



NEWSLETTER: MAY 2011

The Thin Green Line - Talk by Sean Wilmore

Our March speaker was Sean Willmore, a former Parks Victoria ranger who set up an organisation called *The Thin Green Line* which works to support park rangers around the world. Sean took us on a quick world tour of national parks and nature reserves in Africa, Asia, North and South America and Europe, and the issues faced by the park rangers.

Poaching is a major issue facing rangers in Africa, with many rangers being killed as they try to protect the animals in their reserves such as elephant, rhinoceros and gorillas. His organisation has provided financial support to the widows and children of rangers who have lost their lives fighting for what they believe in, usually for very little pay and with little or no support.

Habitat degradation is a problem in many Asian countries, even in declared reserves, whilst even in the USA and Canada rangers face danger from illegal hunters.

Sean's major message was that yes, bad things continue to happen, but that good people can make a difference and maintaining a positive outlook is essential. Balanced against the sad stories were the many friends Sean has made around the world and the common devotion across continents and cultures to conserving and protecting our natural places.

More information on the Thin Green Line can be found at www.thingreenline.org.au.



The Weedy Sea Dragon

Our March field trip was aboard the glass-bottomed boat Weedy Sea Dragon out of Mornington. A good number of members and several visitors took part on what turned out to be a rather chilly day on the water.

Leaving the Mornington Jetty the boat headed for Fisherman's Point where we were able to see a clear view of the seabed.

Surprisingly few fish were seen – apart from one ray – but there was plenty to interest us including algae, sponges, anenomes and urchins on the sea bed. We were able to identify differences in the communities between regions with different exposures to the prevailing south-westerly wave regime.

The glass-bottomed boat is a good way to view this shallow-water marine habitat without getting wet.





Following the boat trip we went to the Balcombe Creek estuary for lunch followed by a walk along the boardwalk, spotting a number of birds including Rufous Whistler, Royal Spoonbill, and the common bush birds. An unusual sighting was a Ringtail Possum not quite fitting into a nest box!

Wilson Botanic Park, Berwick

Nine members of the Club visited the Wilson Botanic Park in Berwick for our May field trip. The Park is an old blue-metal quarry, first opened in 1859 and worked until 1976. Fossilised wood, leaves and pollen had been unveiled during the early quarry excavations. Further study had found the Park to contain the earliest dated eucalypt fossils in the country, and that tropical rainforest existed here 20 million years ago. After 117 years of quarry operation the 39 hectare park was left with many interesting landforms including two lakes, sheer rock walls and large

hills.

The Park was opened in 1992 as a Botanic Park and displays many native and exotic plants and trees that attract many species of birds. Many species of *Correa* were displayed.

Bird sightings included Eastern Spinebill, White-browed Scrubwren, New Holland Honeyeater, Scarlet Robin, Purple Swamphen, Dusky Moorhen, Little Pied Cormorant and Australasian Grebe, among others.

The Park has a bird hide, lots of open and sheltered picnic areas, a lookout and scenic views of the surrounding countryside. - **Pat Gomm**

Sunshine Reserve

Our speaker on Wednesday, April 13, 2011 was Gill Gordon, the indefatigable Project Officer for Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group Inc. Gill explained to us how this very active and successful group have over 11 years changed this reserve from 75% weeds, to 75% indigenous vegetation. They have done this with the help of grants, community support, and very effective publicity. The Reserve is 3 km long, narrow in places, following the Sunshine Creek line, and comes out at the Esplanade near Hearn Rd.



Judy Smart

Following the meeting on the Wednesday we met Gill on Saturday 16/4/11 at the end of Waterview Drive (which is a new street, only in recent Melways). Gill showed us some sites the group have been working on recently, and other areas which have been successfully regenerated for longer. She pointed out to us the calls of Southern Toadlets. Also seen were many Meadow Argus butterflies (*Junonia villida*). This butterfly is found Australia wide, and flies nearly all year round, apart from winter.

Its food plants are *Goodenia* spp. (which were growing near where we saw it), as well as plantains, snapdragons and centaury.

(Information from Flying Colours, Pat & Mike Coupar)

After lunch we walked down the Southern side of the Reserve, behind the houses, to The Esplanade. We stopped to admire the cliff, the gannets diving close by, enjoy the sunny day, then back up the Northern side. We saw a good bird list (which I forgot to write down) of at least 20 species. We were very impressed by such beautiful bushland, so close to houses. We would never have known it had been 75% weeds recently.

For more information: www.sunshinereserve.com.au

Southern Toadlet (*Pseudophryne semimarmorata*)

An autumn calling frog of very decorative appearance, though unfortunately we couldn't find one to admire his bright colours. See Frogs of Australia website for details, and to hear his call. - **Judy Smart**

Leadbeaters Possum – May Meeting Talk by Raymond Gibson

This year marks the fifty-year anniversary of the re-discovery of Leadbeater's Possum (3 April 1961) in the mountain ash forest at Cambarville, after it had been declared officially extinct. For many years Ray Gibson has run a stagwatch programme for the Victorian Field Naturalists Club, recording the occurrence of this possum in the highland forests. The term "stag" here refers not to a male deer but to a hollow-bearing tree which is likely habitat for these animals.

The technique consists of identifying these stags, which must occur with an understory, usually of Acacias, to provide good habitat for Leadbeater's Possum. The possums leave their nest hollows, usually at or just after sunset, and rapidly make

their way into the understory to minimise the risk of predation. The observer looks for the distinctive silhouette to distinguish Leadbeater's Possum from other likely inhabitants of the stag including Mountain Brushtail Possums, Ringtail Possums, Sugar Gliders, Yellow-bellied Gliders and Greater Gliders.

Ray outlined the types of habitat in which Leadbeater's Possums have been sighted, and took us through an analysis of sighting records from the VFNC programme, including yearly variations in numbers recorded in the years following major bushfires. Unfortunately these records indicate a decline in numbers over the last few years, but the data is not definitive.

Birdwatching Group

Bird List Seaford Wetlands 1 May 2011				
Black Swan	Pacific Black Duck	Chestnut Teal	Hoary-headed Grebe	White-faced Heron
Cattle Egret - 20 +	Australian White Ibis	Whistling Kite	Swamp Harrier	Purple Swamphen
Dusky Moorhen	Eurasian Coot	Silver Gull	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Crested Pigeon
Galah	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Superb Fairy-wren	Spotted Pardalote	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Red Wattlebird	Little Wattlebird	Flame Robin - 2 male, 3 female	Golden Whistler	Magpie-Lark
Grey Fantail	Willie Wagtail	Australian Magpie	House Sparrow	European Goldfinch
Mistletoebird – 2	Welcome Swallow	Little Grassbird	Golden-headed Cisticola	Silvereye
Common Starling				

UPCOMING EVENTS

Meeting – June 8

Roz Jessop from the Victorian Wader Study Group will speak on **Ruddy Turnstones Migration – Early Results of Geolocator Studies**

June Excursion

Please note that this excursion has changed both date and place since the program went out. It is now June 18 (the Saturday after the long weekend), and we are going to the recently re-opened and renovated Endeavour Fern Gully, at Red Hill (opposite the Red Hill Showgrounds). We are being shown around by members of SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association). For more details about SPIFFA and Endeavour Fern Gully see www.spiffa.org

Meeting – July 13 will be a members night and AGM. Members are invited to bring along exhibits including slides or photographs – limit of about 6 photos per person.

The **field trip that month, on July 16**, will see us joining a working bee with the Friends of Upper Sweetwater Creek

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 www.home.vicnet.net.au/~penfnc.

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