



# PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia

## NEWSLETTER: DECEMBER 2020



*Group at Woods Reserve. Photo by Velimir Dragic*

Four months after our last walk in the bush together we finally were able to meet at Woods Reserve for our scheduled November birding outing, albeit with masks and social distancing. On arrival at the gate we saw the dreaded sign 'Notice of Closure'. Reason: fox control operations. On closer inspection we noted that by chance we had managed to schedule our visit into the week between closures of the Reserve. Luck was on our side for once! It was great to spend some time in the bush with like-minded people again. And what's more, the weather was ideal. The birds also mostly cooperated, giving us some good sightings (and a few hearings). Being field naturalists we could not overlook many other attractions in the plant and insect worlds.

A delightful excursion to Baldrys Crossing, Greens Bush followed, with much of interest. Good to start to enjoy the Peninsula's natural places as a group again. This excursion was still under the mandatory masks regime. Our next group outings will be mask-free, although social distancing is still the order of the day. Many of us are now looking forward to the resumption of our various volunteering activities.

As the Covid crisis developed, our Secretary Judy optimistically planned one schedule after another only to have to abandon them as circumstances changed. Finally we were able to keep one.

No meetings as yet—we only managed two meetings this year, in February and March, apart from our AGM held over Zoom. We have kept in touch remotely through email, and there has been quite a bit of activity on the Club's Facebook page. If the pandemic doesn't flare up again we should be able to continue our excursions next year; with regard to meetings it's a case of wait and see, although Judy has, possibly more in hope than expectation, scheduled a meeting for February 2021. We'll wait and see. Since we cannot meet indoors, we'll be having an outdoor breakup this year.

Meanwhile our members have continued to enjoy our natural environment individually. Thanks to those who have shared their experiences via an article for this newsletter. It is always enjoyable, as editor, to receive an unsolicited contribution, so don't be shy.

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## Post-Covid Birding Outing to Wood's Reserve Monday, 2nd November

A relieved group of Field Nats gathered for the first post-Covid lockdown outing, ready with masks and preparedness to social distance. We were under the limit of ten, so it was pretty easy for us to manage. Measurements of the 25km fortunately allowed Heather and Velimir to sneak in by about a kilometre.

Some of us, well me at least, were initially a bit rusty on our bush-bird calls. Thankfully we had Bette to confirm the species for us. But we needed to know the calls as many birds were heard first and took some tracking down, with two species not seen – Olive-backed Oriole and Sacred Kingfisher – the rest we did get to see at some stage during the walk.

Whilst it was a birding outing, as usual there were the distractions, weeds to be pulled (well that couldn't have kept going or the walk would have only been for a hundred metres!), flowers to be identified, insects to be photographed but there were also good birds to be seen.

As we meandered into the reserve, the extent of dead trees where the Bell Miner colony is, took a few people by surprise. It seems to have spread quite a bit since we could recall our last visits. It is looking pretty desolate along that section of the creek. But the birds kept appearing, a flycatcher – Shining, and pardalotes, both Striated and Spotted as we strode up the other side of the creek. Great views were had by all of a small flock of Red-browed Finches on the track with several birds drinking at a puddle. Where is that Fantail Cuckoo – it seems to be getting closer?



*Grey Fantail trying to 'fit' into a tight frame.  
All photos: Rog Standen*

On several occasions, we saw shiny beetle larva on the ground. I'm pretty sure these are the Honeybrown Beetle (*Ecnolagria grandis*), that feed on dead leaves and result in those lovely skeletonised leaves. Judy found a Lycid Beetle (*Porrostoma* sp) on a flowering Prickly Teatree bush (*Leptospermum continentale*). These beetles are toxic and offensive in taste to most predators, which they advertise by the orange and black colours. Many other insects mimic the colouring and shape of these beetles to avoid predation.

