grebes (Australian and Hoary-headed), Moorhens and Swampheens, a White-faced Heron, and a very talkative Welcome Swallow perched on the "No Swimming" sign.

We were gradually able to build up the numbers on the way back to the picnic ground (several honeyeaters, Golden Whistler, Fairy-wrens, Scrubwrens, Yellow Robin etc) but

numbers were well down on recent outings.



Photo - Di Peters

After lunch our numbers further reduced to two, who decided to visit the Australian Garden (one of us with an ulterior motive to check out the *Callitris oblonga* there, as well as any other interesting plants), and added Red-browed Finch and Dusky Woodswallow to the list, along with Eastern Spinebill - these were numerous, many feeding on the flowering Kangaroo Paw. On the way I was sad to see

the loss of the Western Australian Christmas Tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*, a member of the Loranthaceae or mistletoe family; strictly speaking a root parasite), billed as the worlds largest mistletoe, growing to 12 metres in its native habitat. A gardener explained that the tree was lost in high winds. — **Lee Denis**

Bird List For Cranbourne Botanic Gardens 9th April 2018

Pacific Black Duck	Purple Swamphen	White-browed Scrubwren	New Holland Honeyeater	Dusky Woodswallow
Grey Teal	Dusky Moorhen	Brown Thornbill	Eastern Spinebill	Grey Butcherbird
Hardhead	Eurasian Coot	Red Wattlebird	Eastern Yellow Robin	Australian Magpie
Australasian Grebe	Eastern Rosella	Little Wattlebird	Golden Whistler	Grey Currawong
Hoary-headed Grebe	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Noisy Miner	Grey Shrike-thrush	Red-browed Finch
Little Pied Cormorant	Superb Fairy-wren	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Magpie-Lark	Welcome Swallow
White-faced Heron	Spotted Pardalote	White-eared Honeyeater	Grey Fantail	Common Blackbird



Photos - Di Peters

**Tropical Birds of Australia
Max Burrows
11 April 2018**

Max Burrows is the President of Birdlife Mornington Peninsula, and has spoken to us before on Birding at Bookmark Biosphere, SA. This time he spoke on the tropical birds he has seen on his trips to North Queensland and the Northern Territory.

He started with tropical birds which visit us down south: the Cuckoos spend summer here and winter in the tropics. The Scarlet Honeyeaters which created so much excitement last summer locally, are more commonly seen in the tropics. A Common Koel has been a regular summer visitor to Frankston in recent years. Rainbow Bee-eaters are tropical birds which nest at the You Yangs in summer. Another memorable visitor was the Frigatebird seen at Olivers Hill a

few summers ago, well out of its usual tropical territory. Beach Stone-curlews are usually tropical but one is resident at Pambula now.

Birds which are confined to the tropics now, but used to be common in Victoria included Bustards and Brolgas. Another bird on the move is the Sarus Crane, which expanded its range from Asia to Tropical Australia some years ago, but was not noticed for a while because it closely resembles the Brolga.

Max showed us photos of groups such as the many beautiful and varied Finches, including the sought after Gouldian; the 3 species of Whistling-ducks, Monarchs,

Honeyeaters, and the Parrots with Golden-shouldered, Hooded, Red-winged and Eclectus among others. The male and female Eclectus Parrots are so different — the male is bright green with red, the female crimson with lots of blue — that they were thought to be different species for some time.

Other intriguing birds were the Cassowary, Spangled

Drongo (surely the best named bird in Australia), Pacific Baza, Victoria’s Riflebird and the Pheasant Coucal, related to the Cuckoos.

It was a great introduction to the many, varied and spectacular tropical birds, making you long to pack the car and get going.— **Judy Smart**

Hanging Rock Excursion Disaster And Fascinating Organ Pipes 14 April 2018

After failing to visit Hanging Rock last month due to fire danger, today’s attempted visit was also unsuccessful, this time due to strong winds. So, the Hanging Rock National Park was closed for visitors and we only managed to have a peek at the Rock’s edge through the forest and take a photo. That is the only documentation of our great desire to spend time hanging about the mystic rock.