Lots of chatter emanated among the group as people caught up with the comings and goings of the past few months. Whistlers were prominent across the reserve but as is usually the case, there were no waterbirds on the dam. However, as we were discussing this, in flew a pair of Chestnut Teal. The dam is clearly in a healthy state, with a good ring of Tall Spike-rush (*Eleocharis sphacelata*) around the edge and at least six species of dragon/damselflies were identified (by me later), but it doesn't seem to nurture much waterbird life.

At last, we had good views of the cuckoo, males and females of the Golden and Rufous Whistlers, plus many other good birds among the total of 43 for the walk.

Lee found an unusual, spongy pink fungus on a dead log that had an appearance that resembled a sponge oozing onto the surface. It was soft to touch and held an indentation from a finger.\*\*



*A really healthy patch of Common Bird Orchid (*Chiloglottis valida*) was found next to the track with many still flowering.*

We saw many 'common' things on the walk, but they were all of great interest.



*Male Superb Fairy-wren enjoying a bath after a lovely warm day.*

The weather was gorgeous, sunny, calm and warm, perfect for our outing. People dispersed after a pleasant, late lunch.

PS I went back to the dam after lunch to photograph the odonata and on leaving the reserve at the end of the day, watched a range of birds come into a small puddle on the track to bathe and drink. This included a male Golden Whistler, Striated Thornbills and Superb Fairy-wrens. — **Rog Standen**



*Elusive male Golden Whistler after his bath.*



*Common Bluetail*



*Judy's Lycid Beetle on a Prickly Teatree (*Leptospermum continentale*) flower*



\*\* I believe this was in fact a slime mould, which is not a fungus but belongs to the Kingdom Protista. I have not been able to further identify it, so if anyone has any ideas please let us know—Ed.

**Bird List For Woods Reserve 3 November 2020**

Chestnut Teal	Eastern Rosella	Striated Thornbill	Eastern Yellow Robin	Dusky Woodswallow
Australian Pelican	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Red Wattlebird	Golden Whistler	Grey Butcherbird
Australian White Ibis	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	Little Wattlebird	Rufous Whistler	Australian Magpie
Straw-necked Ibis	Laughing Kookaburra	Bell Miner	Grey Shrike-thrush	Grey Currawong
Silver Gull	Sacred Kingfisher	Noisy Miner	Satin Flycatcher	Little Raven
Galah	Superb Fairy-wren	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Grey Fantail	Red-browed Finch
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Spotted Pardalote	White-eared Honeyeater	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike	Common Blackbird
Rainbow Lorikeet	Striated Pardalote	White-naped Honeyeater	Olive-backed Oriole	Common Myna
Crimson Rosella	Brown Thornbill	Eastern Spinebill		

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## Parsnips, Carrots and Hemlock

One of the glorious sights of early summer is the swathes of Native Parsnip (*Trachymene composita* var. *composita*) in flower along the McClelland Break at Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve. This flower grows all through LFFR, but is spectacular when massed, as in the breaks. It is a tall, to 1.5 m high, annual or biennial herb, with profuse lacy white flowers in flat topped clusters, or umbels, on long stalks. It is an indigenous plant, but looks like several weed species, and for years a well-meaning person pulled out seedlings at LFFR. The Rangers had to put up signs advising that Wild Parsnip is one of the Good Guys.

Native Parsnip is usually found on sandy well-drained soils, such as found in the Sand Belt in SE Melbourne. For example, Braeside Park, Cheltenham Park, The Pines and Cranbourne Botanic Gardens. There are other occurrences in rocky montane to sub-alpine areas of the Victorian Alps. It often appears only after fire or soil disturbance, but this has not been the case at LFFR. It used to be called *Trachymene anisocarpa*.

So who are the Bad Guys that Native Parsnips resemble? I started to look into these, to learn how to tell them apart for myself, and found a lot of interesting plants. The most similar is Wild Carrot, *Daucus carota*, the wild form of the cultivated vegetable, which primarily grows on roadsides and agricultural areas. It is a widespread environmental weed in Victoria, NSW and WA. (It's also a weed in the USA). It has the same form as Native Parsnip, a tall herb with white lacy flowers, and finely divided foliage. The most obvious difference is that Wild Carrot has a single purple floret in the centre of the white flower cluster, and more finely divided foliage. Wild Carrot is also known as Queen Anne's Lace, and promoted as a cottage garden plant by specialist cottage garden nurseries. A local nursery has a coloured variety called Purple Kisses, which has cream and chocolate coloured flowers.

Then to confuse matters further there is False Queen Anne's Lace, or Bishop's flower, *Ammi majus*. This is also promoted by cottage garden nurseries. It is a native of the Nile River Valley, and widespread in North Africa and Europe. This is also an environmental weed, particularly in inland NSW and the Goulburn Broken catchment. It has a

large compound flower cluster, like the others, but the leaves differ from Wild Carrot in that the lower leaves have broad segments, and finely divided leaves further up the stem.

And then there's the notorious Poison Hemlock, *Conium maculatum*. This plant is poisonous to humans and animals, and was famously used to poison Socrates. The American Indians used it as an arrow poison. All parts of the plant are poisonous, and according to W.T. Parsons (Noxious Weeds of Victoria), an elephant from a visiting circus died in Ballarat some years ago after eating hemlock. It was deliberately introduced to Australia as a garden plant, which was an incredible act of stupidity. It wasn't long before it naturalised and was proclaimed a noxious weed. It is a widespread weed of the USA, NZ and Great Britain. Hemlock is not uncommon, but often overlooked. I have seen it established at Tower Hill, near Warrnambool, and on The Nut at Stanley, Tasmania. Hemlock flowers are small and loosely clustered, much smaller than the flower heads of Native Parsnip or Wild Carrot. The stems are smooth (not hairy like the Wild Carrot), and hollow with longitudinal lines, and characteristic purple blotches. The leaves are finely divided and lacy, like Wild Carrot.

Another line of enquiry is why *Trachymene composita* var. *composita* was called Native Parsnip in the first place, when the foliage doesn't closely resemble the edible Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*), which has broadly pinnate foliage, rather than the finely divided foliage of carrots. This led me down another rabbit hole, the Great Water Parsnip, *Berula erecta*. This aquatic or semi-aquatic herb (30-100cm high), grows in swamps and stream sides in every state except Tasmania and is widespread. It can be seen on the Mornington Peninsula at Burrabong Creek, near Cape Schanck. It was originally thought to be indigenous and called *Sium latifolium*, but is now accepted as a naturalised alien. Its homeland is Europe, Central Asia and North America. *Berula erecta*'s foliage closely resembles an edible parsnip. Vicflora warn you that it is often confused with *Heloscadium nodiflorum*, Fool's Water-cress, which fortunately is only found in Merri Creek, and is another naturalised alien.



Native Parsnip



Hemlock



Wild Carrot



*False Queen Anne's Lace*



*Australian Carrot*



*Hemlock (stem)*

To get away from the aliens, which seem endless, and get back to the indigenous: there is an indigenous Australian Carrot, *Daucus glochidiatus*, a small inconspicuous herb between 3 and 60 cm high, with tiny umbel flowers, and which is widely distributed around Melbourne, all states of Australia, and NZ. It is also found at Langwarrin FFR.

one; all the others are small or spreading herbs, some found in the Mallee, others are alpine. There are 38 species in Australia and the Pacific, and 55 world-wide.

	Native Parsnip	Wild Carrot	Hemlock	Ammi majus
Edible	Yes	Yes	No	No
Foliage	Hairy Basal leaves divided into 3 wedge shaped	Not hairy Basal leaves & upper leaves finely divided	Glabrous All finely divided like carrot	Glabrous Basal leaves in broad segments Upper leaves finely divided
Stems	Finely grooved	Hairy	Smooth, hollow, purple blotches, longitudinal lines	Ridged, smooth

These are all part of the family which used to be called **Umbelliferae**, after the umbel flowers. It is a big family worldwide, with 434 genera and 3780 species, many of which are edible, such as parsley, celery, and cumin, as well as poisons such as Hemlock. *Trachymene* is now in **Araliaceae**, and the other plants I have mentioned are in **Apiaceae**.