Vampire cliff - Edge of the rock

As we were coming down from Mt Macedon, the weather started to improve: wind slowed down, rain stopped, sun and rainbow appeared. When we reached Organ Pipes National Park it was a completely different day. On our way through the Reserve it was sunny, clear with amazingly fresh air and, all of a sudden there was a “site explosion” — the basalt columns jumped from Jacksons Creek high into the sky. It was a breath stopping moment, a wonder moment triggered by the grandiosity of nature and the art creations of the prehistoric geological times.

The valley walls of Jacksons Creek expose Pleistocene volcanic rocks of the New Volcanic Group and their age is between 2.5 to 2.8 million years. The basalt lava fractured during cooling into vertically standing, hexagonal columns. The popular names for the basalt lava and these amazing vertical columns are: “trap rock” and “organ pipes”.

Since those ancient times, the Jacksons Creek continuous cutting down into the basaltic plains and trap rocks has slowly been exposing more and more of these geological beauties. The Jacksons Creek also exposes 400 million year-old buried valley cut into Silurian mudstones and sandstones. This buried valley still contains ancient creek gravel of quartz and quartzite. Marine fossils found in lower levels of the Silurian sedimentary tell us that it once

was a bottom of a prehistoric ocean.



Organ pipes and Jacksons Creek

Jacksons Creek, which meets with Deep Creek to become Maribyrnong River, created a deep valley in the basaltic plain formation of hard, dark rock, making these significant geological formations such as hexagonal basalt columns. As the lava cooled over several years the interior molten lava got insulated and developed into undisturbed columns of basalt (with uniform composition).



Rosette Rock

Today, the rock formation rises to a height of 20 metres and is considered the best example of rare columnar jointing. The width of each “pipe” in the formation is about 1 metre. Only some of the columns are vertical, while most other

smaller columns around the Pipes are either inclined or horizontal.

Rosette rock is one of the unusual “sculptures”, a radial array of basalt columns. It is an overhanging rock on the northern bank of the stream. It is also an outcrop of basalt, but with a radial array of columns akin to the spokes of a giant wheel. Its formation is attributed to the cooling of a pocket of lava, probably in a spherical cave formed from an earlier lava flow.

Tessellated pavement is an assortment of basalt columns formed by erosion caused by the Jackson Creek.

It wasn't only the rocks that were interesting. Several kangaroos were hanging around and posing for the camera in front of the Organ Pipes. It looked like they were the locals who knew what the main attraction was.—**Photos and text by Velimir Dragic**

Punch Bowl San Remo – George Bass Coastal Walk 12 May 2018

Four club members defied the forecast for showers following a very wet Friday and ventured to the rugged Bass Coast. It is 8 years since we last did this 7 km. walk from the Punchbowl, near San Remo to Kilcunda. In view of the weather, we decided to only walk the Punchbowl end of the track, with the option to retreat if the showers rolled in. It also has more interesting geological formations than the Kilcunda end.

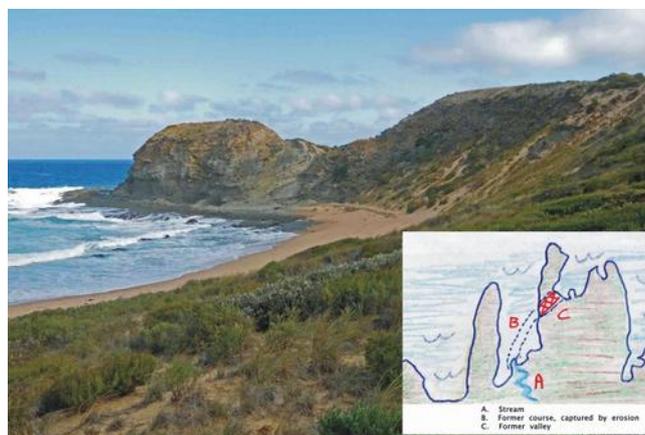
close-up view of a pair of Peregrine Falcons gliding in the strong wind. The steep rocky cliffs provide an ideal nesting site.



The Punchbowl. Photo: Heather Ducat

The Strzelecki Ranges of South Gippsland are formed by a series of domes and blocks, uplifted between faults with intervening areas of subsidence. During Cretaceous times, (144 - 65 m.y.a.) sediment was deposited in an east/west trough between southern Victoria & Tasmania, on a rapidly subsiding floodplain with lakes, swamps and braided streams. The sediment formed mudstone and sandstone and is similar to the Otway coast and also contains dinosaur fossils and coal seams.

George Bass Coastal Walk crosses the uplifted Bass Block with spectacular cliffs and small sandy coves. Near the western end is an interesting formation called 'The Punchbowl', a steep-sided hollow about 50m. wide and 30m. deep; it has formed as a result of subsidence of the roof of a cave. Exploration was not possible due to fences, a steep slippery track and pounding waves on the narrow rocky shore platform. We were confined to a high windy lookout above the formation which gave us a wonderful



Captured Stream Valley. Photo: Heather Ducat

We walked almost to the halfway point to Kilcunda, as far as Sandy Waterhole, which gives access to the beach. A stream flows from a narrow valley into the sandy cove; the former course of the stream can be seen across a nearby headland. The valley was captured and dismembered by cliff recession. We retraced our route to the car and after lunch had a short walk along the bank of Powlett River, almost to the mouth. With the outflow blocked by sand dunes, an extensive wetland has formed and is good habitat for numerous waterbirds. The showers finally arrived just after we returned to the car and headed for home. Judy, William, Velimir & I enjoyed a windy, energetic and very interesting day. — **Heather Ducat.**



Bass Coast. Photo: Heather Ducat

After our walk along the cliff, and lunch at the old railway bridge at Kilcunda, we thought we would have a look at the Mouth of the Powlett River, just down the road. As the crow flies, it isn't far at all. However it took us ages to get there due to a number of navigational errors.

First we missed the turn off, due to the lack of a sign, and ended up in Wonthaggi. There was a sign on the way back though, so we drove in. The first car park we came to must be it I thought, so we parked and set off walking, following the West Powlett River signs. (East, West, what difference

does it make, I thought.) Once down on the beach there was no sign of the river mouth so we started walking, then trudging, in the general direction of East. Twenty minutes later I conceded defeat, and we turned back. Back to the car, and this time, the correct car park further down the road. By now it was getting quite late, and the light failing, but it was a beautiful spot, and we saw a few birds, and it's definitely worth another look. And in a ditch on the side of the road at Lang Lang we saw a White-necked Heron, our second best bird of the day.—**Judy Smart**

Western Port Seagrass Partnership, 'Research & Results' Ian Stevenson, 9 May, 2018

Ian Stevenson started his career as a botanist, taught for 7 years, then after a Masters in Environmental Science became one of the first Conservation Officers in local government in Victoria, at Mornington Shire, in 1988. From there he worked at other councils, then finished his working life training CFA officers. In his retirement he volunteers widely, including with the Western Port Seagrass Partnership, as Chairman.

In the 1970s it was observed that there was a major loss of seagrass in Western Port, and studies were undertaken into the causes and remedies. In 2000 it was recommended that an NGO be created to promote seagrass recovery, and the WPSP was set up in 2001 as an independent body, to undertake research and create projects with the aim of restoring seagrass to Western Port. There were a number of Professors involved, and also the late great John Clarke, broadcaster, who made a great contribution to the WPSP until his untimely death in 2017.

The seagrass loss is caused by water turbidity – sediment, smothering the seagrass. The sources are one third each; sediment washed in from the catchment – Koo Wee Rup Swamp rivers, cliff erosion, and re-suspension. The Cardinia Shire frontage provides 32% of the sediment entering Western Port, (5 – 8000 tonnes per year), but is a difficult management issue because there is no Crown Land and no management plan. Farmers are losing their water frontage to erosion by about 1 metre a year, and also have their paddocks inundated by seawater up to 1 km from the beach in storm surges. The Grantville area also has an erosion problem, with rock walls failing to hold the water back.