**Photo Credits**

Native Parsnip, Hemlock, Wild Carrot: Judy Smart  
False Queen Anne's Lace: ebay  
Australian Carrot: Annabel Carle (Vicflora)

**References:**

Vicflora website -<https://vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au/>  
Weeds Australia website- [weeds.org.au](https://weeds.org.au)  
Flora of Melbourne, Marilyn Bull  
Noxious Weeds of Victoria, W.T. Parsons  
Wikipedia

There are lots of other *Trachymene* - Victoria has 10 species and sub-species; *T. composita* var. *composita* is the only tall

Thanks to John Eichler for fact checking and improvements. All mistakes are mine. —**Judy Smart**

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**Unthanks Reserve Somerville**

Unthanks Reserve was originally part of a farm with a dam. Over time the land surrounding the reserve has been developed for residential estate. Predominantly it has been planted around the dam however there is a small section that is listed as Grassy Woodland. It is this grassy woodland section that I have been paying a bit of attention to of late. Noticing that this area contained Tiger Orchids (*Diuris sulphurea*) and Button Everlasting (*Coronidium scorpioides*)

The afternoon was sunny and something shiny blue caught my eye. Not knowing exactly what it was I made an identification, *Castiarina bifasciata* then put it on iNaturalist for assistance. Within a short time identification for another species *Astraeus navarchis* came in from multiple people both in Australia and Overseas, several advising that the Beetle was rare.

However on Tuesday the 21st October I was on my afternoon walk and decided to walk through Unthanks Reserve and the grassy woodland section to see if there were any other interesting things to notice. I always have a small camera with me just in case I come across something.

Looking up on iNaturalist there were two records in Australia one from 2015 and the other being mine, and eight records listed on the Atlas of Living Australia. Pretty happy to find something rare and it was only due to slowly walking around with my head down. The miniature world is an amazing place if time is taken to look.— **Graeme Rigg**



*Tiger Orchid*



*Button Everlasting*  
Photos by Graeme Rigg



*Jewel Beetle (Astraeus navarchis)*

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### Some Highlights of Spring in Mt Eliza 2020

My two favourite places in Spring in Mt Eliza are Moorooduc Quarry and the Mornington Railway line. Not being able to roam far this year, I have spent a bit more time in both lately.

Highlight 1. Moorooduc Quarry – The Dillwynia and Donkey orchids in early September, growing in the slashed area beside the ‘reference’ area. The reference area was fenced off decades ago to protect the many orchids growing within, and now unfortunately is overgrown with Gahnia and bracken, as well as shrubs and undergrowth, and few orchids have been seen in recent years. But just outside the fence is this luxuriant mix of *Dillwynia* sp and *Diuris orientis*, along with Nodding greenhoods.



Highlight 2. Moorooduc Quarry – Climbers. The wet conditions have suited *Clematis aristata*, *Glycine clandestina* and Love creeper - *Comesperma volubile*. They have put on a beautiful show.



Highlight 3. Mornington Railway line – *Daviesia latifolia* – Hop Bitter-pea. From Wooralla Drive to Bungower Rd Mornington is a significant biolink with great areas of grassy woodland, along with swampy areas, Snow gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*), the rare Purple Diuris (*Diuris punctata*) and many other treasures. All through October and November the lilies grow among the native grasses.

Highlight 4. Moorooduc Quarry – birds- no photos, but today (October 17) in a short time I saw close up Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, a pair of Yellow robins, Red-browed finches, Silvereyes, a Common Bronzewing, and a glimpse of the Peregrine Falcon cruising. All this accompanied by the calls of Banjo frogs.

Lowlight. There are plans for a bicycle track along the railway line from Moorooduc Station to Mornington. There is a working group looking at this currently. It would entail a 3m wide path with a fence between the path and the railway line, so it would destroy most of the vegetation on one side of the track. There are alternative routes proposed, so I hope they will be used instead. — **Judy Smart**

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### Annual General Meeting 2020

We usually hold our AGM in July, along with our annual working bee. Fortunately we had our working bee early, in June, at Sages Woodland, because days later we went into lockdown. We held off on the AGM for a few months, waiting to see what would happen. When it became obvious that there would be no meetings for a long time, we turned to Zoom.

The meeting was held September 9, and attendance was 11, which wasn't much different to our usual attendance. The election was quick, as no-one resigned, and there was no competition for the places on committee. So thanks to last year's position holders for standing again- Coralie Davies-President, Heather Ducat - Vice-President, Judy Smart - Secretary, Linda Edwards – Treasurer, Newsletter Editor-Lee Denis, General Committee- Eleanor Masterton and William Walker.

Coralie wrote a President's report which was circulated by email.

We had previously requested that members pay their subs direct to our bank account (details on last page of newsletter). The Treasurer's report by Linda was also circulated, and Linda reported that since her June 30 report quite a few members had paid subs, and our new bank

balance is \$910.02. We thank members who have paid direct; although there is not much going on, insurance still has to be paid.

There was discussion about whether to change our meeting night at the AGM in 2019, and the subject was raised again. There had been discussion during the year, but no consensus for a change. As it was too difficult to discuss issues via Zoom, the discussion had to be postponed until we can meet again in person.

The other issue for discussion was that we have committed to hosting a SEANA camp in September 2022. Now with Covid the camps that were to be held this year have had to be postponed, and nothing is certain about 2021. Will SEANA camps be viable in the future, with health uncertainties, and an ageing membership and attendees? Hosting a camp is a big commitment. It was decided not to commit any further with this camp until things are more predictable.

We found conducting a meeting via Zoom to be frustrating, with technical difficulties such as drop outs and poor sound for participants. It was better than not having a meeting though. We hope to discuss issues in the future in person. — **Judy Smart**

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### PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB PRESIDENT'S REPORT A.G.M. Sept.2020

Welcome and thanks for joining our Zoom meeting. This is a good opportunity to thank our Committee who I hope have all chosen to stay on to make this another painless AGM.

Thanks to Judy ( our backbone) , Lee for the newsletter and Website updates, also Linda, Heather,, William, Pat, and Eleanor for their various contributions.

This year being unable to meet at the hall, or have excursions, we have started our Facebook page thanks to the initiative of Tanya Hattingh. More that 50 people are appreciating the post called "Peninsula Field Nats." and we also have our amazing Newsletter. Please contribute to

both. Our Club enjoys respect in the Community due to our collective knowledge and I would like to see us capitalize on this status by way of increasing our advocacy for Nature whilst retaining our laid back, impromptu attitude towards enjoying same. We would need to spread the load. Of course it's not for everyone.

I really enjoy our annual working bee. It's rewarding as we usually help established groups and share knowledge, we don't work too hard and our hosts like us!

Looking forward to hopping back on our bike....but not in the bush! —**Coralie Davies**

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### Greens Bush 14th November

Our first excursion since our working bee in July was to Baldrys Crossing in Greens Bush, part of the Mornington Peninsula National Park. Six members and one visitor attended on a fine, mild, albeit cloudy day with little wind. We decided to start earlier than usual in case the car park at this very popular location became too crowded. We think it did, because there was an influx of people while we were in the bush, but as usual we took so long on the walk that the crowd had thinned out by the time we got back.

This was a very enjoyable excursion with much to see. Good birding, some interesting insects, and some plants that are not seen in the more heathland northern parts of the Peninsula. Almost the first things we noticed were some Bird Orchids; the flowers were past their best but were on extremely long flower stems—20-30 cm. We decided that these must be *Chiloglottis valida*, even though we couldn't recall seeing such long stems before. On the course of our walk we saw many patches of these.