There are three species of seagrass in Western Port. *Zostera muelleri* grows in the intertidal mudflats. *Heterozostera nigricaulis* grows in shallow subtidal areas. *Amphibolis antarctica* grows in the oceanic western and eastern entrances to Western Port, and is the seagrass washed up on Flinders and Somers beaches.

One of the first projects was planting seagrass plugs in Western Port, but these were smothered by silt. After this it

was decided that the answer was to plant mangroves to reduce cliff erosion and to collect sediment, in order to give seagrass a chance to survive.

In tropical Australia there are many species of mangrove, but in southern Australia there is only one – *Avicennia marina*, the grey mangrove. Since 2007 until now there has been a massive volunteer effort to grow mangroves and plant them, with much experimentation. Several schools and the Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises nursery have grown mangroves, each using very different methods and potting mixes. The upshot has been that mangroves are easy to propagate and grow, but establishing in Western Port waters is very difficult.

Planting them unprotected has not worked, they were colonised by barnacles or washed away. Planting into plastic tubes has worked better, but they have been ringbarked, so another attempt involved filling the tube with artificial turf to protect the seedling. This worked better, but is too intensive. Using these methods a 25% survival rate has been considered good. Another experiment is direct seeding, using a seed attached by rubber band to a stick. So far, a 30% survival rate.

One of the founders of WPSP is Dr Tim Ealey, who only retired from the project 2 years ago, at the age of 90. He spoke to our Club in 2008 on mangroves, and a few of us joined a planting day soon after. The memory of wading through, and planting into, deep sucking mud is still fresh.

Last year Dr Hugh Kirkman conducted a night beam trawl of seagrass and unvegetated sandy areas of Western Port. The results were that the seagrass beds had five times more animals captured than from the unvegetated areas. Altogether there were 81 species of animals counted, the majority being crustacea such as crabs, shrimps, sea spiders and barnacles, but also juvenile fish and six species of pipefish.

Seagrass also stores more carbon than rainforests, and could be used for carbon capture.— **Judy Smart**

Birding at Seaford Wetlands 7th May

The north wind was gusting to 40 knots or more when eight members gathered at the Austin Road observation platform. The birds, being smarter than the watchers, were absent altogether — not a single water bird to be seen. A few backyard birds — Magpies, Magpie-lark, Red Wattle-bird — were the only signs of life. Results were no better along the western side of the wetland, with only some ferals and some Rainbow Lorikeets.



Things improved opposite the school, where we came across three bright orange male Flame Robins, together with one female. A Willie-wagtail was consorting with them.

It was only when we reached the Eel Race Drain that we started to see waterbirds - all of the waterbirds in the list below were seen along the Drain. Even then, some of the birds reported by a couple of cyclists we met on the way had moved on by the time we got there — although we did see a Dusky Woodswallow as predicted.



Following the Drain we were exposed to the full force of the wind, but we did see a few more birds including a flock of Goldfinches. Returning through Downs Estate, with the wind at our backs, our best sighting was of a Nankeen (Australian) Kestrel hunting in the paddocks. A few more bush birds, including Fairy-wrens and New Holland Honeyeater rounded out our surprising bird list of 40. After a very wind-blown lunch we took the only sensible decision — to go home. — **Lee Denis**



All Photos: Lee Denis

Bird List for Seaford Wetland, May 7, 2018				
Pacific Black Duck	Australian White Ibis	Silver Gull	Noisy Miner	Grey Butcherbird
Chestnut Teal	Straw-necked Ibis	Rock Dove	New Holland Honeyeater	Australian Magpie
Australasian Grebe	Swamp Harrier	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Flame Robin - 3 male, 1 female	Little Raven
Hoary-headed Grebe	Nankeen Kestrel	Crested Pigeon	Eastern Yellow Robin	European Goldfinch
Little Pied Cormorant	Purple Swamphen	Rainbow Lorikeet	Magpie-Lark	Welcome Swallow
Little Black Cormorant	Dusky Moorhen	Eastern Rosella	Grey Fantail	Common Blackbird
White-faced Heron	Eurasian Coot	Superb Fairy-wren	Willie Wagtail	Common Starling
Great Egret	Masked Lapwing	Red Wattlebird	Dusky Woodswallow	Common Myna