The vegetation varies markedly from the drier hills, dominated by Messmate and bracken, to the wet valleys containing various ferns including both soft and rough tree ferns, hen-and-chicken fern, gristle fern and screw fern. Hazel Pomaderris and Prickly Current-bush were to be found on the slopes.

One of the most prominent plants observed was the Showy Daisy-bush *Olearia argophylla* in full flower. To me this tall rounded shrub, reaching 4 or 5 metres in height, is more attractive than its cousin *Olearia lirata*, Snowy Daisy-bush (who comes up with these names?), which also occurs in the heathlands. Some of the other somewhat unfamiliar (to me) plants in flower included *Stellaria pungens* - Prickly Starwort, and *Sigesbeckia orientalis* subsp. *orientalis* - which labours under the common name of Indian Weed. Native Elderberry *Sambucus gaudichaudiana*, Mountain Clematis *Clematis aristata*, Tasman Flax-lily *Dianella tasmanica*, Native Raspberry *Rubus parvifolius* were other notable plants in flower.



*Prickly Starwort (All photos: Lee Denis)*

Also of note was a species of Kangaroo Apple, *Solanum aviculare*. This is distinguished from the Kangaroo Apple of the northern Peninsula (*S. laciniatum*) by the petals being pointed rather than notched.



*Solanum aviculare*

One plant that looked like a weed, but wasn't, was *Hackelia latifolia*, otherwise known (e.g. in Flora of Melbourne) as *Austrocynoglossum latifolium* - Forest Hound's-tongue. A plant that **was** a weed was the Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, which was abundant on the lower creek slopes—it is also abundant along Sweetwater Creek in Frankston.

On the track were noticed several yellow flatworms—possibly *Fletcheria sugdeni*; a friendly leech made our acquaintance; and on a leaf of a messmate we saw a tight group of sawfly larvae.



Leeches are related to earthworms (Phylum Annelida). Most are aquatic, including freshwater and marine species. Terrestrial leeches only occur in Australia and SE Asia. For some reason leeches are a very specialised area of study, so it is difficult to identify them even to the level of family. They are classified under Class Hirudinida (or Clitellata, depending on your source); bush leeches are placed in Order Arhynchobdellida. They have a sucker at each end of their body which they attach to their substrate in turn to move in a looping fashion. The posterior sucker is the larger. They attach to their host using toothed jaws, and inject an anticoagulant called hirudin to keep the blood flowing. Various sources claim anything from 500 to 1000 species worldwide, with maybe 100 or so species in Australia.



*Forest Hound's-tongue*



The most exciting observations were among the birds: extended views of Rufous Fantails and Satin Flycatchers were among the list of 31. Both male and female Flycatchers were seen; the female was so brightly coloured—much brighter than the pictures in the app—that on first fleeting glimpse it was mistaken for a robin. Later we had clear views of both male and female. Rufous Whistlers

were abundant.

This walk offers a wealth of interest to the field naturalist, with plants, birds, and various invertebrates to be observed; the only people not fully catered for were the rockhounds.  
—Lee Denis



*Indian Weed*



*Rubus parvifolius*



*Sawfly larvae*

Bird List For Baldrys Crossing 14 November 2020				
Straw-necked Ibis	Eastern Rosella	Spotted Pardalote	White-naped Honeyeater	Grey Fantail
Common Bronzewing	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	White-browed Scrubwren	Eastern Yellow Robin	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	Brown Thornbill	Rufous Whistler	Australian Magpie
Galah	Laughing Kookaburra	Red Wattlebird	Grey Shrike-thrush	Australian Raven
Little Corella	White-throated Treecreeper	Noisy Miner	Satin Flycatcher	Silvereye
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Superb Fairy-wren	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Rufous Fantail	Common Blackbird
Crimson Rosella				

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**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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Newsletter edited by Lee Denis

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