**SEANA Autumn Camp - Healesville
27-29 May 2018**

The camp this year was hosted by The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria and was based at Healesville. A range of full-day & half-day excursions included a behind the scenes tour of Healesville Sanctuary, the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve, home to the rare Helmeted Honeyeater and the lowland Leadbeaters Possum and bushland at Dixons & Chum Creek areas comparing differences in fire intensity and the recovery of vegetation since the 2009 bushfires.



Donnellys Weir. Photo: Heather Ducat

A half-day excursion on Saturday was a delightful walk from Maroondah Dam to Donnellys Weir, looking at the history of the dam, plants and birds. The original weir was built in 1891 and the Maroondah Dam was completed in 1927. The mature exotic trees were flushed with autumn colour and hosted King Parrots, Spotted Pardalotes, Crimson Rosellas, White-throated Trecreepers, Grey Currawongs, Yellow Robins, Olive Whistler, Brown Thornbill and more. Waterbirds included Pacific Black Ducks, Hoary-headed Grebes, White Ibis and Dusky Moorhens.

Our route took us across the dam wall and to the lookout, with a good view of the exposed shoreline and the surrounding peaks clothed in Mountain Ash. The water level is down a bit after summer and dry autumn. The geology of the area includes marine sediment, much folded and uplifted. Nearby Mt. Donna Buang is one of a number of Devonian (370-360 m.y.o.) volcanic calderas that filled with ash, some to a depth of 1500 metres.

The highlight of our 2½ hour walk was seeing a pair of Powerful Owls, perched high up in a tall pine tree; their presence was indicated by some bones and fur on the ground. They were not at all disturbed by the excited chatter of our group. The owls were partially obscured by a maze of branches but we watched them for about 15 minutes. It's the best view I've ever had, but probably my worst-ever photograph. Certainly a delightful and exciting walk. — **Heather Ducat.**



Powerful Owl Dinner Remains. Photo: Heather Ducat



Maroondah Dam. Photo: Heather Ducat

Giant Trees of Toolangi

Brett Mifsud is an arborist who with colleagues has found and measured many of Victoria's and Tasmania's tallest trees, and documented them on websites and papers.



Brett Mifsud with one of his Big Trees. Photo: Judy Smart

He took us on a tour of Toolangi's tallest trees. Toolangi has

3 of Victoria's top 10 large trees. We started at Sylvia Creek Rd and wound around through the Yea Link Rd and Blowhard Rd and ended up at the Kalatha Giant Tree. The first one we saw was a Grey Gum, *Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*, and the rest were Mountain Ash, *Eucalyptus regnans*, the second tallest trees in the world, second only to the American *Sequoia sempervirens*, the Coast Redwood.

Brett and his colleagues had given the trees names, such as Scarlett Scarface (for a large bole on the side), Blackbeard, and His Royal Antechinus (for an antechinus scampering down the tree when found). The trees had both large girth (measured at 1.4m off the ground), and height, with a range of 10 – 14 metres girth and 65 – 70 metres height, making

them all very awe inspiring and impressive, and far too important to be turned into wood chips.

The understory of these trees was beautiful too, with Mountain Pepper (*Tasmannia lanceolata*), Mountain Correa (*Correa lawrenciana*), Tree Lomatia (*Lomatia fraseri*), Christmas bush (*Prostranthera lasianthos*) and Snow daisy (*Olearia pannosa*), as well as ferns and fungi. It was a wonderful day, and we really appreciated Brett's work.

It is well worth visiting Brett's websites, <https://victoriasgianttrees.weebly.com/> and <https://tasmaniasgianttrees.weebly.com/>, plus his papers and other links. — **Judy Smart**

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.

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